

MELCHIZEDEK, PRIEST WITH NO BEGINNING OR END
3RD ADVENT SERVICE HEB. 7:1-9, 15-17, 22 DEC. 14, '

¹ For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. 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.

⁴ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. ⁹ 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.

¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

Where do your gifts come from? Some families think it is fun
for Christmas gifts to come from stranger in strange clothes
and for them not to be given simply out of love
but only to those who deserve them.

But for others the gifts come from parents & other relatives.
to whom you can personally say “Thank you.”

But where do those gifts come from?

Some may be homemade crafts or baked goods.

But even pie that looks home baked may come from store.

But where do those gifts come from?

Maybe they come from small local shop or the mall
or maybe they were ordered on line & delivered to door.

But where do those gifts come from?

For some people it is important to check the label.

Is it made in America or in China or another place?

So, where gifts come from can be complicated.
Add to this the understanding that every good gift
ultimately comes to us from God himself.
The discussion of Melchizedek in text is also complicated
but the point is to point to Jesus as the one
who is the source of God's greatest gifts.

A HUMAN PRIEST REPRESENTS GOD WHO GIVES
OUR ETERNAL PRIEST BRINGS US GOD'S GIFTS
JESUS' SACRIFICE GIVES US ETERNAL BLESSINGS

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So, what is a priest? A mediator who represents God.
When Israel left slavery in Egypt and came to Mt. Sinai,
God impressed on them that he was holy & powerful God
who rescued and took care of them
but who did not put up with impurity and evil.
The people rightly realized that sinful people like them
did not dare to come into his presence.
So God had them set apart Moses' & Aaron's family,
including their whole tribe, the tribe of Levi
as a special, separate group to be the priests
who would represent God for them and speak for him,
& would represent them to God & offer their sacrifices
and pray and lead worship for them.
Partly because this was their full time job,
people were to give them a tenth of their income each year
as way of acknowledging all they had was gift from God.
Text points out even before Levites were assigned to do it,
there were priests who worshiped and represented God.

One was a man named Melchizedek, a man in the shadows
we don't know much about.

Abraham met him on way back from rescuing nephew Lot
who had been living in Sodom, and all he had,
from other kings who had attacked & captured them.

Abraham recognized this happened by God's grace
so as a way to thank God, he gave a tenth of what he got
to this priest who represented God.

In reply, Melchizedek spoke for God in blessing Abraham,
that is, he assured him of God's continued blessings.

The letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians
who were being told that by not depending on
Levitical Priests at temple to sacrifice & pray for them
they were being cut off from God and his blessings.

But one point it makes is that the blessings don't come
just from the Levite priests but from God himself
and, in fact, God has a priest even greater than the Levites.

The first example is Melchizedek, who was honored with tithes
by Abraham, the ancestor of the Levites
and so, in a sense by Levites themselves
who were already "In Abraham's loins" so to speak.

Fact that Abraham received a blessing from him
implies that he is even greater than Abraham.

In making the point that Melchizedek is greater than
the Levite priests, the main point is that he points to
one who is greater yet, Jesus.

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Text acknowledges that Jesus was not from tribe of Levi,
just as Melchizedek wasn't either,
but he didn't need this to be qualified as to be a priest,

partly because he came even before Levi
as one without beginning or end who lives forever.
The Levite priests, in contrast, each died
and so had to be replaced by another and another
because the sacrifices had to continue being made.
Because they were mortal, they also had to make sacrifices
for their own sins.
The point is that their work and their sacrifices were never done
because their sacrifices could never totally pay for sin.
They weren't intended to.
They were to remind people of the results of sin: death
and be a way to express sorrow for sin
It is like all the sacrifices of the other priests
were simply paying the interest on our debt of sin
to temporarily take care of things
while the principle still remained.
But they were example illustrating how sin would ultimately
be taken away: by death of a substitute, which is Jesus.
Jesus is a greater priest because he does something for us
that no Levite priest could ever do:
give us complete & permanent forgiveness
and so everlasting salvation.
This is because Jesus' once and for all sacrifice has finally
paid everything in full so there are no more sacrifices.

JESUS' SACRIFICE GIVES US ETERNAL BLESSINGS

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²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

One thing we know about Melchizedek is that his name
is the Hebrew words for King of righteousness.
and he is king of city of Salem, later known as Jerusalem,
& Salem is Hebrew for Peace, so he is prince of peace.
We know nothing of where he came from, his beginning,
or what happened to him afterward, his end.
But Jesus is the one even greater, of whom we know
he has no beginning or end at all. He is immortal God
and so he is a righteous king, totally without sin,

but he came to us in peace and was crowned with thorns
in Jerusalem and enthroned on a cross
so that he could reign in our hearts and lives,
giving us his peace and righteousness,
because he has risen again and lives forever,
enthroned in heaven as both king of the universe
where he is constantly interceding, praying for us.

What he does for us is a greater covenant
because it does not require imperfect work of mere humans.
One problem with the Levitical priesthood, tithes & sacrifices,
was it was easy to get idea that it is something
we have to do for God or give to God
that is reason we are forgiven and saved.
Even for those who know nothing about priests & sacrifices
it is easy to get this idea.

It is natural for humans to assume it depends on us.
But the fact that Jesus is our ultimate priest means
that everything depends on what he does in our place,
not only that he does the sacrificing for us
but that he himself is the sacrifice.

What Jesus does for us is not offering back to God
a portion of what God has first given us,
although he had to be human like us in order to do it,
but it is itself one more gift from God,
the greatest gift of all.

The Priest who is without beginning or end
gives us endless forgiveness and life without end.
He continues to give us this gift when he himself
by his own words gives us again in Holy Communion
the very body and blood he sacrificed on the cross
and with it the forgiveness & life that come from it.
This is true not because of anything we do or think
but because he himself says and does it all.

Melchizedek pictures how Jesus does it all, beginning to end.
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They are mediators between men and God the true source.
OUR ETERNAL PRIEST BRINGS US GOD'S GIFTS
Jesus is the greatest priest who gives he greatest gift.
JESUS' SACRIFICE GIVES US ETERNAL BLESSINGS
We are blessed by him not because of anything
we ourselves do but by Jesus sacrificing himself for us.