

THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF MELCHIZEDEK (vv. 4-10)

⁴ Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!

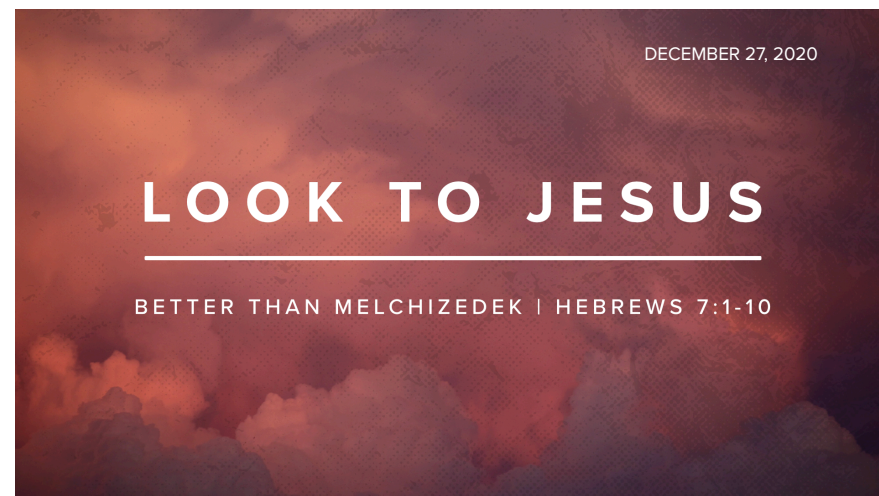
⁵ Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. ⁶ This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

⁷ And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater.

⁸ In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living.

⁹ One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, ¹⁰ because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

1. How does the writer of Hebrews describe Abraham in verses 4 and 6?
2. What are some indications that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham?
3. How does the writer of Hebrews describe Levi?
4. What are some indications that Melchizedek is greater than Levi?
5. How is Christ greater than Melchizedek?



You will not venture very far into the Old Testament before you encounter names and places that are hard to pronounce and next to impossible to sort out. The writer of Hebrews has been dropping one of those names for the better part of two chapters.

In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” ⁶ And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:5-6).”

Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ¹⁰ and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:8-10).

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:19-20).

Melchizedek makes his first appearance in Genesis 14, and then just as quickly disappears. He graces the pages of Scripture for three brief verses and then he is gone. Those three verses, however, are so pregnant with meaning that it is hard to let them go.

Nearly 500 years later Melchizedek makes his second and final appearance in the Old Testament. In Psalm 110 David pens the famous line that captures the writer of Hebrews imagination.

The Psalm begins with one of the most poignant prophecies of the coming Messiah in the Psalms. “The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I

make your enemies a footstool for your feet (Psalm 110:1).” Both Jesus and Peter see this verse fulfilled in Christ. Only Jesus can at one and the same time be David’s son and David’s Lord.

But the writer of Hebrews is drawn to verse 4. “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” No one else in the New Testament picks up on the significance of this verse.

The writer of Hebrews reprises the memory of Melchizedek to drive home an important truth about Jesus. In Ancient Israel, a priest could never be a king and a king could never be a priest. In Jesus however the two offices are realized in one person. Jesus is both our priest and our king.

The writer of Hebrews takes us back to Genesis 14 to explore how Jesus is “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

THE STORY OF MELCHIZEDEK (vv. 1-2a)

GENESIS 14: 18-20 After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). ¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

¹ This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.

1. The Melchizedek account in Genesis 14 is short on detail, the writer of Hebrews is even more compact in his presentation. What are some interesting details that he chooses to ignore?
2. How might bread and wine invoke a powerful image of Christ?
3. What part of the story seems to be most important to the writer of Hebrews?
4. Why do you think he fixates on these two points?

SOME INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS ABOUT MELCHIZEDEK (v. 2b)

^{2b} First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.”

1. Anyone familiar with Hebrew would immediately be drawn to the significance Melchizedek’s name (king of righteousness) and his title “king of Salem (or peace).” Why do you think the writer of Hebrews highlights these details?
2. How do these details shift our attention from Melchizedek to Jesus?
3. In what ways is Jesus the King of Righteousness (or the King who ushers in a reign of righteousness)?
4. In what ways is Jesus the King of Peace (or the King that ushers in a reign of peace)?
5. How do we benefit from Jesus’ reign of righteousness and peace?

THE MYSTERY SURROUNDING MELCHIZEDEK (v. 3)

³ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

1. The writer of Hebrews makes the most of an argument from silence. We do not know who Melchizedek’s mother or father were. In a book full of genealogies, Melchizedek’s genealogy is conspicuous by its absence. We do not know when he was born or when he died. We don’t know when his priestly service began or when it ended. Some interpreters suggest Melchizedek was indeed a divine figure, others that the speculation surrounding Melchizedek suggests the reality of Christ.
2. How does Melchizedek resemble the Son of God?
3. Although we do have Jesus’ genealogy, how does Jesus transcend his human ancestry?
4. How would you describe the beginning of Jesus’ days or the end of his life?
5. What is significant about the fact that he is a priest forever?