Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews - Lesson 8

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Studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews

LESSON VIII

CHRIST THE KING-PRIEST
IS "BETTER THAN" AARON IN HIS PERSON

Hebrews 7:1-28

The Melchizedek Priesthood

Following the long parenthesis of Heb. 5:11—6:20, the Holy Spirit resumes the "chief point" of the Epistle to the Hebrews, begun in 5:1-11. He takes us, in chapter seven, into the deeper meaning of the High Priestly character of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a chapter of contrasts between the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood and the Melchizedek priesthood, which typified the "order" or Person of Christ, Israel's King-Priest and the only "mediator between God and men." This is our lesson for today—the contrast between the good things of Judaism, as represented by the priesthood of Aaron, and the "better things" of Christianity, as found in the eternal, unchangeable priesthood of our eternal, ever-living Lord—"a priest forever," but also a King!

Now the priesthood was the very heart of Judaism; and to give up the temple worship, with the ministry of Israel's earthly priests, meant being ostracized by the nation, persecuted by the rulers of the Jews, and subjected to the possible loss of property or even of life itself. It was the hardest test of all. The Jewish persecutors of Christian Hebrews said that the followers of Christ had no priest! And that was unthinkable to one steeped in Judaism! Yet in the inspired words, which are our lesson for today, the Holy Spirit urged the Hebrews living while the temple was still standing to separate themselves from the ritualism of Judaism, which was intended only to foreshadow the coming of the Messiah, and which had been done away by His sacrificial death, His bodily resurrection, His ministry of intercession, and His promised return in glory to reign. The Holy Spirit was saying that the Hebrew Christians did have an
eternal, unchangeable King-Priest, by far superior to Aaron!

But this seventh chapter of Hebrews has a living message for men in every age, Gentile, as well as Jew; for it portrays the eternal glories of the Person of our Sin-Bearer, our "Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," and our coming King. He is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," not after the order of Aaron.

WHO WAS MELCHIZEDEK?

And who was this king-priest named Melchizedek, who was such a remarkable type of Christ Jesus, our eternal, unchangeable King-Priest? We have seen that he is mentioned in only three places in the Bible, and that little is said about him; yet the little which is written speaks volumes to us, as it is explained by the Holy Spirit in the seventh chapter of Hebrews. Let us turn to the historical record about Melchizedek, as found in Gen. 14:17-20; then to Psalm 110:4, where this strange character is definitely stated to be a type of our Lord.

The first sixteen verses of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis tell the story of the capture of Lot, Abraham's nephew, by a confederacy of kings; and of how Abraham had delivered Lot, together with the people of Sodom. It was on Abraham's return from that victory over those kings that Melchizedek met Abraham; and in three brief verses we have the only historical record the Bible gives us of this king-priest, who was a type of Christ. Psalm 110:4 is a prophecy; and the explanation in Hebrews is doctrinal. Now who was this man, Melchizedek? Let us itemize the facts presented to us in the Genesis record:

He was "king of Salem."
He "brought forth bread and wine" to Abraham. He was "priest of the most high God."
"He blessed him," saying,

"Blessed be Abraham of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand."

Abraham gave to Melchizedek "tithes of all" the spoils of the battle.

There is no record in Genesis of Melchizedek's genealogy; yet this first book of the Bible places much importance upon genealogies. The very silence of the Scripture here proves its inspiration, as we shall see.

More than eight centuries passed before the second reference to Melchizedek was made by the Holy Spirit, as He guided David to write the prophecy of the coming into the world of David's Son and David's Lord, to whom the Father promised, by the word of His oath,

"Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4).

More than ten other centuries passed, from David's prophecy to the time when the inspired apostle wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, giving the divine interpretation of the two Old Testament references to Melchizedek. And now let us turn to it, in the seventh chapter of Hebrews. Let us read the first three verses from the Revised Version:

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham divided a tenth part of all (being first, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God), abideth a priest continually."

We observe at once that verse one, which we have just read, is a re-statement of the historical record of Genesis; but verses two and three not only repeat the story of Genesis; but also add the interpretation thereof. For example, let us list the added explanation, in outline, before we discuss it further:

The name "Melchizedek" means "King of righteousness."
The name of the city, over which he was king, means "peace." Therefore, as "King of Salem," he was "King of peace."

Because no genealogy was given concerning Melchizedek
in Genesis, because we know nothing of his parentage or birth or death, he becomes a type of the eternal Son of God, who has "neither beginning of days nor end of life." Therefore, Melchizedek portrays, in type, the eternal, unchangeable priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, who "abideth a priest continually."

What a picture of Christ—the King of Righteousness and King of Peace, eternal God, "a priest forever"!

Before we continue our discussion of this marvelous passage, let us answer the question that some have raised by asking, "Was Melchizedek a supernatural person? Or was he a manifestation of God in angelic form before the incarnation of our Lord Jesus in human flesh?" In reply to such questions as these, we would say that Melchizedek was not supernatural, that he was not a mysterious personage, not an appearance of the Lord before the incarnation. He was a real man of history, a godly man, one whose very names and actions foreshadowed the coming into the world of Christ, the Heavenly King-Priest. The words "without genealogy" simply mean what they say: The Holy Spirit purposely did not record this man's genealogy in a book of genealogies, in order that he might be a type of the eternal Lord Jesus.

**MELCHIZEDEK—A TYPE OF CHRIST—OUR KING-PRIEST**

Now let us look more closely at what we have read in the first three verses of this seventh chapter of Hebrews. The first thing we note is that Melchizedek's name means "King of righteousness"; and that name, in a literal and complete sense, belongs to our Lord. In His Person He is absolutely righteous. In His work of redemption, He is both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). His justice, or righteousness, demanded that the penalty of sin be paid; He "paid it all" in His own death on the cross; therefore, His righteousness is forever vindicated. In His dealings with the children of men, He is always righteous. And in His coming glory, as King of kings, He will be the righteous "Judge of all the earth." Melchizedek's name foreshadowed the Person of our Lord.

Then Melchizedek was "King of Salem," which means "peace." "Salem" was the ancient name for "Jerusalem," which means "City of Peace." The Prophet Isaiah wrote some seven hundred years before the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, saying that His name should be called "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Christ speaks peace to the heart of the redeemed sinner, who having been "justified by faith," has "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding" guards the heart and mind of the trusting believer in Christ (Phil. 4:7). And when He comes in glory to reign, He will be acknowledged by all His creatures as "The Prince of Peace" in very truth. Jerusalem, the "City of Peace," will be the metropolis of the world; and Christ will be her King.

Now it is significant that the Holy Spirit expressly declares, in Heb. 7:2, that Melchizedek was "first ... King of righteousness," and "then also King of Salem, which is, King of peace." The order is righteousness first; then peace. There can be no peace until there is righteousness; our Lord first imparts His righteousness before we can know His peace. The world at war today is longing for peace. Men are talking about making a permanent peace following this second world war, but they are not talking about world righteousness. There can be no lasting peace until the Prince of Peace rules the earth. Why? Because sinful men are in the world, selfishly, graspingly seeking their own interests—men and nations, as individuals and as a whole. The League of Nations did not make Japan love China. It did not bring harmony and peace to the world. Heathen tribes in pagan lands steal from one another; they shed blood. Civilization man fights one war and then another and then another. God's order is first righteousness; then peace. Let us read a few of the many passages of Scripture which prove this truth:

> "Mercy and truth are met together; 
> Righteousness and peace have kissed each other"

—(Psalm 85:10).

This beautiful passage was fulfilled in Christ. In Him righteousness and peace have met. And only by faith in Him shed blood can the guilty sinner be made righteous, in order that he may find the peace of God.
"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable" (James 3:17).

"And the work of righteousness shall be peace: and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa. 32:17).

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

The whole body of Scripture teaches that there must first be righteousness in the sight of God; then His peace always follows.

But Melchizedek was not only "King of righteousness" and "King of peace"; he was also "priest of God Most High." And when he met Abraham, "returning from the slaughter of the kings," he "brought forth bread and wine," symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, the Great High Priest who was to come. In other words, Melchizedek's priesthood was based upon sacrifice, silent testimony to the one sufficient sacrifice of the promised "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Often in these studies in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have stated that our Lord's priesthood began at His cross, with His own precious blood shed "once for all" as an atonement for the sinner's soul. We have repeatedly tried to show that all the Old Testament sacrifices, offered in faith, from the time of Abel even unto Calvary, foreshadowed the coming into the world of the one perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Then He came; and before He went to the cross, He told His disciples that the broken bread and poured out wine were symbols of His broken body and shed blood, to be taken by the true believer in token of his faith in the cross. He told His disciples to do this in remembrance of Him until He returned to take them to Himself. These symbols are, therefore, reminders to us of His great love; when we shall see Him, we shall no longer need reminders of Him; we shall be with Him forever, to look upon His face.

When Melchizedek met Abraham, and brought forth bread and wine, he must have taught the patriarch the meaning of these emblems of the death of the promised Saviour.

He certainly taught him a new name for Jehovah—"The Most High God." Through the priesthood of Melchizedek, Abraham received a fuller revelation concerning the God he loved and served. Likewise, through the Great High Priestly work of our Heavenly Priest, "after the order of Melchizedek," we learn God's full and complete revelation of His love for a sinning world.

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (11 Cor. 5:19).

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (i.e., 'led him forth' into full revelation)." (See John 1:18.)

"Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:8, 9).

Now the forcefulness of this part of the argument concerning the Melchizedek priesthood lies in the fact that Christ is greater than Aaron because He is both a Priest and a King; whereas Aaron was only a priest. Aaron descended from the tribe of Levi; but Christ came through the royal tribe of Judah. This thought is emphasized yet further in verse 14 of this seventh chapter of Hebrews. Christ's priesthood is of a higher "order" than that of the Levitical priests; He did not even come into the world through the Aaronic or Levitical "order." He is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." And Melchizedek lived at least four centuries before God told Moses to make Aaron and his sons priests in Israel. (See Exod. 28, 29.)

Moreover, although Abel and Noah and Abraham and others of God's redeemed had offered animal sacrifices by faith in the coming Saviour; although in so doing, they were acting as priests in their own households; yet the name "priest" does not occur in the Bible until we read of Melchizedek. Therefore, it seems very clear that, through this king-priest, God was teaching Abraham of the eternal King-
Priest who was to come, even Jesus, the Son of God. And let us remember that God taught the father of the Hebrew nation this lesson about the priesthood of Christ four hundred years before Aaron was made Israel’s first high priest under the Levitical order! Aaron represents the Law of Moses. And the law “was added because of transgressions, till the seed (i.e., Christ) should come” (Gal. 3:19).

In our study of Heb. 8:1-10:18, we shall see that Aaron was, indeed, a type of Christ in his ministry—offering sacrifices, praying for the people, dealing “gently with the ignorant and the erring.” In fact, we have already spent much time in these studies considering this very truth. Even in His ministry, our Lord’s priesthood is by far “better than” that of Aaron. But He is so much “better than” Aaron in His Person that God had to use Melchizedek, a king-priest, greater than Aaron, to typify the glories of Jesus, our Great High Priest. In this connection, it will help us to remember the two-fold division of this main portion of this epistle, already outlined in a previous lesson: (1) Christ is “better than” Aaron in His Person, or “order,” Heb. 5:1 7:28; and (2) Christ is “better than” Aaron in His ministry, Heb. 8:1 10:18.

In no other place in the Bible do we read of one who was both priest and king; only Melchizedek, of all earthly men, held that two-fold office, in order that he might be a type of Christ, our King-Priest. Israel’s King and Messiah, promised in Gen. 49:10, had to come through the tribe of Judah; whereas, we know that Aaron came through Levi. King David came from Judah, and Christ had to come through David’s line. But the priests of Judaism could never be kings; and in this respect Aaron’s priesthood could never be as great as that of Christ, Israel’s King and Priest. This is one of the arguments whereby the Holy Spirit sought to urge Hebrew Christians to leave Judaism for Christianity.

And today, as in every age since Adam fell, sinful man needs the only King of Righteousness and King of Peace and Great High Priest. The world needs the King of kings to take the government upon His shoulder; and the world needs the Heavenly Priest to usher in the universal worship of Him whose right it is to receive worship. What confusion there is in the world today, both governmentally and religiously! With a global war raging in all its fury, with slave-labor and concentration camps and starvation and brutality taking their fearful toll of human life, we need not argue the point. This sin-cursed world needs Jesus, the righteous King! And when we think of the confusion in the religious world, we need not argue that point either. The human heart will never find peace and rest until it looks to the Christ of the cross and of the empty tomb, even the Heavenly Priest.

In India today there are some three hundred million people bowing down to idols of wood and stone; in all the world, some twelve millions of never-dying souls are in pagan darkness. And what shall we say of our so-called Christian lands? Indifference to Christ and the Bible, godlessness and crime and immorality rampant, apostasy in professing Christendom, much more than half of the population in our own United States of America not making any profession of faith whatsoever in the living God what shall we say of our need of Christ, the King-Priest? The Reverend William A. James, writing in the May, 1943, issue of “The Christian Digest,” page 3, says: “Only 20 per cent of the people in America are members of a recognized body owning God as God, and about half the number (are) not worth the cost of the ink spent in registering their names on the rolls, as far as any worth to the religious body is concerned.” From many Protestant pulpits we hear men urging “brotherly love” so-called, in a union of religions Jew, Catholic, and Protestant; but what does such a union involve? Jewry rejects the Christ of God; Catholicism upholds a human priesthood which robs souls of the sufficiency of the eternal, unchanging priesthood of the Lord Jesus. How can we who love the Lord have fellowship in worship with the adherents of such systems?

We pride ourselves on our religious liberty in this country—and God forbid that the day should ever come when we can not worship Him according to the dictates of conscience! But religious liberty under human government must permit any and all false religious systems to flourish. The
whole, wide world needs the only Great High Priest, even Jesus, the Son of God - not priests of Judaism, not priests of Catholicism, not priests of pagan creeds, but Christ. And when He comes to be recognized by all the world as the righteous King and ever-living Priest, then and then only will there be unity of worship. Idolatry will cease. Sun-worshippers will look to the "Sun of righteousness," who shall arise "with healing in his wings." The world will have one King and one Priest, even Jesus, the Son of God.

Isaiah prophesied of the coming of the Christ-Child, who was to be "born" in Bethlehem; he wrote of the eternal "Son" who was to be "given" by the Father to die on Calvary; then he called His name "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6, 7).

Zechariah wrote of the coming King, whose "feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives," saying,

"And the Lord shall be king over all the earth . . . and every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zech. 14:4, 9, 16).

In these and in hundreds of similar prophecies we see the picture of Christ, the King-Priest; for the King who is to rule the world is none other than the Saviour who has come and has offered one perfect sacrifice for sin forever. That is what the Holy Spirit was saying to the Hebrew Christians in the days of Paul; that is what He is saying to the world today. Christ is King of kings; and He is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

**MELCHIZEDEK—A TYPE OF THE ETERNITY OF CHRIST**

We can not emphasize too much the truth set forth in Heb. 7:3, that, because the Holy Spirit withheld the genealogy of Melchizedek, he became a type of Christ, who has neither beginning nor ending, but "abideth a priest continually." Our Lord is the only One ever born into the world who had a previous existence. The Scriptures are filled with proofs of His eternity. Here are just a few of them which we quote from His own words:

"I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

(The fall of Satan certainly took place before sin entered the Garden of Eden!)

"Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

"I proceeded forth and came from God" (John 8:42).

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

Our Lord Jesus had no beginning; for He is eternal God, the Creator, to whom the Father spoke wonderful words proving His Lordship, some of which we have already considered in our study of the first chapter of Hebrews. But, as our Priest, He had to die; and because He is eternal, He had to rise again from the dead. Thus the bodily resurrection of Christ, as well as His eternal deity, must be believed, or else we have no priest! Satan deceives men into doubting the eternal deity and the bodily resurrection of our Lord; for in so doing, he succeeds in getting men to worship him. We can not worship God and Satan at the same time. And if we reject the eternity of Christ His preexistence and His bodily resurrection from the dead then we worship Satan. There is no middle ground. My unsaved friend, will you not let the Holy Spirit lead you to the cross of the eternal Son of God? My Hebrew friend, still rejecting the Christ of the New Testament, will you not look to Jesus, your ever-living Priest? Aaron is dead; his sons are dead; all the Levitical priests are dead. But Christ ever liveth! He has "neither beginning of days nor end of life," but "abideth a priest continually."

**MELCHIZEDEK WAS GREATER THAN AARON**

In verses 4-10 of our lesson for today, we have a very forceful argument; briefly, it is this:

Melchizedek was greater than Abraham for two reasons:
1. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek.
2. Melchizedek blessed Abraham.

Therefore, Melchizedek was greater than Abraham's
lineal descendant, Aaron; and, for that matter, he was greater than all of the Levitical priests, who came from the family of Aaron.

This argument should have carried much weight with every Hebrew to whom Paul was writing; for since Melchizedek was greater than Aaron and all the Levitical priests, then Christ, of whom Melchizedek was a type, is greater than Aaron and all his sons. Here is how the Holy Spirit expresses this logical, conclusive evidence of the superiority of the Person of Christ over that of Aaron and the Levitical priests:

"Now consider how great this man was, unto whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth out of the chief spoils. And they indeed of the sons of Levi that receive the priest's office have commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though these have come out of the loins of Abraham: but he (Melchizedek) whose genealogy is not counted from them (i.e., the sons of Levi) hath taken tithes of Abraham, and hath blessed him that hath the promises. But without dispute the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there one, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And, so to say, through Abraham even Levi, who receiveth tithes, hath paid tithes; for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Abraham met him" (Heb. 7:4-10, R. V.).

Every Hebrew knew that the Law of Moses commanded the people to give their tithes to the priests and Levites for their temporal support; but here was Abraham, the forefather of the Levitical priests, paying tithes to Melchizedek; therefore, this royal priest was greater than Abraham and his descendants; for he who receives tithes is greater than he who pays tithes. Again, "without dispute the less is blessed of the better"; and Abraham, "the less," was blessed by Melchizedek, "the better." Moreover, the Levites who died received tithes from Israel; but he who was a type of the ever-living Lord Jesus, received tithes from Abraham, the father of the Levitical priesthood. Therefore, Christ, "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," is a "better" Priest than Aaron and all his sons!

The Levitical Priesthood "Changed" for the Better Priesthood of Christ

The next paragraph of our chapter is very long and very wonderful. It sets forth one of the many striking contrasts of this book of contrasts—a comparison between the Levitical priesthood and that of the Lord Jesus Christ. And throughout the whole discussion the superiority of Christ over Aaron and his sons is established beyond controversy. Perhaps we shall better grasp the full significance of this passage if we outline it on the page before us, even as we read the verses:

The Levitical Priesthood
1. Imperfection, verse 11.
2. "Under it hath the people received the law" (of Moses).
5. "The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law," verse 12.
6. The Levitical priests came from the tribe of Levi.
8. "For there is a disannulling of a foregoing commandment," verse 18.
9. Characterized by "weakness and unprofitableness (for the law made nothing perfect)" verses 18, 19.

The Priesthood of Christ
1. Perfection, verse 25.
2. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," John 1:17.
3. The need met in Christ, verse 11.
5. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," Rom. 10:4.
8. "For there is . . . a bringing in thereupon of a better hope," verses 18, 19.
10. "He (Christ) with an oath by him (the Father) that saith of him, The Lord sware and will not repent himself,
Thou art a priest for ever," verses 20, 21.

11. "Jesus ... the surety of a better covenant," verse 22.


14. "Able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," verse 25.

What more could an honest seeker after the truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus ask? Surely we need not attempt further explanation of this divine exposition of the deep things of God! Even a child can grasp it—by faith. It covers some of the most profound spiritual truths of the Word of God concerning Christ. His eternal deity; His gift of grace; His bodily resurrection; His eternal priesthood, including His intercession before the "throne of grace"; our access to God through Him—these are some of the blessed truths set forth in this convincing, logical contrast between the Levitical priesthood and the Melchizedek priesthood of our Lord.

While we need not enter upon a further discussion of these truths just here, yet we shall do well to remember that this passage tells us of the setting aside of the Law of Moses, as well as of the Levitical priesthood, under which the law was given. We are living in a day when literally thousands in professing Christendom are trying vainly to observe the Law of Moses; trying vainly to keep the seventh-day Sabbath; trying vainly to work for their salvation; believing their souls are not eternally secure in Christ, thinking they must add works to their faith, in order to be saved. To such as these God says plainly in the passage before us that the law has been set aside, annulled, fulfilled in Christ, forever done away. In Heb. 10:1 the Holy Spirit explains further that the "law" was "a shadow of good things to come." What "good things"? The "good things" concerning the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. My legalistic friend, remember that the law and the Levitical priesthood are bound together; and God tells us here that both have been set aside, since Christ died and arose and ascended into heaven our ever-living Great High Priest. That means all of the law, not just the ceremonial law alone, as some would have us believe. The law produced a dying priesthood, an imperfect priesthood; grace has given us an eternal, unchanging, perfect Priest—a King-Priest, even Jesus. (Of this contrast between the old covenant of the law and the "better covenant" in Christ, the Holy Spirit has much more to say in chapter eight of this epistle, which we shall study in our next lesson.)

Verse 24 of our Authorized Version tells us that our Lord "continueth ever"; and we are told that the Greek expression here is the strongest possible for "eternity," that it might be translated, "unto the ages." The Levitical priests died; but Christ's priesthood does not pass on to another; it continues "unto the ages," because He lives forevermore.

Again, we are told that the expression "unto the uttermost" in verse 25 implies eternal salvation, as well as salvation from every stain of sin and the meeting of every need of man. If we can think in terms of the billions and billions of years of all the future eternity; if we can realize that we shall live in the presence of our eternal Priest for all those limitless years, then we can get a glimpse of the meaning of these words—salvation throughout all the eternal ages.

We need also to tell lost men that this salvation is only for those who "come unto God by him" who is our Great High Priest. There is no other way to heaven. Our Lord Himself said,

"No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Only by the way of His cross, the altar where His priestly sacrifice was offered, can we receive salvation and enjoy heaven and God's presence throughout eternity. But because He died and rose and ever liveth, there is never a time when we do not have a Priest. His work is perfect. He is always
the same—"yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

When Aaron, Israel's first high priest, ministered on behalf of his people, he wore the names of the twelve tribes engraved in two onyx stones, six names on each shoulder; and the twelve names engraved on the twelve precious stones in the breastplate over his heart. Thus when he entered the sanctuary to pray for his people, he wore their names upon his shoulders, the place of strength, and over his heart, the place of affection. He could never forget his people, whom he represented before a holy God. This is a beautiful picture of our Lord's unceasing, unchanging ministry for us before "the throne of grace." His strength and His love never fail His own!

And what is His prayer for His blood-bought children? We may know something of the wonders of His intercession for us if we turn to the seventeenth chapter of John. There we read of how He prayed that His disciples—and all those who should believe on Him through their word—might be kept from sin by the Holy Word of God; that they might have His own joy, even in the midst of trials; that they might be one in Him, loving one another; that the Christless world, through their testimony, might believe on Him; and that throughout all eternity they might behold and share His glory. What a prayer! And it is the kind of prayer He is ever praying for us at heaven's throne!

"SUCH A HIGH PRIEST BECAME US"

The closing paragraph of chapter seven continues the contrast between the high priest of the Levitical order and our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful climax to this first division of the main portion of the epistle, which sets forth the superiority of Christ's Person or "order" over that of Aaron and his sons. Let us read it together:

"For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself. For the law appointeth men high priests, having infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was after the law, appointeth a Son, perfected for evermore" (Heb. 7:26-28, R. V.).

For the sake of emphasis, let us set these contrasting truths before us, to see the glories of our Lord's Person and work, as compared with the person and work of the Levitical high priests, whose ministry foreshadowed His coming into the world.

The Levitical High Priests  
Our Heavenly High Priest

1. "Those high priests" were sinners, verse 27.
2. Offered "daily . . . sacrifices," verse 27.
3. "First for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people," verse 27.
4. Offered animal sacrifices.
5. Appointed by the law, verse 28.

1. Christ is "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," verse 26.
2. One sacrifice "once for all," verse 27.
3. Christ "knew no sin"; He is "holy," and needed not to offer sacrifice for Himself, verse 26.
4. "He offered up himself," verse 27.
5. Appointed by "the word of the oath . . . after the law," verse 28.

Once more the proof of the superiority of Christ over all the priests of Judaism is overwhelming. "Those high priests" were sinners; our Lord "knew no sin" (II Cor. 5:21). God, the Father, spoke from heaven more than once, saying,

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5).

Christ, the Son of the Father, said to the Pharisees who sought in vain to find fault with Him,
"The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29).

Pontius Pilate said to the Jews who accused Christ,
"I find no fault in him at all" (John 18:38).

Satan had tried in vain to cause the Lord Jesus to sin, but the powerful enemy of God and man had failed in his wicked attempt; for Christ is holy and holiness means separation from sin. That is why we read, in Heb. 4:15, that our Great High Priest was "in all points tempted like as we are sin apart." Sin held no temptation for the Son of God!

"For God cannot be tempted with evil" (James 1:13). Absolutely holy in His nature; "guileless"; that is, without deceit or hypocrisy; "undefiled," not having any trace of sin; "separated from sinners" in His morally perfect Person; "and made higher than the heavens" because He is the Lord and Creator of all, our Great High Priest is so much "better than" any earthly priest that we stand "amazed in the presence" of such a Saviour!

The Levitical priests had to offer sacrifices day after day, year after year, century after century animal sacrifices, "which could never take away sin." Because they did this in obedience to God's command and by faith in the promised Redeemer, God met them in grace and gave them a certain sense of acceptance and joy. But they rested their faith, not in those animal sacrifices, but in the "Lamb of God" who was to come. How much "better" was the one sacrifice "once for all" of the Lord Himself! "Those high priests" had to offer for their own sins first, then for the people; Christ "offered up himself" for all the world because He alone was without sin, and a worthy sacrifice for the guilt of a sinful race.

Moreover, He offered Himself voluntarily, even as He said before He went to the cross,

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17, 18).

"Men . . . having infirmity" were appointed by the Law of Moses to be high priests; but the "Son, perfected for evermore," was appointed by God the Father, who confirmed His Word by His oath, saying,

"The Lord sware and will not repent himself, Thou art a priest for ever After the order of Melchizedek."

The Hebrew Christians, to whom this epistle was written, knew in their hearts that they were just the opposite of all these things that were true of Jesus, the Son of God. They knew that they were unholy, filled with guile, defiled by sin, needing a Saviour. Those apostate Jews who, in the light of this epistle, still turned back to Judaism, were without excuse, as is every man in every age who is "enlightened" concerning the things of Christ, yet refuses to love Him. And what shall we say of our own response to this inspired portrait of our Lord? As we compare our own sin and misery and shame with His unsullied and eternal holiness and glory, we can only worship Him for His grace, that He loved us enough to die for us! "Such a high priest became us!" He meets every human need. Shall we not give back to Him, as never before, everything He has committed to our trust, that we may tell others of "such a high priest"?

Or shall we go on, in our selfish, ungrateful way, seeking our pleasure and satisfaction from the Christ-rejecting world? Abraham did not do that when he met Melchizedek, gave him tithes, and received from him "bread and wine" and blessing. Abraham also met another king on that occasion, the king of Sodom. Out of gratitude for his deliverance from the enemy, the king of the wicked city of Sodom offered Abraham all the spoils of the battle. But the king of Sodom represented the godless world; and the patriarch refused to receive anything from his hand, saying in effect that he did not desire the riches of the world. God was pleased with Abraham's choice, we know; for immediately afterwards He spoke to His believing child in a vision, saying,

"Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1).
My Christian friend, God never stands debtor to His trusting children. Whatever your need may be, rest in His provision to meet that need, and in His love to provide. We have “such a great high priest” at the court of heaven to represent us personally before “the throne of grace.” His one sacrifice “once for all” has forever paid the penalty of our sins. His prayers for us avail. And He deals gently, sympathetically, with us in our weakness and in our testings and trials. Moreover, He leads us in our praises to the Father, even as Melchizedek led Abraham in his praise to a delivering Jehovah, saying,

“Blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand” (Gen. 14:20).

This blessed truth reminds us again of Heb. 2:12, where the Holy Spirit quoted the Psalm that foretold this ministry of our Great High Priest,

“. . . in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee (cf. Psa. 22:22).

Surely the Hebrew Christians, to whom Paul addressed this epistle, were not content to continue to be “babes in Christ,” following the reading of the seventh chapter of this epistle! In the words of another, Paul seems to be saying unto them—and unto us—“Think of Christ as a Priest, and I will make you understand” who He is—in His “altogether lovely” Person. As we look into the face of Jesus, the Son of God, “such a high priest” as pictured to us in our lesson for today, may God help us to understand something more and more wonderful concerning Him—something of His holiness, His eternal deity, His unlimited power, and His measureless love.