

A priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek

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Thank you for that reading from Psalm 110. Here at Epping Baptist we are looking at the psalms during the month of January, and I thought Psalm 110 would be a fitting one for me to teach. And Hebrews chapter 7 is almost mandated to adjoin this psalm.

Shalom to each of you today as we unpack this psalm and learn a bit about one of my favorite biblical characters, Melchizedek, and sort out why the biblical writers chose to make mention of him and use his person as a pointer to the Jewish messiah Yeshua. And today we will also consider the mission to the Jewish people here in Sydney and worldwide as I share a bit about Jews for Jesus also.

Introduction: Who is this guy?

The psalm begins with unusual vocabulary. “The Lord said to my Lord” (נָאָם יְהוָה | לְאֵדֹנָי) It doesn’t sound very Jewish, because we Jews have one God, and not more than one. Here we read One Lord said to another Lord, and that sounds like two, but David sounds confused. So confusing in fact, that Yeshua Himself used this text to answer those Pharisees who were giving him stick about his claims.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: “What do you think about the Messiah, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “*The son of David.*”

(This is still taught nowadays. I grew up an Orthodox Jew in Kansas City In the middle of the US, and learned Messiah would be “Mashiach Ben David”) He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, ‘SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, until I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET’?” “If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ How is He His Son?” No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question. (Matt. 22.41-46)

Our role: The role of the priests

For others it’s not so clear. So let’s try to clear things up. Before we unpack the psalm, I want to remind you if you are a believer in Yeshua as Messiah that He calls us to be a royal priesthood, according to the apostle Peter. (“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people *God’s own possession* so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2.9). Peter would certainly have known all about this priestly ministry, as Yeshua actually ordained him to such a status as is recorded in Matthew chapter 16. “Yeshua said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My congregation; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” Matthew 16.17-19)

By using the odd phrase “Blessed are you” (which is how Jewish prayers often begin) and Peter’s full Hebrew name (demonstrating this is an official ceremony), Yeshua ordains Peter to Gospel ministry, and that means one thing to those men that day. Peter is becoming a Cohen, a priest. Wow, who can do that anyway? Who can make someone who is not a priest to be a priest? It was genetics that made a priest.

The only one who can really honestly do that is the Lord himself. And Yeshua is basically saying that of himself. Jesus is claiming to be God. Deity? What an awesome claim!

But wait a minute, Jesus isn’t even a priest himself, is he? According to the Scriptures, a priest had to be born in the line of Aaron, who was a Levite, Levi being the 3rd son of Jacob. Yeshua according to the genealogies was a great, great, great.... Grandson of Judah, the 4th son of Jacob. In other words, Yeshua comes from the wrong son of Jacob. To be a priest—descend from Levi. Yeshua? Descended from Levi’s brother Judah. So, no he’s disqualified, he cannot be a priest at all, much less to make someone else to be one like Peter. Therefore, something has to be done about that conflict. The writer of Hebrews will make a very clear and very important case for the priesthood of Yeshua, and I’ll explain that just now using our featured character of the day, Melchizedek.

Yeshua: The great High Priest of our confession

Melchizedek lived during the time of Abraham about 2000 BCE. And he is mentioned both in our Psalm today and in the book of Hebrews. Who is he? And why is he so important?

According to the story found in Genesis 14, he was a priest of another people, geographically in what we today call Jerusalem. When Abraham had been successful in battle in retrieving his nephew Lot from his captors, Abraham wanted to demonstrate thankfulness to God right away. He went to Melchizedek, both a priest and the King of Salem, who promised to stand with Abraham, Melchizedek brought out what we would title communion or kiddush, that is, bread and wine, and served some of the military leaders in Abraham’s entourage. He also said a priestly blessing over Abraham, which was powerful. The Bible makes it clear that the greater blesses the lesser.

What Abraham did was surprising. He gave money, a tithe to Melchizedek and thus gave honour to him. Let’s read from Hebrews 7 and unpack it as we go to learn why this is so important.

Verse 1: “For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, 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 the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.”

“Without father or mother” (v. 3): This doesn’t mean Melchizedek didn’t have parents, but rather that in the record of Scripture, he just pops onto the scene. He did have beginnings and he did die later, but the Bible doesn’t make mention of those events. What matters is that moment.

Verse 4: “Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from

their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. (All Jewish people pay to the Levites) But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.”

A key word in the book of Hebrews is ‘better’ and Yeshua is better than angels, better than Moshe, better than... And here in verse 7, we see Melchizedek is better than Abraham because of the blessing.

“In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one *receives them*, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. (It’s not a one-off annual donation; in this case, it’s a one-off eternal donation) And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.” (Abraham represents in his family the Levites because in his loins are the Levites. So when the Levites later receive tithes, they still are owing to the One who is from the greater order, who blessed Abraham.” Levites are less; Melchizedekians are greater.

In other words since Levi was “in Abraham”, and all the current priests were also there, then the priesthood of today (the Aaronides) is less than the priesthood of Yeshua (Melchizedek) because of the blessing and the tithing!

Verse 8: “Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need *was there* for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? (In other words, if it were complete in Levi, we wouldn’t need anyone else) For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.”

Yeshua came from Judah and was as such disqualified from being our high priest in heaven, but cleverly the writer of Hebrews gets another order of priests to make this work.

Verse 17 quotes our psalm today: “For it is attested *of Him*, (the second ‘Lord’ of verse 1), “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110.4)

That’s what the author of Hebrews is helping us understand. Genealogy is not what makes Jesus able to be a priest and to make Peter into a priest. God has a second order, actually a primary order, a greater order, a better order, and the psalm tells us that this priesthood is forever. (Ps 110.4) *Forever* is better than the limited annual work of the Levitical priests. They daily worked, they annually worked, but they never perpetually worked.

That’s why we speak in the Creeds about how he “sat down at the right hand of the Father.” After Yeshua completed His work, dying on the cross, rising from the dead, He ascended into heaven and “is seated.” Why seated? Psalm 110, “Sit at my right hand UNTIL I make your enemies your footstool.” Sit down, not because Yeshua was tired, but the enthronement was both a seat of judgment (see the rest of Psalm 110), and due to His completing the task of eternal salvation for all of humanity. It’s a picture of triumph. Priests had to stand each year on Yom Kippur, and each day they ministered with sacrifices for sin in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple. The offerings were never-ending: done, undone,

done, undone—the system shouted “Incomplete” and is represented by the standing priests. But when Yeshua offered Himself, once for all (meaning for all people) it was also once for all (meaning for all time). Why all time? Because “it is finished.” It is done. COMPLETE! For the people of Moses’ day, for the people of Isaiah’s day, of Yeshua’s day, and of our day, too, Hallelujah! And because of His work being done, He can and did sit down. (Hebrews 10.11-13)

Verse 23: “The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Yeshua, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Verse 26: “For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints a Son*, made perfect forever.” (Hebrews chapter 7)

So what do we learn?

Yeshua is our Great High Priest, not because he came from Judah, but because He came from Melchizedek’s order. He is a *forever* priest. He is God’s Son, equal with God. He is perfect and needed no atonement for his own sins. He is the one who hears us and who cares for us. He lives to make intercession for us. He saves to the uttermost. Glory to His name!

And what about you?

Priests have a job to do, to mediate between the people and God, and between God and the people. That’s why we celebrate that we have Yeshua now who is the only mediator between God and men. No man needs to do it for us any longer. No man can do this any longer.

And what about us today? It’s great to learn of Yeshua’s priesthood. “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin, therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4.15-16)

I mean, ok, after learning about Jesus, and His priesthood, and that He is awesome and fulfils biblical requirements, ok, so what?

In the same way God ordained Peter, God calls you to be a priest. That means you represent God to others and others to God. We speak about God to others and we speak about others to God. So we evangelise and we pray.

And listen to this odd phrase in Romans chapter 15.

“I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Messiah Yeshua to the Gentiles,

ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 15.15-16)

I say it's odd because this is the only time in the Newer Testament that the word priest is used in verb form. And what we are as the Body of Messiah, here at Epping Baptist Church, and at all the other churches meeting just now, wherever the Gospel of Messiah is proclaimed, we are to function as a royal priesthood, if you will all of us together, reaching a lost world, bringing them to God and bringing God to them. We together are a witness and a holy one at that, of the Holy God.

If you are not yet a believer, I urge you to hear these words, to consider Yeshua, our Great High Priest, who alone went into the Heavenly Tabernacle, made without hands, and secured our eternal forgiveness. Consider and receive Him as Saviour and Lord; He is our Messiah and the One who lives to intercede, and to cry out on our behalf. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Then when you also join Him, and believe Yeshua died for your sins and rose from the dead for us all, then you can join us and make a clear proclamation to the world of God's eternal message of hope and joy, of forgiveness and salvation.

That's why I'm here today. To help you all see the priesthood of all believers, that is, that we all together, are a priesthood to the world, and to ask you to continue to pray for our work in Sydney, Australia and around the world. Quick story about a guy out west named Allen.

Story: Two days before Christmas I received an email from a confused Jewish man out in Perth. He didn't string his sentences together the way I'm used to and I wondered if he were having a go at us. But he said he was Jewish and curious about God, so I wrote him back straightaway. He replied. I replied. It kept going and a phone call ensued. And on Christmas Eve, Allen prayed with me to accept Jesus as his Messiah and Lord. And his darkness is going away. God is saving him daily by His priestly ministry.

And we have loads more stories I want to tell you, from Budapest and Tel Aviv, from London and New York, to here in Sydney. This week into our shopfront in Bondi Junction came many Jewish people too.

I love that story. I have many others I want to tell you, but I'll let the newsletter do that. Would you please fill out the white card you received on entry, tear the stub off, and begin to fill out the larger card. I won't think it rude for you to write while I finish speaking. Please fill out the card completely, especially your email, so we can tell you stories quickly and you can pass them on via forward to many like this one. (For those online, just send an email will you please?) admin@jewsforjesus.org.au will be happy to receive your contact information and anything you want to let us know about yourself.

If you are giving financially to Jews for Jesus today, please put the amount on the front of the card when you fill it out so we can receipt and thank you. I really appreciate that. (to donate, using PayPal, click on this link <http://www.jewsforjesus.org.au/?p=1030> Thanks.

Our book shop and ministry centre in Bondi Junction welcomes people all week, and every week for a decade unsaved Jewish people come in, like this week when Sebastian from Chile and Nick from Russia and Ariel from Israel all came in, to talk, to learn, to discuss.

I have a resource table up the back, and really want you to get some books on messianic prophecy like this one, or messianic music and many other items on the table.

By the way I also have a credit card machine, so you can use your card, a cheque, or cash to pay for things.

Pastor Andrew, thanks for letting me come today. Thanks to each of you here at Epping Baps who make this such a good place in a dark world. Remember, be His priests to the world that so needs to know Him. Keep doing what makes Yeshua happy and have a blessed Australia Day Tuesday.