

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
The Letter to the Hebrews – Chapter 7, Verses 11- 22
Notes From Class on November 17, 2009
Last Revised on (November 19, 2009)

Good evening everyone!

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

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

Tonight you will need a Bible and a song book.

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

There is coffee and tea at the back.

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

Review

Last week we **began** with a review of the last two verses of Chapter 6,

where we noticed that the author uses highly **figurative** language to describe Jesus,

and to explain how **Jesus** has gone to heaven, ahead of us, and on our behalf,

having become a "**high priest, forever, after the order of Melchizedek.**"

This latter description is taken from **Psalm 110, Verse 4.**

Where **God** in the mouth of David says to Jesus, "you are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."

It is important to remember that neither God, in the first place, nor David, nor the author of Hebrews is interested in **Melchizedek**, at least not primarily.

Q. They are interested in **whom**?

A. Yes! They are interested in **Christ.**

It is to help explain **Christ** and, in particular, his priestly role in relation to us, that the Biblical figure of Melchizedek is alluded to Psalm 110 and in Hebrews.

However the author expects many of his listeners to find this teaching **difficult** to understand,

because they have become "**dull of hearing**" (c.f. 5:11).

Therefore in the first 10 verses of Chapter 7, he sort of stops to **explain** the allusion to Melchizedek.

His explanation goes something like this:

The Melchizedek one reads about in Genesis, Chapter 14 was a king of **righteousness** and **peace** in a violent and unrighteous world,

who comes (mysteriously) from someplace **beyond** our sight and knowledge.

We know he can **not** be a priest in accordance with the Laws of Moses.

Nevertheless it is plain that Melchizedek **is** a priest,

and that a priest of the **God of Abraham**,

because he **blesses** Abraham and receives Abraham's **tithe**.

Therefore not only is Melchizedek a **true** priest of God;

but he is far **superior** to all priests later established under the Laws of Moses

His is a priesthood over not only Israel, but **all** descendants of Abraham, and **therefore** all nations.

These are some of the ways in which the priesthood of Melchizedek **foreshadows** that of the Son of God.

Of course the priesthood of the Son of God is **supreme** and **universal** and **eternal**.

and the priesthood of Melchizedek is but a fragile **metaphor**.

Q. Is everyone OK to here? Any questions or problems?

n.b. Everyone seemed to understand, so we proceeded directly to the reading of Chapter 7, Verses 11-14 and did not again cover the points which appear in red immediately below.

There is a **literary** sense in which the Biblical character Melchizedek is a priest **forever**:

the Bible **records** no beginning or end to his life or his priesthood.

That is (almost certainly) what David means in Psalm 110.

There is also **literal** sense in which this is (almost certainly) true:

Melchizedek is priest forever because **in Christ** neither his life nor the priesthood named after him shall come to an end,

Just as none of **us** who are in Christ shall come to an end.

Melchizedek was however a **human**, just as we are, just as was Jesus, and just as all priests must be.

The Biblical understanding of priesthood requires that a priest be human, and **not** an angel or some other kind of super- or sub-human being.(c.f. 5:1)

Having clarified this, the author of Hebrews now wishes to return to his primary subject which is **Jesus**.

Chapter 7, Verses 11-14

OK, then would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 7, Verses 11-14, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

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

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?

12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

13 For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar.

14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

Thank you.

Again Verse 11 reads:

(Verse 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?

The **Levitical** Priesthood was instituted by the Law promulgated by Moses

and the Levitical Priesthood **existed** to administer that Law.

The two things --- the Law of Moses and the Levitical Priesthood --- **belong** together.

They came to God's chosen people, through Moses, from **God**.

It might therefore be supposed that their purpose was to bring God's people to **perfection**.

But if perfection **had** been attainable through the Law and Levitical Priesthood,

then **why**, the author asks, would God have sent a **different** kind of priest, after the order of Melchizedek?

This is a **rhetorical** question (i.e. it contains its own answer).

He means to say that perfection was certainly **not** attainable through the Levitical Priesthood

And that this is precisely **why** God sent a different **kind** of priest.

Just as **David** foresaw in Psalm 110

And just as **Moses** and the other Old Testament prophets had also foreseen.

And Just as **Jesus** and **Paul** and others (including the author of Hebrews) later explain in various ways.

It was **never** expected or intended that Man would be brought to perfection by the Torah.

God had something **else** in mind from the very beginning.

Specifically the **Gospel** of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was **not** "Plan B"

Verse 12 reads:

(Verse 12)

For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

The Law, promulgated by Moses, required priests to perform all of the offerings and sacrifices and ceremonies that the Law required

and the Law required that these priests come from the Tribe of Levi and the House of Aaron.

There was no provision in the Law for any other kind of priest.

Nevertheless, long after the Law had come into effect, King David foresaw the coming of a priest who would be different, as we have seen in Psalm 110, as repeatedly quoted by the author of Hebrews.

And it is profoundly significant, I think, that David was the one who foresaw this,

because it was during his reign that the Levitical priesthood and other manifestations of the Old Covenant in Israel were especially strong,

And of course it would have been his natural tendency to think of the monarchy and the priesthood as two inherently separate spheres.

So his vision is for him highly counter-intuitive and, therefore, especially credible as prophesy.

In other words, he could hardly have imagined that which he foresaw.

Verse 13 reads:

(Verse 13)

For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar.

Q. What things?

A. Things regarding a new priest.

Q. Who is the one of whom "these things" are spoken?

A. The Son of **God**

A. The Son of **David**

A. The **Messiah**

A. **Jesus** of Nazareth

Q. Was Jesus **also** from the house of Aaron?

A. No. (At least the author to Hebrews doesn't think so and it would not help his argument here!)

Q. Was Jesus even from the Tribe of **Levi**?

A. No.

Q. What then?

Verse 14 reads:

(Verse 14)

For it is *evident* that our Lord was descended from *Judah*, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

It was evidently **common knowledge** among the first hearers of this sermon that Jesus of Nazareth was descended from the Tribe of Judah.

The Law made **no** provision for such a priest.

No provision for the One who is our **Lord** and eternal priest.

Therefore we can only conclude that, with the coming of Jesus, the Law had been **changed**.

Wow!

We are going to want to be very careful to understand this correctly.

Let's read on.

Chapter 7, Verses 15-22

Would someone please read Hebrews, Chapter 7, Verses 15-22, in Japanese (Shin Kaiyaku)

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

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."

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.

20 And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath,

21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'"

22 This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

Thank you.

Verse 15 reads:

(Verses 15)

This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek,

Q. **What** becomes even more evident?

A. That there has been a **change** in priesthood which abrogates **the Law**.

Verse 16 continues:

(Verse 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.

It has **already** been observed that the Law made no provision for a priest from the House of David.

We are now reminded that the status of our Lord as a priest has no basis in the **Law** whatsoever.

Which is not to say that the priesthood of Christ is "**illegal**"

but, rather, that He is a different **kind** of priest entirely.

One who is **above** and beyond the Law.

One who is **divine**.

He takes his power **not** from bodily descent,

but from an **indestructible life**.

Following from this, Verse 17 reads:

(Verse 17)

For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest *forever*, after the order of Melchizedek."

I believe that the emphasis in reading this sentence is on the word "**forever**"

Q. Who is "him"

A. The **Messiah**

A. **Jesus**

Q. Who are the "**witnesses**?"

A. **God**

A. **David**

Q. What is their **testimony**?

A. Basically that Jesus is the **eternal** Son of God and God.

Which of course makes him **infinitely** the best kind of priest!

Verses 18 and 19 call Jesus "a **better hope**"

Let me read those verses again:

(Verses 18 and 19)

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.

There are **two** reason why a former commandment might be properly set aside:

First (on the one hand) because the former commandment is **weak** and useless

Second (on the other hand) because something **better** has been introduced.

We are to understand that **both** hold true here.

Q. What **is** the former commandment which has been set aside?

A. The Law.

It has been inserted parenthetically that the **law** made nothing **perfect**.

Here I understand that our author is speaking **not only** of the Levitical Priesthood and the sacramental system which required such priests and which such priests administered **but also** of the entire corpus of Laws handed down by God through Moses.

This is not to say that the Law of Moses was bad in itself or utterly ineffective,

It was simply **insufficient** for **perfecting** the people and, thereby, reconciling them with God.

In other words, the Law handed down through Moses was incapable of removing **sin**.

The **moral** laws --- the 10 Commandments and the rest --- did not produce right behavior.

The **sacramental** system --- the sacrifices and etc. --- did not remove guilt.

The Old Covenant could neither sanctify nor justify.

From either side, the Law was incapable of bringing God's people into fellowship with Him.

n.b. At about this point in the class, there was (appropriately) much discussion about the sense in which it might be right or wrong to say that the Laws handed down by God through Moses have been set aside.

Q. What better hope has been introduced, through which we draw near to God? (v.19)

A. Jesus Christ

A. The Gospel

But if the Law could, in some sense, be set aside and replaced by the Gospel,

what about the Gospel?

Might it not also later be replaced with something else?

No, we are told in verses 20 and 21, the gospel is the perfect, final, and permanent arrangement!

Verses 20 and 21 read:

(Verses 20 and 21)

And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, 21 but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'"

Here "it" refers back to Verse 19 and the "better hope" that was introduced

that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ

We are told that "it" (the Gospel) was introduced with an oath!

This in turn looks back to Chapter 6, Verses 13-18

where we read about the promises which God made to Abraham and confirmed with an oath.

In the same way, it is recorded in Psalm 110 that when God appointed his Son a priest,

the appointment was "**forever**"

and it was also confirmed by an **oath**.

No such statement was ever made by God concerning the **Levitical** priesthood.

And so we read in Verse 22

(Verse 22)

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

Interestingly this is the first time in the Book of Hebrews where the word "**covenant**" appears.

This word will become **central** to all that follows.

Do you have any questions or comments before we read on?

n.b. here is where we ran out of time.