

Sent: Thursday, November 10, 2016 12:41 AM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Hebrews 7

Hagner titles our lesson last nite on Hebrews 7 as "The Priesthood of Melchizedek." But it's really more about the priesthood of Jesus! As MacArthur points out, there was a need of all mankind for a perfect priest and a perfect sacrifice that would "once and for all" actually remove sin! And God's provision for that perfect priest and sacrifice in Christ is the central theme of the book of Hebrews!

As "Shepherd's Notes" notes, it's not that Jesus resembled Melchizedek, but that Melchizedek resembled the Son of God! And, as Hagner notes, the author of Hebrews uses the fascinating story of Melchizedek to "establish the legitimacy of the high priesthood of Christ"!

Here's how the story unfolds in a nutshell: It begins with the author noting (in Heb. 1:1-2) that "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world...Therefore (moving on to 2:17), He "had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation (satisfying God's requirement) for the sins of the people...! Therefore...consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (he continues in 3:1) who was faithful to Him who appointed Him..." And (picking up in 4:14-16): "Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession...and 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!" And in 5:6, 9-10--"He's a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek...and because of His perfect righteousness, He became to all those who obey Him the source of salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek!"

Then, in last week's lesson, the author encourages the reader to "take hold of the hope set before us--the hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil (with all its high priestly implications!), where Christ has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek!" (There he goes again!) And, finally, in our lesson last nite, he writes that "He (Jesus!) has become the guarantee of a better covenant...and, because He continues forever, He holds His priesthood permanently...and is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them"! (7:22, 25)

Whew! And so, the questions: Who was Melchizedek? How was his priesthood superior to that of the Levitical priesthood, and why was it necessary for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek? How does the author establish the connection between Jesus and Melchizedek--and what are the implications for us today?

Well, Melchizedek mysteriously shows up in Genesis 14 to greet and bless Abram (not yet Abraham!) after a victorious battle. His name means "righteous king," and he's also identified as the king of Salem (meaning "king of peace") and a "priest of God Most High." (Note his status as both king and priest--like Christ--and unlike any Levitical priest!) His superior status is recognized by Abram by his acceptance of Melchizedek's blessing, and by his offering to him of

a tithing! His name later shows up in Psalm 110, where he is connected with the one who is invited to "sit on the right hand of the Father"--which is picked up and interpreted by the author of Hebrews (in a "sensus plenior" way), as being Jesus Christ, the Son of God, thus establishing His priestly credentials!

Interestingly, Melchizedek was identified as a "priest of God Most High" 600 years before the Levitical priesthood was officially instituted by God during the time of Moses and Aaron. And because he was (according to Heb. 7:3) identified as being "without father and mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life," he was pictured by the author of Hebrews (again in a "sensus plenior" sense) as "made like the Son of God, remaining a priest perpetually!" And thus, the declaration of Jesus as a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek!"

It was necessary, according to the author of Hebrews, for another priest to arise because of the "weakness" of the Levitical system--which played only a "preparatory role" until its fulfillment would come through Christ as the "Lamb of God"! He would later say (in Heb. 10:4) that "it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins!" And thus, the need for a "bringing in" of a better hope (7:19) resulting in Christ offering up Himself "once for all" as a sacrifice for sin, and becoming the "guarantee of a better covenant"!

And that brings us to our memory verse: "But He (Jesus) holds the priesthood permanently, because He continues forever! Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them!" (Heb. 7:24-25)

"Drawing near to God," according to Hagner, is the "essence of Christianity as compared with the Levitical system, which kept people outside His presence"! In contrast to the work of the high priests, who of necessity had to offer sacrifices repeatedly--beginning with a sacrifice for their own sins, and only then making sacrifices for the people--Jesus, the perfect high priest, did not need to offer sacrifice for his own sins, but accomplished the sacrifice for the people once for all when He offered up Himself! And this, according to Hagner, was the most shocking fact of all--and particularly to many of his Jewish readers!

Well, there's more to come to this story of the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ--and the implications it has for us as believers--as we continue in our study of the great book of Hebrews!

May this lesson help us realize afresh the access we have directly to God through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, and make us want to "draw nearer and nearer" to Him in the time before us!

On to Hebrews 8!

Lowell