



HEBREWS

Jesus is GREATER THAN...SO STAND FIRM

JESUS IS GREATER THAN... MELCHIZEDEK—CHAPTER 7

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Having completed a long digression (running from 5:11–6:20) the author returns to a discussion of Jesus' status as "high priest in the order of Melchizedek." In order to provide context it will be necessary to review who Melchizedek was and his significance (which the author deemed necessary to explain to his intended audience). It will become clear that aligning Jesus with Melchizedek and placing the order of Melchizedek on greater footing than the order of Aaron (the Levitical order) was another bold, challenging idea for the audience that helped to deepen their understanding of the significance of the incarnation and Christ's saving work.

IMPORTANT: As always, we encourage you to begin preparing for each lesson by committing the class and the teaching to God in prayer. After this, we encourage you to dig into not only the specific chapter in Hebrews for this week (Chapter 7), but also the book of Hebrews as a whole and the Scriptures at large. As you move through your readings, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is **ONLY AFTER DOING THESE THINGS** that you should approach this lesson plan and perhaps use it as a guide. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.

PRAYER

Begin your time with a prayer of thankfulness to God for giving us in Jesus a high priest who guarantees a new covenant that saves us by grace rather than by the Law.

FOCUS

- Melchizedek was a priest unlike any other, as He was the first priest and ordained directly by the Lord. He was also recognized as a king.

- Through Melchizedek God established an order that is greater than the Levitical order that served Israel under the Law of Moses. Jesus is the culmination of this greater order and *perfects* it.
- The Lord guarantees the work of Christ with an oath of his own name.
- Recognize that **JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Melchizedek (and all other priests)**.

LESSON

Discussion Starters (OPTIONAL)

- What tasks and responsibilities do you associate with the word “priest”?
- What role did priests play in ancient Israel?
- At this point in the letter, what are some of the challenging ideas that the author has presented to the audience?

FROM GOD’S WORD

- 7:1-10
 - Key Points
 - Melchizedek is only mentioned twice in the OT: Genesis 14:17 – 20 and Psalms 110:4. **[Facilitators: Both passages are short and can be read in class.]**
 - Interestingly, Melchizedek is the first priest ever mentioned in the OT, and the author contrasts him with the Levitical priesthood with the observation that he was “without father, mother, or genealogy”. Why does this matter?
 1. In order to enter the Levitical priesthood, one had to have had faithful parents and lineage traceable to the tribe of Levi, specifically, back to Aaron (brother of Moses).
 2. The fact that Melchizedek is recognized as a high priest by Abraham (God’s chosen) before the existence of Aaron marks him as someone special.
 - a. Abraham made a tithe to Melchizedek and received a blessing from him.
 - b. Despite meeting none of the requirements of the Law to qualify as a priest, Scripture clearly recognizes him as such.
 3. Melchizedek is the only OT figure who serves the dual roles of priest and king.
 4. The reference in Psalm suggests that the order of Melchizedek will be the order of a future priest-king.
 - The author’s arguments concerning Melchizedek follow an “if-then” configuration.

- If Abraham recognized Melchizedek as a priest despite having no earthly criteria for making such identification, then Melchizedek must have been a priest.
 - If Melchizedek was a high priest despite not meeting any earthly qualifications, then the Lord, who was pleased with him, must have appointed him.
 - Abraham's payment of a tithe to Melchizedek and Melchizedek's blessing on him makes clear that Melchizedek was the greater of the two.
 - If Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, then his order must be greater than the order that would eventually descend from Abraham, the Levitical order.
- For Discussion
 - If the Lord could appoint a priest that superseded the Levitical line, why establish the Levitical line at all? Why the stringent requirements for priesthood in Israel?
- 7:11-25
 - Key Points
 - It is important to remember that in ancient Israel the priests held massive responsibility for religious practice. They were:
 - Interpreters, preachers, teachers, and protectors of the Law of Moses.
 - Keepers of the covenant between God and Israel.
 - It is not an exaggeration to say that without the priests, there was no law. This is why the requirements for priesthood were so exacting.
 - This also explains v. 12 – a change in the priesthood leads to a change in the Law.
 - In light of this, a changing of the entire order of the priesthood suggests a massive shift in the covenant between God and His people.
 - This change was necessary (and ordained from the beginning) because even though the Law was perfect, it could not provide salvation and neither could the priests.
 - Since the Law and the priestly order of Levi are inadequate to provide salvation, another order (the only order which supersedes the Levitical order) is called for.

- Since Melchizedek was a high priest without meeting any earthly requirements, then the high priest of his order need not meet earthly requirements either (which is why being descended from the tribe of Judah does not disqualify Jesus).
- In effect, Jesus' earthly ministry (and continued work) eliminates the need for the Levitical priesthood as his work surpasses their work in every way. The author makes the following contrasts:
 - The Levitical priests were human – Jesus is God
 - The Levitical priests died off and had to be replaced – Jesus' resurrection means that he is eternal
 - The Levitical priests were bound by human requirements – Jesus is not
 - The Levitical priests had to make regular sacrifices that had limited temporary value – Jesus' sacrifice (Himself) is perfect and good for all eternity
 - The Levitical priests made intercession for Israel through rituals – Jesus intercedes directly to God for those who believe in him.
- For Discussion
 - Why is the Law insufficient for salvation?
- 7:26-28
 - Key Points
 - Finally, in contrast to the fallible men who served as high priest and had to atone for their own sins as well as the sins of Israel, Jesus' service as high priest is unique and perfect because he is human but without sin and is exalted to the point of sitting at the Father's right hand.

REFLECTION

- Why do you think it was necessary for the author to give the long discourse on Melchizedek to establish Jesus' place, role, and work to the audience?
- Jesus' role as high priest demonstrates God working within established structures to change or abrogate those same structures. Can you think of other examples of this in scripture?
- Does the "priestly language" of the chapter clarify your understanding of Jesus' work or raise more questions? If it raises more questions, what are they? If it is clarifying, how so?

PRAYER

LESSON OUTLINE – Here are the lessons we will be studying the weeks to come.

- INTRODUCTION (January 5)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Angelic Beings–Chapter 1 (January 12)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Angelic Beings–Chapter 1 (January 19)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...But Still Human–Chapter 2 (January 26)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Moses–Chapter 3 (February 2)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...The High Priest–Chapter 4 (February 9)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...The High Priest–Chapter 5 (February 16)
- THEREFORE, Don't Fall Away–Chapter 6 (February 23)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Melchizedek–Chapter 7 (March 2)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...The Law–Chapter 8 (March 9)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...The Tabernacle –Chapter 9 (March 16)
- JESUS IS GREATER THAN...Sacrifices–Chapter 10 (March 23)
- THEREFORE, Have Faith–Chapter 11 (March 30)
- THEREFORE, Stand Firm–Chapter 12 (April 6)
- THEREFORE, Offer Acceptable Sacrifices–Chapter 13 (April 13)
- CONCLUSION (April 27)