

Fact Sheet for **“Melchizedek, but Why?”**
Hebrews 7:1-28

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Read the chapter in your Bible

This whole chapter focuses on an individual from the OT, Melchizedek, who has been mentioned in the previous two chapters of Hebrews. But the more important question is, “Why?” Why does the author of Hebrews focus on him now? I find the greatest application of this chapter for today lies in the answer to this question, “Why?” But I want to begin with just a couple nuts and bolts of the passage then move to the “Why?”

Melchizedek

The story of Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14 where he is mentioned once. Abram and Lot have separated due to the size of their flocks. Lot gets caught up in a battle. He is taken captive along with his household and possessions. Abram mounts a rescue party and frees him. After Abram returns he meets Melchizedek (“*king of righteousness*”), king of Salem (“*king of peace*”), priest of God Most High, who blesses him. Abram then gives Melchizedek a tenth, a tithe, of all he has. Melchizedek is a true priest of God. But Isaac has not yet been born, as have not Jacob, Levi, and some four centuries later Aaron. This was centuries before the Mosaic Law with its priesthood had been given. Melchizedek fell under a different priestly system. The only other mention of Melchizedek outside the book of Hebrews is once in a psalm of David, a psalm about the Messiah, the Christ.

ESV Psalm 110:4 THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."

Under the Mosaic Law priests had to be descendants of Aaron, who himself was a descendant of Levi. Jesus was a descendant of David, who himself was a descendant of Judah. Under the Mosaic Law Jesus could never be a priest. He is our king, but He also is a priest, our high priest, forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Jewish Illustration 1

The author of Hebrews says of Melchizedek...

ESV Hebrews 7:3 He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

Now Melchizedek was human just like us. He was born and he died. But his birth and death are not recorded in the Bible and the author of Hebrews takes liberty with this to illustrate the permanent nature of Christ's priesthood. He drives this point further home with Psalm 110:4.

Jewish Illustration 2

ESV Hebrews 7:9-10 One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham,¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

The author of Hebrews writes this to show that Christ is greater than Levi, and by extension Aaron.

Why?

Why did the author of Hebrews write this chapter? I want to begin to answer this by bring up something else. We have two sections of our Bible, OT and NT. We've known these titles since childhood. Why

weren't they called something else? And what is a "testament" anyway? We get a clue from different translations of 1 Corinthians 11:25.

KJV ... This cup is the new testament in my blood...
ESV ... "This cup is the new covenant in my blood...

A "testament" is a "covenant" or an "agreement". God made a covenant with Noah about the rainbow. God made a covenant with Abram about descendants. God made a covenant with David about kings. God made a covenant with Israel, the Law. But God has made a new covenant with us through Jesus Christ. In fact the author will say in the next chapter...

ESV **Hebrews 8:13** In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

The author of Hebrews is saying that the Mosaic Law is now obsolete! Imagine how this would sound to Jewish ears! The author of Hebrews had his work cut out for him. And there was a reason it is obsolete. The Law had an inherent problem.

¹¹ ¶ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

This perfection he writes about is a perfect standing before God. Under the Mosaic Law that required 100%, absolute, birth to death obedience. Jesus references this in the last verse of Matthew 5.

ESV **Matthew 5:48** You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

And Jesus would be the only one ever to achieve this. No matter how much anyone else tried they could not hit this mark. Consider Paul's words in Philippians 3:4-9. The Mosaic Law had an inherent problem. It made no one perfect before God! You can't legislate morality. The New Covenant is salvation by grace through faith in Christ. And He is our permanent intercessor.

²³ ¶ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

What should we do with the OT then? Ignore it??? Remember that the Bible of the 1st century church was the OT. It teaches us about the character of God, the character of man, Christ, ethics and morality, wisdom, etc. These and other things are the same now as they were in the OT. What is not required by any of the NT writers is that we need to follow the more ceremonial provisions of the Mosaic Law in order to have a perfect standing before God. We can eat bacon!

Jesus Christ is our permanent high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. It is only He who can provide us with a perfect standing before God.

The Mosaic Law is the obsolete Old Covenant. The gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ is the New Covenant God has made with man. This is why the author of Hebrews brings up Melchizedek.

I think of Peter's words in Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."