

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Hebrews 7:1-3 & 18-28

English Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, October 23, 2016

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 23, 2016**, is from **Hebrews 7:1-3 & 18-28**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **International Bible Lesson Forum**.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Hebrews 7:1-3 & 18-28

(Hebrews 7:1) For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,

What we know about Melchizedek from the Old Testament can be found only in Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalms 110:4. The writer of the Book of Hebrews used Melchizedek to show that Jesus, as our Great High Priest, is superior to the Levitical priests (and, of course, superior to the priests of any other religion or sacrificial system). Jesus is King and Priest, as was Melchizedek. According to the law of Moses, only Levites could be priests and only those of the tribe of Judah could be kings. Therefore, legally, Jesus the Messiah had to be a descendant of a different priestly order. Jesus was of the Order of Melchizedek, which lawfully permitted someone to be both a king and a priest of the true God. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah and the line of King David; therefore, Jesus legally qualified to be king over Israel (including Judah).

(Hebrews 7:2) and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

In the days of Abraham, the Canaanites had the opportunity to know and worship the true God through the services and teaching of Melchizedek and his priestly order. By the time of Moses, the Canaanites had so

completely turned to idol worship, child sacrifices to gain the favor of their gods, and gross immorality that God gave their land to the Hebrews. For the same offences, God would later send the Jews into exile in Babylon.

Melchizedek followed the moral law of God, the law of righteousness, and was king of righteousness. As king of righteousness, he judged his people according to the moral law of God. He taught and enforced God's law and moral standards in order to create a just society. As a king, Melchizedek worked for peace; therefore, he commended Abraham who brought peace again to the land after it was invaded when Abraham defeated the evil kings that had attacked them and stolen from them. In recognition of Melchizedek's superior position as priest and king, Abraham gave him an offering or gift.

(Hebrews 7:3) He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

The Book of Hebrews reveals what we do not learn from the Old Testament. The Bible does not reveal Melchizedek's parents or genealogy, perhaps because it was unnecessary (unlike the requirement to keep the genealogy of the Levites and the Judeans so the appropriate people could be appointed as either priests or kings). The Bible does not reveal the time or way he entered the world or his death (perhaps he did not die but ascended to heaven as did Enoch who walked with God—

see Genesis 5:22-24). What little we know about Melchizedek has led to much speculation, but the Book of Hebrews wants to show that Jesus' superior responsibilities as both Priest and King was not unprecedented, because Jesus and Melchizedek were similar in this way.

(Hebrews 7:18) For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness

The ceremonial laws that commanded the Levitical priests to offer sacrifices for sins were regulations that did not help believers overcome temptations to sin. As a means to empower believers to live holy in the world, these sacrifices and regulations were useless. Furthermore, the requirements regarding who was legally qualified to be a priest or a king were also set aside. The divided form of government between kings and priests had become weak and useless by the time of Jesus, and a divided form of government was not exempt from corruption. As King and Priest, Jesus would not be corrupted and He will rule visibly someday in righteousness and peace.

(Hebrews 7:19) (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

The law of God cannot make anyone perfect, and it was never intended to make people morally perfect. The first

time we break God's law, we become morally imperfect. We can try to obey the law of God in the days ahead, but that will not make us morally perfect: we remain former lawbreakers even though we are trying to do better. Paul wrote that the law of love, God's law, or the moral law, is good so we need to obey the moral law and love God and others, but our better hope is in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to help us obey and love God and others rightly rather than placing our hope in ourselves or some other self-improvement method. Because Jesus Christ died for our sins, leading to our just and merciful forgiveness by God, we can draw near to God with confidence and know God will help us. Because Jesus has cleansed us from sin, He could send us the Holy Spirit to live within us to guide us and empower us to obey God's law.

(Hebrews 7:20) And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath,

God made an oath or solemn promise that He would send us a better hope in the Messiah (see Psalms 110:4 and Hebrews 7:21 below). God kept His oath when He sent Jesus, His only Son, into the world to be our Prophet, Priest, and King. Others in Israel became priests by the regulations God gave Moses and not by an individual oath of God. When Jesus came He fulfilled God's oath or solemn promise to us.

(Hebrews 7:21) but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’”

When God makes an oath or a sworn promise, He will not change His mind. An oath is different from a warning from God that He will punish a person or a nation, and then if they repent He chooses not to punish them (that is an acceptable way for God or anyone to “change their mind” – for example, see the Book of Jonah). God’s oath was an expression of His unconditional commitment to make Jesus a priest forever. No matter what people would do to Jesus, they could not do anything that would interfere with God making His Son a priest forever. When human priests die, their service as a priest ends. Not even death on the cross could keep Jesus from being a priest forever, because Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven as God promised. In heaven, He intercedes for us as our High Priest forever.

(Hebrews 7:22) This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

Because Jesus fulfilled the oath of God our Father, He has guaranteed a better covenant, a new covenant in His blood, which has made the forgiveness for and the cleansing of sins possible for all who believe in Him. Because Jesus lives forever as our High Priest, He will meet all of our real needs. The new or better covenant that

has enabled every believer to be filled with the Holy Spirit is far superior to the old covenant made through Moses with its laws, priests, and sacrifices that could not save people from their sins.

(Hebrews 7:23) The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,

Under the Old Testament covenant and before the coming of Jesus Christ, priests served the Lord and then died. These priests had to be replaced with new priests, and then they died, leading to numerous priests living and dying over hundreds of years. God brought an end to this Old Testament system when He sent Jesus. The Book of Hebrews gives sound reasons from the Scriptures for us to stay loyal to Jesus Christ and not fall into any other religious system, or for the Jews of that day to return to the practices of and depend upon the old covenant regulations and sacrifices to be right with God.

(Hebrews 7:24) but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.

Jesus is our High Priest from a different order than the Levitical priests of the Old Testament. Jesus is our High Priest from the Order of Melchizedek. Having risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, Jesus' priesthood is permanent. Jesus will never die again and He will never need to die a sacrificial death again. Jesus now lives as our

High Priest forever to our benefit and everlasting gratitude. Our love relationship with Jesus will never end and by grace He will always keep us right with God.

(Hebrews 7:25) 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.

When we come to God our Father through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, we are saved from our sins and granted eternal life. Having received eternal life and the indwelling Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to save us day-by-day in the midst of our facing temptations and sometimes failing God. Jesus saves us day-by-day by interceding for us throughout the day, day-by-day. Praise and thank God for all He does for us: Jesus prays for us in heaven and God always answers His prayers; the Holy Spirit indwells us, prays for us, and inspires our prayers, and Jesus answers our prayers. We thank and praise God for all He does for us through Jesus Christ to save us completely forever!

(Hebrews 7:26) For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

We learn many of the needs Jesus meets from reading the entire Bible and from our own experiences and those of other Christians. Christian biographies and the lives of

other living Christians are examples that often show us the great extent and varieties of needs Jesus will meet.

Perhaps one of our greatest needs is the power and wisdom to rightly express our love to God in Christ and others. As “one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens,” Jesus is the type of Person who can give us everything we need because of His holy character and the position of responsibility He fulfills for us above the heavens as our High Priest.

(Hebrews 7:27) He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Because of Jesus’ moral character and perfect life throughout His entire life, Jesus did not need to offer sacrifices for Himself (Jesus never sinned) as did the priests in the Old Testament. Jesus came to make a single sacrifice of His own perfect life and shed His own blood (rather than the blood of sheep and goats) for the forgiveness of our sins. No additional sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins are needed: Jesus fully met that need

(Hebrews 7:28) For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

The law of God was followed as a guide for appointing high priests. All of these priests had moral and personal weaknesses; therefore, the law of God required them to offer sacrifices for themselves and others before Christ came and made the New Covenant sacrifice in His blood. The oath in Psalms 110:4 came after the law was given to Moses, and the oath of God rather than the regulations of the law appointed Jesus, the Son of God, as our High Priest. Jesus is pure and perfect as Hebrews 7:26 describes. By Jesus' death and resurrection, He was made the perfect High Priest forever and His grace will sustain believers forever in a right relationship with God and others forever in heaven and forever on earth after He comes again as He promised.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In what important way (or ways) was Jesus similar to Melchizedek?
2. If Jesus were born of the tribe of Levi, would He have been legally qualified to be the Messiah? Give a reason for your answer.
3. Before the coming of Jesus the Messiah, why do you think only those of the tribe of Judah could be kings and only those of the tribe of Levi could be priests?

4. Why can't the law of God given to Moses in the old covenant make us perfect?
5. How is Jesus able to save completely those who come to God through Him?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly
International Bible Lesson.

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