

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 7, Verses 1-3**  
**Notes From Class on November 3, 2009**  
**Last Revised on (November 9, 2009)**

Good evening everyone!

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Welcome to our continuing study of the New Testament Book of Hebrews.

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Before we begin please make sure that you have everything you need.

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Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

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If you are using an English translation of the Bible other than the English Standard Version ("ESV") then it may help you to have the handout I have prepared, which has the ESV text of Hebrews (in its entirety).

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There is coffee and tea at the back.

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Please get what you need and, then, let's get started....

### **Introduction**

Two weeks ago we finished reading Chapter 6.

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Last week I began by asking the class to summarize the key points from those first six chapters.

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I think we correctly singled out the following three points:

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(1) The **unqualified supremacy of Christ**: The author of Hebrews wants us to know that the Son of God is greater in every way than everything in all creation.

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(2) The importance of **holding fast to our confession** of Christ: We are warned by many admonitions and by the example of the Exodus generation in Israel not to fall away.

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(3) The idea of **Jesus as our Great High Priest**: The idea of Jesus as our Great High Priest is developed rather fully in Hebrews, but hardly at all elsewhere in the Bible.

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In developing the idea of Jesus as our Great High Priest, the author points to the curious Old Testament figure of **Melchizedek**.

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Last week we spent the whole time talking about Melchizedek.

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Q. Does anyone remember where Melchizedek was **first** mentioned in the Bible?

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A. That's right: **Genesis**, Chapter **14**, verses **18 - 20**.

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Q. In those three verses, what happened?

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A. *(Let's just read it again quickly)*

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Q. Is Melchizedek ever referred to **again** in the Old Testament?

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A. Yes.

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Q. How many times?

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A. Once

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Q. Where?

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A. **Psalms, 110**, verse **4**. (We won't read it again, but please look there.)

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Q. What is the particular significance of Psalm 110?

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A. **Davidic**: It is inscribed as a Psalm of David

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A. **Prophetic**: David is understood to speak in a prophetic voice.

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A. **Messianic**: It is understood by both Jews and Christians that this Psalm foresees the Messiah

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A. **Christological** --- Jesus himself claims that Psalm 110 refers to himself.

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A. Psalm 110 is Quoted more **frequently** in NT than any other OT chapter!

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A. In this very important Psalm, it is **God** in the mouth of **David** who says to the **Messiah** "**you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.**"

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So we are obliged to understand, as best we can, what is going on here...

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Q. Is Melchizedek mentioned often in the **New** Testament?

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A. No, not really.

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Q. In which **books** of the NT is Melchizedek mentioned?

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A. **Only** in Hebrews.

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Q. **Where** in Hebrews?

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A. In Chapter **5** (twice)...in Chapter **6** (once at the very end)...and in Chapter **7** (5 times).

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Last week read and discussed all of the passages in the Bible referring to Melchizedek, except for what is said in the Seventh Chapter of Hebrews.

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Tonight we are entering the Seventh Chapter of Hebrews.

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Before we begin reading and discussing Hebrews, Chapter 7, does anyone have anything to say or to ask?

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*n.b. several people expressed great interest in and enthusiasm for Psalm 110, in the fact that David had foreseen Jesus there, and also in the strange character, Melchizedek, which first appears in Genesis 14, and which God in the mouth of David later uses to describe Jesus.*

### **Chapter 7, Verses 1-3**

Would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 7, Verses 1-3, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

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Thank you. Now would someone please read those same three verses in English (ESV)

**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.**

Thank you. "**For this Melchizedek...**" continues the thought from the end of Chapter 6.

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Please look at the end of Chapter 6,

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where it says that Jesus, as a forerunner on our behalf, has entered into the inner place behind the curtain, having become a high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

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There are several metaphors mixed together there.

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Jesus as a forerunner --- one who goes first, ahead of others.

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Q. Who are the others on behalf of whom Jesus has gone ahead?

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A. Those who will finally also go where he is --- i.e. Christians.

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Q. Where does he go?

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A. "the inner place behind the curtain"

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This is (almost certainly) a reference to the holy of holies in the tabernacle, where only the High Priest could go, once per year, on the Day of Atonement.

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But the author of Hebrews can **not** mean to say that Jesus is literally in the (earthly) tabernacle

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Q. So, what **does** he mean?

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A. He means that Jesus is (in heaven) with God.

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No ordinary High Priest had ever done **that** before. Only the Son of God. And he has gone there **forever**.

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Jesus is for us, then, a **High Priest forever**.

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To all of this is **added** "after the order of Melchizedek."

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The author of Hebrews is **not** being original when he tacks this on.

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He is borrowing almost the exact wording of Psalm 110, Verse 4

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Remember: it was **God** in the mouth of David who said this of Jesus --- i.e. that he is a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

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Q. When God through David calls the Messiah (Jesus) "a high priest forever **after the order of Melchizedek**, what does he mean?"

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A. **That** is what the author of Hebrews endeavors to explain to us now, here in the first part of Chapter 7

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He begins with the **identification** of "this" Melchizedek,

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which can **only** be the one referred to in Psalm 110, Verse 4 and Genesis, Chapter 14, verses 18-20.

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This **name** is not shared by any other character in the Bible.

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OK. So how is **this** character, named Melchizedek, like Jesus?

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In the first sentence of Chapter 7, the author begins with a **summary** of Biblical **facts** about Melchizedek, which can only be taken from Genesis, Chapter 14, verses 18-20.

(Verses 1-2a)

**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.**

Q. So what **happened** between Abraham and Melchizedek, **according to the author of Hebrews**?

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A. Three things: **First**, Melchizedek **met** Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings

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A. **Second**, Melchizedek **blessed** Abraham.

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A. **Third**, Abraham gave Melchizedek a **tithe** of everything.

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Q. Did the author of Hebrews summarize the facts **correctly**?

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A. Well, nothing that he says is **incorrect**.

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Q. Are any details **missing** from his summary?

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A. Yes: The passage from Genesis mentions something about Melchizedek offering Abraham **bread** and **wine**. But that part is not recounted here, neither was it recounted by David in Psalm 110, nor anywhere else in the Bible (so far as I know).

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Q. Is anything **else** missing?

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A. No.

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Q. So what do you make of the fact that **neither** David (in Psalm 110) **nor** the author of Hebrews make any mention about the bread and wine?

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A. Apparently this was **not** part of what they considered to be important about the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek. (Or at least it was not important to what they wanted to teach about Jesus.)

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It will probably not surprise you to learn that, down through the centuries, many Christian commentators have **wanted** to see the Lord's Supper presaged here, but they are probably wrong.

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From the serving of bread and wine in Genesis 14, we may safely infer that Melchizedek was **hospitable**.

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It is safe to say that **hospitality**, was one of the ways in which Melchizedek and Jesus were alike!

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But that was **not** the part of the story from Genesis that David and the author of Hebrews were looking at.

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Q. So what similarities between Melchizedek and Jesus **do** they wish to examine?

**Verse 2b**

**He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.**

The second sentence of Chapter 7 (i.e. verse 2b) looks at **names**.

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It is commonly observed that in Bible times names **signified** more than they do for us today.

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That is probably a **useful** observation here.

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Melchizedek was not just the name of a particular person but a **description** of who this man was.

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And Melchizedek, we are told (v. 2b) means "**King of Righteousness**."

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The man named Melchizedek **was** a righteous king.

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If you are familiar with the **depravity** of the world described in and around Chapter 14 of Genesis,

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perhaps especially in the region where the story takes place, between **Canaan** and **Sodom**,

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then you will appreciate how **surprising** it is to find there any righteous king.

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But that is how the **Bible** describes this man Melchizedek....

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And that is how the Bible describes the man Jesus **also**.

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Not **only** is Jesus himself shown to be comparatively **righteous** in a wicked world,

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but he is the **only** man in human history who every lived a life that was **perfectly** righteous,

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and so he is the one who **becomes** righteousness **for all of us**,

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by laying down his life as an **atonement** for our sins,

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and by **sanctifying** us by his Spirit.

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Melchizedek does **none** of those things.

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He is a very **dim** and **partial** foreshadow of righteous Son of God.

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Nevertheless both Melchizedek and Jesus are priests and righteous kings in a wicked world.

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Melchizedek is also called the King of **Salem**.

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The author of Hebrews understands this to mean King of **Peace**

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This may mean (only that) Melchizedek's was a **peaceful** kingdom,

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in the sense that it was not at war with **other** kingdoms,

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and, also perhaps, in the sense of being without strife or division **internally**.

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This would have made his kingdom **very** special in those days!

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Remember he appears in the Biblical narrative within the **context** of bloodshed, strife and division.

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Abraham is returning from the **slaughter** of certain Kings who had **kidnapped** Lot.

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But Melchizedek is **never** described as a warrior,

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and **Abraham** nevertheless defers to him immediately.

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Melchizedek is **very** great, but his greatness derive from **uprightness** and **peacefulness** and his status as a **priest** of the most high God.

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His power lies in his **godliness**.

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In this he surely **prefigures** Christ.

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Jesus brings peace on **earth** and, also, peace between **God** and Man.

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He himself **is** our peace. (Eph. 2:14)

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He is indeed the Son of God, and God, but these are **not** names that he shares with Melchizedek!

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Perhaps that exhausts what we can say about the **names** shared by Melchizedek and Jesus.

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Of both men, in summary, we can say that they are **priests** and that they are righteous **kings** who rule peaceful kingdoms, which derive their power from their godliness.

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Q. OK, what **else**? In what other ways are Melchizedek and Jesus alike?

### Verse 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.**

A. Verse 3 tells us that Melchizedek resembles the Son of God in that both continue a priest forever.

Of course Jesus, the eternal son of God, continues as a priest forever. That is easy to understand.

But in what sense is Melchizedek a priest "forever?"

*n.b. As we discussed this in class on November 3, things became a little confused. The notes which follow have been changed and hopefully improved somewhat from what was discussed in class --- GGR*

Genesis 14 says nothing about Melchizedek being inhuman or superhuman or immortal.

Psalm 110 does not say that Melchizedek is a priest forever.

It says that the Messiah (Jesus) is a priest forever....after the order of Melchizedek.

The principal connection between Jesus and Melchizedek is that they are both priests of the same order.

The most important characteristic of this priestly order, in which they both participate, is that it has nothing to do with the Levitical priesthood.

The Levitical priesthood begins and ends within the Biblical narrative.

It begins with the Law promulgated by Moses.

It finally ends with the death of Christ on Calvary.

This is underscored some years later when the temple is destroyed.

By contrast the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek continues forever, because that is how the eternal priesthood of the Son of God is described.

Q. Is this all that the author of Hebrews means in the last part of verse 3....when he says that resembling the Son of God, Melchizedek continues as a priest forever?

Q. I mean is he only saying that the office, the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek, continues forever?



A. Maybe.

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Q. But then what does he mean in the first part of verse three, where he says that Melchizedek "is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginnings of days nor end of life..."

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One thing is for certain: the resemblance being talked about there is a resemblance between Melchizedek and the eternal son of God and not the incarnate son of God.

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Jesus of Nazareth, did have a mother, a genealogy, and beginnings of days.

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Jesus' paternity was unique, in that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and then raised by Joseph.

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Likewise Jesus' resurrection from the dead was unique.

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But it is very important that we understand that Jesus' birth and death were perfectly natural.

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It is therefore reasonable to assume that the man named Melchizedek, "resembling the Son of God," was also a natural man, like Jesus was, who was born and who died, as Jesus did.

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Of course it would also be reasonable to conclude that the man Melchizedek, resembling the Son of God, has inherited blessed eternal life, as do all of us who believe in Jesus!

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So in that sense Melchizedek may be said to continue as a priest forever....in heaven

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I mean because of what Jesus accomplished on Calvary, both the man, Melchizedek, and the priesthood which David named after him continue forever.

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Now while everything we have said to this point is probably true, we have probably still not captured what the author of Hebrews has in mind here, in Verse 3 of Chapter 7.

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Like David before him, he is not interested, as we tend to be, in the natural man Melchizedek but, rather, in the Biblical figure.

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Again, he says that Melchizedek is without father, mother, genealogy, birth, childhood, and death but, as we have seen, he almost certainly does not mean this literally.

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What he almost certainly means is that none of these things (i.e. Melchizedek's birth, death, genealogy, etc.) are written in the Bible.

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And this grants us some insight into the way in which the author of Hebrews, King David, and the Jews and godly gentiles of that era read their Bible, which is our Old Testament.

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From their exegetical point of view --- i.e. the way they understand the Bible --- what is not written in the Bible, does not exist or, at least, is of little or no importance in comparison to what is written in the Bible.

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Melchizedek exists and is important **only** because it is written in the Bible that he met Abraham and etc.

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We are not invited to start with the story of Melchizedek and speculate about his parents, his birth, his death, and etc. because none of these things are written in the Bible!

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And they are **not** written in the Bible for a **reason!**

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Here neither David nor the author of Hebrews are writing about Melchizedek as a **private person**

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they are writing about Melchizedek as a **type of Christ**, a Biblical figure representing the Son of God.

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It is therefore actually **dangerous** to speculate about Melchizedek.

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Because we risk **misunderstanding** Christ, and that is the most dangerous misunderstanding of all!

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Do you see it? In case of both the Son of God and Melchizedek, in whom the Son of God is prefigured in the Bible, we are dealing with an eternal reality that touches but also **transcends** human history, and which can only be known correctly within the confines of what is written in the Bible.

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All we can safely know about these things, is what the **Bible** tells us.

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We have to stay there.

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Comments?

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Questions?