

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Melchizedek is mentioned only twice in the Old Testament, within just four verses (Gen. 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4). Yet what is contained in those four verses emboldened the author of Hebrews to declare the end of the Levitical priesthood, a thousand-year-old institution founded by Moses in obedience to God. The author's ultimate intention was to assure his wavering Hebrew readers that they were in sync with God's plan. They had lost nothing by believing in Jesus, and had rather gained the benefit of a superior high priest.

Melchizedek was the "king of Salem," an ancient name for Jerusalem. "Salem" is derived from the Hebrew word "Shalom." Thus Melchizedek's title means "king of peace" (7:2). Jesus, the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) will of course one day rule from Jerusalem.

Melchizedek's name means "king of righteousness," which also reminds us of Jesus, "the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14). Melchizedek was a king and a "priest of the Most High God," as Jesus is also.

And there is more about Melchizedek that makes him resemble Christ. There is no information in Scripture about his genealogy, his birth or death. So like Christ, he seems to have no beginning or end. Some suspect that Melchizedek actually was Christ in a pre-incarnate form. But the Bible doesn't say so.

We've already learned that, according to Psalm 110:4, the Messiah was appointed by God to be an eternal priest after the order of Melchizedek. So the author of Hebrews first shows how the Melchizedekian order was superior to the Levitical order as a means to prove Christ's superior priesthood. He points out that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. By this act, writes the author, Levi, a future descendant of Abraham "in the loins of his father," in effect paid tithes to Melchizedek (7:9). Moreover, when Abraham paid his tithes, Melchizedek blessed him, and "without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater" (7:7). So Melchizedek was greater than both Abraham and his descendant, Levi, and thus his priestly order was superior to that of Levi's. All of this is to say that Jesus is a superior high priest.

The author also argues that, if the levitical priesthood had been sufficient, God would never have announced a plan to install an eternal priest of a different order who was not a descendant of Levi. But God did make such an announcement in Psalm 110, and it was after He had established the levitical priesthood. Jesus, who was so much like Melchizedek, was obviously the promised priest of Psalm 110.

But there is more to be gleaned from Psalm 110 that points to Christ's superiority. The eternal priesthood of Jesus came by an oath from God the Father Himself, which was not true of any other priest before Him (7:20-22). And unlike Christ's priesthood, God never promised that the old covenant priesthood would go on forever.

Under the old covenant, there were many high priests. Prevented from continuing in their service by limited life spans, they followed one another successively from generation to generation. But Jesus is the only high priest of the new covenant, as He is alive forever. Consequently, He can offer us eternal salvation, because He will always live to ensure our covenant with God (7:25).

The old covenant priests had to make daily sacrifices for their own sins and the sins of the people. But Jesus was sinless, and no sacrifice was required for Him. And as the perfect, sinless sacrifice, He needed to offer Himself only once for our sins (7:27). By His sacrifice He atoned for every sin once and for all.

Finally, Jesus was a superior priest because He was not just a man, but also the Son of God (7:28).

The message to Hebrew Christians was clear: There was no sound reason to revert to the Levitical system of the old covenant now that the promised, long-awaited, superior, eternal, heavenly, sinless, God-appointed, perfect high priest had been revealed to the world. In fact, if you suspect that the entire Levitical system was designed by God to ultimately point to the priestly ministry of Christ, you are correct. Stay tuned!