

October 23

Lesson 8

# THE HIGH PRIEST

## FOREVER

DEVOTIONAL READING:: Psalm 110

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 7

### HEBREWS 7:1-3, 18-28

<sup>1</sup> This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup> and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” <sup>3</sup> Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

<sup>18</sup> The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless <sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

<sup>20</sup> And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, <sup>21</sup> but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

“The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind:  
‘You are a priest forever.’”

<sup>22</sup> Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.

<sup>23</sup> Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; <sup>24</sup> but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. <sup>25</sup> Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

<sup>26</sup> Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup> Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.



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### KEY VERSE

*Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.—Hebrews 7:24*

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the one whose priesthood is eternal.
2. Compare and contrast the priesthoods of Jesus, Melchizedek, and those descended from Levi.
3. Explain to a new Christian or an unbeliever the concept of priesthood and Jesus' role therein.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Unexpected Support
- B. Lesson Background: Mysterious Priest
- C. Lesson Background: Messianic Psalm

### I. Priest of God ([Hebrews 7:1-3](#))

- A. Lesser and Greater ([vv. 1, 2](#))
- B. Out of Nowhere ([v. 3](#))

### II. Priest by Divine Oath ([Hebrews 7:18-22](#))

- A. Better Hope ([vv. 18, 19](#))
- Protective Boundaries*

- B. Sworn Declaration ([vv. 20-22](#))
- Substitutes*

### III. Priests Contrasted ([Hebrews 7:23-28](#))

- A. Permanence and Intercession ([vv. 23-25](#))
- B. Character and Exaltation ([v. 26](#))
- C. Sacrifice and Consecration ([vv. 27, 28](#))

### Conclusion

- A. Faithful Mediator
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Unexpected Support

The Lord of the Rings trilogy, published in the mid-1950s, is a classic story of the victory of virtue and providence over the power of evil. A mysterious ring, which proves to be an instrument of evil, falls into the possession of a humble hobbit named Frodo. He learns that the ring must be destroyed at the mountain where it was forged, and he sets out with friends on a journey that proves to be momentous and dangerous.

Early in their journey, the travelers are rescued by Tom Bombadil. He is a powerful and enigmatic character, but he shows the weary hobbits rich hospitality and provides wise counsel for their perilous journey. Similarly, the enigmatic Melchizedek appears on the scene of Old Testament history to render aid to a virtuous person who is on a journey, namely Abraham ([Genesis 14:18-24](#)). Tom Bombadil is fictional, but Melchizedek was real.

### B. Lesson Background: Mysterious Priest

Melchizedek appears in the Old Testament only in [Genesis 14](#) and [Psalm 110](#). These passages note his considerable status, but otherwise give very little information about him.

As a result, the identity of Melchizedek has been the subject of speculation. Some Jewish scholars propose that he was a visitation of Enoch, a man who had “walked faithfully with God” ([Genesis 5:22, 24](#)). Others suggest that Melchizedek was the angel Michael, the defender of God’s people ([Daniel 12:1](#)).

Some Christian scholars, for their part, propose that Melchizedek was actually a theophany (a visual manifestation of God). But if Melchizedek’s presence and ministry in Canaan as “priest of God Most High” ([14:18](#)) was part of why God called Abraham to settle in that land ([12:1](#)), then such theories should be set aside.

The opening “this Melchizedek” of today’s text picks up on the closing verses of chapter 6. There the writer focuses (1) on the oath by which God confirmed his promise to Abraham as support for our hope of salvation and (2) on the work of Jesus as our “high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” By this the writer is not indicating the existence of a continuing priestly order led by Melchizedek. The idea is that of a

special category rather than of an established institution.

### C. Lesson Background: Messianic Psalm

[Psalm 110](#) looks forward to the Messiah and the deliverance he will bring about. The importance the New Testament writers assign to this psalm is revealed by its 10 quotations and 14 allusions in the Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul, and the letter to the Hebrews.

[Psalm 110:4](#) affirms that “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’” The writer of Hebrews repeatedly points to this divine decree in calling the reader to remain faithful to Christ ([Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:17-20; 7:11-17, 21](#)). Melchizedek, whose genealogy and death are not recorded in Scripture, is a type of Christ—Christ who continues to minister to us as king and high priest by “the power of an indestructible life” ([7:16](#)). The phrase *type of Christ* recognizes that the New Testament writers use a technique known as *typology* to draw on patterns from the Old Testament to understand aspects of the era of the new covenant. One example is that of Adam, described by Paul as “a pattern [type] of the one to come” ([Romans 5:14](#)).

## I. Priest of God

([HEBREWS 7:1-3](#))

### A. Lesser and Greater (vv. 1, 2)

**1, 2. This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.”**

The fact that *Melchizedek* was *king of Salem* points decisively to the man as a historical figure, not an angel or a theophany (see the Lesson Background). According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, *Salem* refers to *Jerusalem*; the latter designation is merely a longer form of the city’s name (compare [Psalm 76:2](#)). *Salem*, from the Hebrew word *shalom*, means “peace.”

Melchizedek was not only king there but also *priest of God Most High*, a status of extraordinary honor. The man’s greatness is shown in the fact that even Abraham, who is held in the highest regard in the history of Israel, paid tithes (*a tenth of everything*) to him ([Genesis 14:17-20](#)). The implication (hinted at here and clearly affirmed in [Hebrews 7:4-17](#), not in today’s text) is that there is no scriptural basis for maintaining allegiance to the old Levitical priesthood in preference to the high priest of the new covenant, Jesus Christ.

### B. Out of Nowhere (v. 3)

**3. Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.**

A primary question concerning the identity of Melchizedek is whether the writer to the Hebrews is intending to present him as more than human. A literalistic reading of the verse before us could lead us to say *yes*, but a broader look at [Hebrews 5-7](#) will restrain us from doing so.

That broader look reveals that the writer’s main purpose across those three chapters is to establish the superiority of Jesus over the Levitical priesthood. For this purpose, comparisons between the natures of Jesus and Melchizedek themselves are unnecessary. Instead, it is sufficient to note parallels between their respective priesthoods, contrasting them along the way with elements of the Levitical priesthood.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Apocrypha Uh-paw-kruh-fuh.

Enoch E-nock.

Levi Lee-vye.

Levitical Leh-vit-ih-kul.

Melchizedek Mel-kiz-eh-dek.

Messiah Meh-sigh-uh.

shalom (*Hebrew*) shah-lome.

Sirach Sigh-rak.

theophany the-ah-fuh-nee.

The priesthoods of both Jesus and Melchizedek are outside the genealogical boundaries of the Levitical priesthood, boundaries grounded in the Law of Moses ([Exodus 28:1-4; 29:44; Leviticus 8](#); etc.). Melchizedek and Jesus were appointed by God to priesthoods that do not base their validity on having Levi as an ancestor. Melchizedek was appointed “priest of God Most High” apart from recorded genealogical credentials, and Jesus has been appointed our great high priest “not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an

indestructible life” ([Hebrews 7:16](#)).

Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, not Levi ([Matthew 1:1-17](#); [Hebrews 7:14](#)). Yet it was God’s purpose, as promised in [Psalm 110](#), that a descendant of King David would, as Messiah, be both king and priest. The readers of Hebrews can have no greater king or priest, and they would be foolish to forsake Jesus to return to the old covenant. Equally foolish would be to compromise submission to Christ by attempting to combine new-covenant faith with old-covenant practices that “will soon disappear” ([Hebrews 8:13](#)).

## II. Priest by Divine Oath

([HEBREWS 7:18-22](#))

### A. Better Hope ([vv. 18, 19](#))

**18, 19. The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.**

The priestly ministry established by the Law of Moses could not bring people to sinlessness and complete spiritual maturity. The priests themselves were not without sin and were subject to mortality. The law by itself could point to, but could not provide for, the redemption of sinners; only the work of Christ on the cross could accomplish that. As Paul explained, “So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith” ([Galatians 3:24](#)).

The death and resurrection of Jesus brought into history *a better hope*. Jesus is the high priest of the new covenant. He is the one who offered the perfect sacrifice for our sin: the sacrifice of himself. He now mediates between us and the Father so that we may *draw near to God* with confidence ([Hebrews 4:16](#)).

#### *What Do You Think?*

How do we keep a healthy balance between respect for law and reliance on grace? Or is *balance* even the right word? Explain.

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding our salvation
- Regarding our personal holiness
- Regarding the laws of society
- Other

### **PROTECTIVE BOUNDARIES**

Throughout elementary school, my daughter did her homework on her own without any prodding from me. During the first week of junior high, she forgot to do her homework twice. The new schedule—which featured a greater variety of classes and social engagements, combined with more responsibility and less teacher supervision—was taking its toll on her. Consequently, I told her that I would have to check her homework at night to make sure she had finished it before she could do fun activities.

Shocked, she said that this had never happened before. I replied that she had never needed it before, but the previously unnecessary rule came into effect when she did need it. The boundary of “finish your homework in a timely manner” had existed since she had begun to be assigned homework. It was only when the boundary was violated that a corrective procedure was enforced.

God’s law drew the behavioral boundaries for the Old Testament era. When people crossed those boundaries, he enacted corrective procedures. The people of that day were not ready for the freedom that we in the New Testament era enjoy ([Galatians 5:1](#); [Ephesians 3:12](#); [James 2:12](#)).

This freedom is available because of the better hope that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection bring (compare [Colossians 2:14](#)). Even so, we are not to use our “freedom as a cover-up for evil,” but for service to God ([1 Peter 2:16](#)). Our place in God’s story is one of relationship with his Son rather than keeping of rules. But there are still boundaries.—L. M. W.

### B. Sworn Declaration ([vv. 20-22](#))

**20, 21. And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:**

**“The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind:  
‘You are a priest forever.’”**

The contrast between the priesthood of Jesus and the Levitical priesthood continues. Levites were appointed to be priests according to stipulations of the Law of Moses; such priests could be appointed *without any oath*. But Jesus’ appointment was accompanied by an oath,

recorded here as being [Psalm 110:4](#).

#### *What Do You Think?*

Under what circumstances, if any, does the oath God affirmed serve as a model for swearing oaths or taking vows on our part?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Considering positive views in [Hebrews 6:16, 17](#)

Considering negative views in [Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22; James 5:12](#)

Relevance of [1 Thessalonians 5:27?](#)

The idea of the Lord swearing an oath is not a new one (see [Genesis 24:7; Psalm 89:49; Ezekiel 16:8](#); etc.). The fact that *the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind* means that he will never rescind his decision that the Messiah will forever serve as the high priest of his people. Jesus' authority to fulfill this office is grounded not in the temporary Law of Moses but in the everlasting oath of the Creator.

#### **22. Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.**

The noun in the original language that is translated *guarantor* is quite rare, occurring only here in the New Testament. For Jesus to *become the guarantor* means that he is something like a bondsman or underwriter, who provide a guarantee. A nonbiblical text from the Apocrypha, written before the time of Christ, is intriguing in this regard: "Do not forget the kindness of your guarantor, for he has given his life for you" (Wisdom of Jesus the Son of [Sirach 29:15](#)).

The *better covenant* Jesus guarantees is the new covenant, a point further developed in [Hebrews 8:6-13](#). The old covenant served well its purposes of revealing the holiness of God and the holiness he expected of his people (compare [1 Peter 1:16](#), which quotes [Leviticus 19:2](#)). However, the old covenant was promissory rather than complete. It was not faultless as an instrument of salvation ([Hebrews 8:7](#)), and it served as "our guardian" as it demonstrated our need for the Messiah ([Galatians 3:24](#)). He alone fulfills the righteous requirements of the law, first for himself by his sinless life and then for us by his death and resurrection.

### ***SUBSTITUTES***

When parents leave their child for a short time, they trust a babysitter in their place. The babysitter provides for the child's care, and the two may enjoy a close relationship. But despite any mutual affection, the care of the child reverts back to the parents when they return. The nature of the relationship between parent and child is of a wholly different order than a bond between babysitter and child. The babysitter is a temporary substitute.

The Old Testament law was something like a babysitter. It served to care for humanity until Jesus could come to renew the bond between heavenly Father and earthly children. As a babysitter is temporarily responsible for enforcing the parents' desires for their child, the Old Testament law enforced God's desires by pointing out sin.

The roles of Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, etc., can remind us that the old covenant law was never intended to be permanent. It was established as "our guardian" (again, [Galatians 3:24](#)) until Jesus came to do all that the law itself could not ([3:25-4:7](#)).—L. M. W.

Jesus became "the pioneer and perfecter of faith" ([Hebrews 12:2](#), next week's lesson) by accepting upon himself the justice of God that we deserve for our sins and by his resurrection to life beyond death. That resurrection foreshadows our own and is the basis for it; God promises that we too will be raised to everlasting life ([1 Corinthians 15](#)). In light of this, how is there any advantage in turning away from Jesus or attempting to combine faith in him with faith in someone or something else? Those who consider abandoning or modifying their faith in Christ in order to be less offensive to others need to think again!

## **III. Priests Contrasted**

([HEBREWS 7:23-28](#))

### **A. Permanence and Intercession ([vv. 23-25](#))**

**23, 24. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.**

The writer begins sketching contrasts between Jesus and the Levitical priests. The latter were necessarily *many* in number because of their mortality, a fact patently obvious to anyone. But Jesus holds a *permanent priesthood* by "the power of an indestructible life" ([Hebrews 7:16](#)).

**25. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.**

The fact that the priestly ministry of Jesus saves *completely* means that salvation through him continues forever. It includes the sanctification in this life and glorification for eternity. We walk in assurance that our high priest will bring us into the very presence of God. Jesus will transform our lowly natural bodies into glorious spiritual ones when he returns ([1 Corinthians 15:44](#)); we will be beyond the reach of

death permanently.

The assurance of eternity in Heaven is what sets our present lives in this fallen world in proper perspective. As Paul stressed, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:19). The Christian faith is rightly weighed on its own terms, not on those of a secular understanding of life that can see no farther than the moment of physical death.

The phrase *those who come to God through him* reminds us of Jesus’ own declaration “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Only Jesus can *intercede* for us with the Father—and he does (compare Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1).

*What Do You Think?*

What more can you do to show appreciation for and reliance on the one interceding for you?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

In your prayer life

In your public witness

In how you manage money

Other

## B. Character and Exaltation (v. 26)

**26. Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.**

The contrasts between Jesus and those of the Levitical priesthood continue. Only Jesus can be characterized fully by the descriptions we see in the verse before us. Only he has been *exalted above the heavens*.

*What Do You Think?*

What are some ways to model Jesus’ separateness from sinners while still engaging with them for purposes of evangelism?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Regarding you as an individual

Regarding your congregation as a whole

## C. Sacrifice and Consecration (vv. 27, 28)

**27, 28. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.**

Verse 27 presents us with a slight problem, because the phrasing of the high priest’s sacrifice as *first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people* seems to refer to the yearly (rather than *day after day*) sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). A solution presents itself when we realize that it was possible for high priests, like anyone else, to sin daily without meaning to do so. And daily sin required daily sacrifice (Leviticus 4:1-3).

But Jesus sinned neither intentionally nor unintentionally. Thus he was able to be the perfect sacrifice “without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19) for the sins of the world. *The other high priests* who served under the Law of Moses were weak toward sin, but the Son of God was perfected by living a life without sin. He lived out daily the holiness that was never lacking in his character.

The final point of contrast concerns the divine oath revealed in Psalm 110:4, sworn by God during the life of King David. That was four centuries after the Law of Moses had been given, so there is no doubt that God himself intended the Levitical priesthood to be superseded by the everlasting ministry of Christ as high priest of his people.

The distinctive qualities of Melchizedek noted in Genesis 14:18-20 combine with the promise of Psalm 110 to point to the singular, superlative high priesthood of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews will reiterate later the decisive contrast: “For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence” (Hebrews 9:24). Our high priest lives, our king reigns, forever and ever.

*What Do You Think?*

How can trust in our high priest be reflected in our Christian priesthood of 1 Peter 2:5, 9?



*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding your graciousness toward and prayer intercession for fellow Christians
- Regarding your graciousness toward and prayer intercession for unbelievers
- Other

**Conclusion****A. Faithful Mediator**

Surely there was no one in Abraham's day (about 2000 BC) who anticipated that Melchizedek's dual positions as king and priest foreshadowed those two roles of the Messiah to come! But that foreshadowing and its implications are precisely what the book of Hebrews establishes.



**Visual for Lesson 8.** *Test comprehension by pointing to this visual as you ask, “How do the ideas of **priest and sacrifice** come together in Jesus?”*

Times of affliction and the discouragement they bring may make us feel far from God, unable to communicate with him. Job certainly felt this way during his time of suffering as he lamented, “[God] is not a mere mortal like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together” ([Job 9:32, 33](#)).

Job depicts a mediator, one who stands between two others and attempts to reconcile them. Job longed for a mediator, for someone who was able to speak directly to God on Job's behalf. God has answered that longing in Christ, our high priest who offered the once-for-all-time sacrifice and who always intercedes for us with God. As Paul reminded Timothy, “There is one God and one mediator between God and

mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

### B. Prayer

Father, may we never embrace any savior other than Jesus! Only he could offer the perfect sacrifice of self to pay the penalty for our sins—and he did. It is with gratitude that we pray to you in his name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Rely completely and only on Jesus for salvation.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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### Into the Lesson

Challenge your class to see how few clues it takes to identify the Mystery Man according to clues you will give. After you read each clue aloud, allow about 30 seconds for guessing the name of the Bible character. Give the following clues: 1-He had no children. 2-He blessed a major Bible character after that person killed some kings. 3-He is a perpetual priest. 4-He was King of Salem. 5-He received a tithe from Abraham. 6-He was made like the Son of God. 7-Jesus is a priest forever after his order.

Congratulate the team that first comes up with the name *Melchizedek*. Then say, “Melchizedek is certainly one of the most mysterious characters in the Bible. We’re going to learn more about him today and how his priestly order makes Jesus’ eternal priesthood far superior to that of Aaron.”

*Alternative.* Write the following question on the board: *Who was the greatest baseball player of all time?* Underneath it list these names: Hank Aaron, Ty Cobb, Lou Gehrig, Babe Ruth, Ted Williams. Encourage your students to give their opinions. Then say, “Most listings rank Babe Ruth as the best overall player, but there are others who would debate it. However, when it comes to the best order of high priest, that honor goes to Melchizedek, whose priesthood serves as a model for that of Jesus.”

### Into the Word

Early in the week, ask one of your students to give a brief lecture about Melchizedek, based on the information provided in the introduction under “Lesson Background: Mysterious Priest.”

On index cards write the following words, one per card: *appointed, death, intercession, king, oath, sacrifice, sinful, covenant*. Distribute all the cards to individuals or pairs of students. Instruct them to search the lesson text to see how their word(s) could be used to make the case that Jesus as high priest in the order of Melchizedek is superior to the priesthood of Aaron. After allowing for study time, ask for volunteers to reveal their words and tell how they relate to the two priesthoods.

Here are some possible responses: *appointed*—the law appointed weak men as high priests, but God appointed Jesus as our perfect high priest; *death*—mortality prevented high priests from continuing in office, but Jesus lives forever; *intercession*—Jesus always lives to make intercession for us; *king*—Aaron’s successors were only priests, but Melchizedek was both priest and king, as is Jesus; *oath*—no oath is involved in the human priesthood, but Jesus’ was established by God’s oath; *sacrifice*—human priests have to offer continual sacrifices for themselves and the people, but Jesus sacrificed himself only once; *sinful*—humans are sinful and weak, but Jesus is “holy ... exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26); *covenant*—Jesus is the guarantor of a much superior covenant, which gives us hope, rather than the one based on the law.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “How Do They Compare?” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work in pairs to complete it; then discuss their answers.

### Into Life

Say, “Help me list the things that the high priest did for the Israelites.” Jot responses on the board, expecting the following: offered sacrifices, entered God’s presence on the Day of Atonement, set high standards of conduct, represented them to God, etc. Then say, “If you had to explain to a new believer what it means for Jesus to be our high priest, what would you say?” Responses could use the answers given before to state that Jesus offered one sacrifice—himself—for all our sins, he is daily in God’s presence interceding for us, he is the perfect example for how we are to live, etc.

*Option.* Have students discuss possible responses to the “What Would Jesus Say?” activity from the reproducible page.