

Judaism revolved around the priesthood. The priesthood was needed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. (Heb. 5:1) The high priest was the people's representative before God. Many of the challenges the readers faced probably concerned the priesthood of Christ. How could Christ be greater and make obsolete the God-ordained Levitical priesthood? This was the so-called 'meat' which they must understand to successfully defend Jesus Christ as the King/Priest/Messiah.

7:1 - "For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;"

Melchisedec is introduced as both a king and a priest, who had dealings with the patriarch Abraham. Melchisedec was the king of Salem, a city which would later be called Jerusalem. He also worshipped the one true God, the God of Abraham, and was God's priest. Scripture first introduces Melchisedec when Abraham successfully defeated a group of allied kings. These kings were terrorizing the region and captured Lot, Abraham's brother.

"And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the kings dale. And Melchizedek the king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the high priest of the most high God. And blessed him, and said Blessed be Abram 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. And he gave him the tithes of all."

Gen. 14:17-20

The significance of the man Melchisedec would be kept a secret for about 1,000 years, when David would write Psalm 110, through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The Messiah would not only be a king, but also a priest in the order of Melchisedec.

"The lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

Psalms 110:2-4

Another 1,000 years would pass before the fulfillment of the Psalm by Jesus Christ. In all 2,000 years passed before the full significance of the meeting between Abraham and Melchisedec would be revealed in this letter to the Hebrews.

We have read everything the bible has to say about Melchisedec. The best explanation is that Melchisedec is an old testament type of Jesus Christ. He pointed to Christ just as did Adam. The bronze serpent was another type of Christ. The Passover lamb prefigured or pointed to Christ.

"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come."

Rom. 5:14

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a firey serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live."

Num. 21:8

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:"

John 3:14

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

John 1:29

7:2 - "To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace."

Not only did Melchisedec point to Christ in that he was both a king and a priest appointed by God, but his very name typifies Christ. Melchi - 'my king' + zedec - 'righteous' = 'my king is righteous'. Salem = 'peace'. Christ is first righteous, his righteousness cannot be compromised. Peace is a result of his righteous rule.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

Is. 9:6-7

(The significance of Abraham paying Melchisedec a tithe will be explained later in great detail)

7:3 - "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God: abideth a priest continually."

Melchisedec further typifies Christ in that his genealogy and origin was not significant in respect to his priesthood. The bible is silent as to the parentage and genealogy of Melchisedec. It is silent as to when he was born and when he died, as well as when his priesthood began. This is in complete contrast to the Levitical priesthood in which heredity determined if one could hold the office of priest.

The lineage of Jesus Christ is given to show that he was of the tribe of Judah in fulfillment of prophecy. Being of the tribe of Judah, Jesus did not have any priestly lineage. Christ, as was Melchisedec, was appointed by God to be a priest, making lineage totally irrelevant.

Christ's priesthood was of the order of Melchisedec, again fulfilling prophecy. There is not any biblical record as to the beginning or end of Melchisedec's priesthood. This typifies Christ's eternal priesthood.

"Jesus is a priest like Melchisedec. His priesthood is universal, royal, righteous, and peaceful, personal, and eternal." John MacArthur

7:4 - "Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils."

It is reasoned that if Abraham paid Melchisedec a tithe, Melchisedec must have been someone very important. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people. He was the most important person in Judaism. The Jew basically believed that being a descendant of Abraham was their ticket to heaven. Abraham was not indebted to Melchisedec in any way. In fact the opposite is true, Abraham having defeated the kings which terrorized the region. Abraham, however gave Melchisedec a tenth of the choicest spoils, simply because he recognized him as a great priest of God.

7:5-7 - "And verily they that are of the sons of Levi. who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: but he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better."

The significance of this tithe is explained, proving the priesthood of Melchisedec to be older and supreme to the Levitical priesthood. The tribe of

Levi did not inherit lands as did the other tribes. They performed a function ordained by God and the other tribes were commanded to support them.

"Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance, according as the Lord thy God promised him."
Deut. 10:9

"And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth of Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."
Num. 18:21

Even though given this function, the tribe of Levi was still descended from Abraham, as were all the tribes. The point is that in paying the tithe to Melchisedec, Abraham recognized him as appointed by God to the priesthood, which was of a higher rank. Abraham recognized Melchisedec as a priest of God before the Levitical priesthood even existed.

The fact that Melchisedec in turn blessed Abraham ends all dispute that Melchisedec was indeed superior to Abraham. The one whom is blessing is of a higher rank or office than the one whom is being blessed. Melchisedec was superior to Abraham and so superior to his descendants.

7:8-10 - "And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him."

The Levitical priesthood is inferior for its parents are mortal. The priesthood of Melchisedec pre-figured the Priest who is eternal. The Levites, even though they held a superior office in regards to the other Israelites, were still mortal men. They inherited the office, served, and passed it on to another. Melchisedec did not inherit his priesthood, there is not any record of his passing on his priesthood, and not any record of his death. The biblical record is simply that Melchisedec lived, and so typifies the eternal priesthood of Christ.

Because Melchisedec did not have any descendants, the relationship between Melchisedec and the descendants to Abraham remained unchanged. It is reasoned that if Abraham, thought to be the greatest man ever, recognized the superior office of Melchisedec, then Abraham's descendants were also inferior.

It follows that the Levitical priesthood is inferior to that of Melchisedec, for the Levites paid tithes to Melchisedec in Abraham.

Who was Melchisedec?

Besides the explanations given in this study, some other opinions are as follows:

- 1) Melchisedec was Shem, the son of Noah. This thought comes from the writings of Jewish rabbis, but seem to be strictly Jewish tradition or folklore.
- 2) Melchisedec was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. The name means 'king of righteousness' which aptly describes Christ. John 8:56 adds more weight to the argument as well as the description of Melchisedec in Hebrews 7:2-3.
- 3) The best explanation seems to be that Melchisedec was a type of Christ. The brief biblical accounts make him a historical figure, someone who lived in the region and was known, Lower case letters are used for the words 'king' and 'priest' in verse 1, and in verse 2 where the word 'King' appears it is probably referring to whom Melchisedec typified.

7:11 - "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?"

After proving the existence and superiority of the priesthood of Melchisedec, the author goes on to point out the imperfections of the Levitical priesthood. Being ordained by God, the Levitical priesthood was regarded as being permanent, perfect, and unchangeable. The author reasons that if this were true, there would be no need for the priesthood of Melchisedec, and the Messiah would be of the priesthood of Aaron. The Levitical priesthood must not be seen as complete, but as ordained by God as a temporary relief from sin, all the while pointing to the eternal priest in which would be perfection. (Heb. 3:5, 8:5)

The law was inseparable from the priesthood, for the priesthood was actually based upon the law. It was the priests who instructed the people, who taught the law and the promises Under it (the priesthood) the people received the law. To speak contrary to the Levitical priesthood was to speak against the law, which was a most serious offense.

"And setup false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against the holy place, and the law:" Acts 6:13

"Crying out, Men of Israel, help: this is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought the Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place." Acts 21:28

7:12 - "For the priesthood being changed, there is made on necessity a change also of the law."

Considering the above, the author must point out the fact that a change in the priesthood necessitated a change in the law. All of the ceremonial laws of ritual and sacrifice were no longer of any value. They were fulfilled in Christ under the new priesthood and so were done away with.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matt. 5:17-18

By keeping the old ordinances of ritual and sacrifice would be to deny the perfection of the new priesthood. The scriptures also showed that mans relationship to the law would change.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they break, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jer. 31:31-34

The author just touches briefly on the subject of the law. At this point he simply wants his readers to understand that the law, like the priesthood, has

undergone a change. He wants them to understand that the ceremonial law, which regulated the priesthood, was now obsolete. The Judaizers did not believe this, but incorporated Christ into their system. The law will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 10. (Heb. 10:1)

7:13-15 - "For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning the priesthood. And it is yet far more evident; for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest."

It was evident from the scriptures that a change had to take place in the priesthood. The scriptures were clear that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah.

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Gen. 49:10

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Micah 5:2

"And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." Matt. 2:6

The fact that the Messiah would be of Judah proves a change had to take place, because the tribe of Judah had nothing to do with the priestly activities. Even more substantial proof is provided by the scriptures in Psalm 110:4, where it is shown that the Messiah would be a priest called of an order different from the existing Levitical order.

These verses are, more or less, a summary of what has already been said. The Levitical priesthood was never intended to restore men perfectly with God. A change was provided for and predicted in the old testament and has now come to pass in the person of Jesus Christ.

7:16-17 - "Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

The unique manner in which Jesus Christ was made a priest is again stressed

by contrast to the Levitical priesthood. Christ was not made a priest because someone died, because he was next in line, or because of any other fleshly rule or regulation. Jesus was made a priest by the inward power of his Godhead, characterized by eternal life. In the Levitical system men were made priests by the outward power of the law. Because he possessed the power of eternal life, Jesus through the sacrifice fulfilled the requirements of the Levitical priesthood and rose again to assume the responsibilities of the everlasting priesthood of the order of Melchisedec. Only Jesus Christ could end the old while assuming the duties of the new through the power of eternal life.

In verse 17, the author again quotes Psalm 110:4 showing that God has declared the validity of the priesthood of Christ. Acceptance is not optional.

7:18 - "For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof."

The Levitical priesthood along with its laws was not designed to fulfill the full purpose of God, which was to draw men completely and permanently to him. The old system ran its course or accomplished what it in itself was designed to do. It pointed to the better system which had now come. Compared to the new system, the old system was weak. It could not accomplish the ultimate goal.

"And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Acts 13:39

Say you had the goal of digging a hole in hard soil. The most efficient means would be to start the job by using a pick. When the ground was loosened, a shovel would be used to accomplish the goal. The pick would be useful up to a certain point, but it would be the shovel which would perfectly accomplish the task.

7:19 - "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."

The Levitical system could not permanently and completely reconcile a man to God. The Levitical system offered temporary atonement. The man was dependent upon the priest and the system. All who were saved were not saved by the system, but by the great sacrifice which it typified, and which had now become reality.

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."
Rom. 3:19-20

The priesthood of Christ offers a sacrifice and sure hope, enabling the believer to draw near to God. The one which the old system pointed to has come. Salvation is no longer vague and distant, but has been revealed. The believer sees Jesus, whom is the foundation of hope.

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."
I Peter 1:9-12

Through Jesus Christ the believer has direct access to God, no longer dependent upon a mortal priest or in bondage to ritual and law. (Heb. 4:16)

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom we also have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."
Rom. 5:1-2

7:20-21 - "And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)"

Having presented the arguments and explanations of the priesthood of Christ, the author concludes by appealing to the oath of God himself. Jesus Christ was appointed priest by a oath of God, by the declaration of God the supreme authority. None of the Levitical priests could claim this, not even Aaron, who was appointed, but not by an oath of God. The system was set up and men claimed the office by decent. God swore upon his own character and attributes, he cannot change his mind.

7:22 - "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."

Jesus Christ is the guarantee of the new and better system. He was made the center of the new system by all the things so far discussed. He was of the

tribe of Judah and appointed to an older and better priesthood. This priesthood was confirmed by Abraham and Christ appointed to it by the solemn oath of God. The Levitical system pointed to Jesus and by fulfilling that system by the power of eternal life he becomes the guarantee of the new.

Through the priestly office he eternally holds, Christ guarantees to pay the full debt of the believers sins, past, present and future. Paul put himself up as a surety for Onesamus (Philemon 18-19). Christ however is the perfect surety.

7:23 - "And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:"

The author once again reminds his readers of the limitations of the Levitical priesthood. Death ruled the Levitical priesthood and in this way the priesthood was undergoing continuous change. There were many priests simply because they were mortal. From the very beginning the temporary nature of the Levitical priesthood was demonstrated by God. Both Abraham, the giver of the law, and Aaron, the first high priest, died before entering into the promised land. This showed the old covenant was temporary and could not save.

(Num. 20:23-29)

7:24 - "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood."

The author wants to emphasize the fulfilling of the Levitical priesthood. It is over and no longer needed. The fact that Jesus possesses within himself eternal life eliminates the need for many priests, as well as eliminates the need for any further changes. Jesus Christ is the priesthood. He does not need any stand-ins or successors. To do so is to again impose human limitations on something which is perfect, complete and unalterable.

The bible is clear that a priesthood of mortal men is weak, imperfect, and can never reconcile men to God. God allowed the temple to be totally destroyed in 70 A.D., and has allowed every effort to reconstruct it to fail ever since. He put a physical end to the system which he both ordained and fulfilled.

The Roman Catholic priesthood has risen up as a counterfeit system. The priests are mortal and imperfect. There are again many priests, for death rules this system. Priests are appointed by the laws and ordinances of men. This system mirrors the Levitical system but was never ordained by God. It takes

the perfect and unchangeable priesthood of Jesus Christ and denies it by subjecting it to weakness and corruption.

7:25 - "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The unchanging and everlasting priesthood of Jesus Christ offers complete salvation. Jesus Christ is able to save perfectly, completely, and eternally. There were probably many high priests who desired to cleanse the people and turn their hearts to God, however being mortal and imperfect, they were not able. Being the only one who is able, the only way to become a partaker of this salvation is through Jesus Christ. He provides the only access to God.

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;"
John 14:6

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."
Acts 4:12

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."
I Tim. 2:5

The security of salvation is in the eternity of the priesthood of Christ. The intercession of Christ on the believers behalf is eternal. His intercession is therefore unlimited. If it were up to the believer to keep his salvation he would loose it daily, but it is Christ who keeps us, just as it was Christ who saved us.

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
Rom. 8:34-39

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:"
John 2:1

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,"
 Jude 1:24

7:26 - "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens;"

Jesus Christ is not only eternal, but eternally holy. Only one who is eternal and holy was qualified to fulfill God's plan. 'Holiness' refers to the spiritual, to ones standing before God. The word 'harmless' is directed towards Christ's relationship to men. He lived totally for others and never threatened. Being 'undefiled' means he was sinless. He lived as a man in the world, but was without sin. Because he was sinless, he was not of the world. He dwelt in the world, but in his nature was 'separate' from it. Because of these things Jesus is exalted higher than the heavens. The only one who could possibly have fulfilled God's plan.

7:27-28 - "Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. for the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."

The Levitical priests were mortal, and so, weak and sinful. Their sacrifices did not have any lasting merit for themselves or for the people they represented. Because the priests as well as their sacrifices were imperfect, they found temporary acceptance only by the things they foreshadowed, according to the law that God had ordained.

"And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make atonement for thyself, and for the people: and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them, as the Lord commanded." Lev. 9:7

Jesus Christ was the perfect sacrifice as well as the perfect and everlasting high priest. As the perfect sacrifice, Christ gained unlimited merit. As a perfect and everlasting priest he continuously applies that merit on behalf of the believer.

Being unlimited and eternal, there is no need for it to be repeated. Unlike the Levitical priests, he offered himself once. By the oath of God, Jesus Christ fulfills the old and is appointed the perfect priest forever. (Psalm 110:4)

The Roman Catholic church brags that every second of every day a mass is going on someplace in the world. This is mans idea of a perpetual and everlasting sacrifice. In every mass the priest takes the host before the people for the forgiveness of his sins. These verses tell us that this very act symbolizes a weak and imperfect system. To believe that there is any merit whatsoever in the Roman Catholic priesthood and in their sacrifice is to deny Jesus Christ as the eternal high priest and the fulfillment of the old covenant. This is the unforgivable sin, for everyone in hell will have one thing in common, that is the rejection of the finished work of Jesus Christ.