Preparing to Teach Hebrews—Part V (Hebrews 7 and 8)

“Chapter 7 not only reveals ‘the core of Hebrews, but also the unveiling of secrets,’ as the Melchizedek speculation most clearly indicates.” Käsemann, Ernst. The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, Inc., 1984—original 1957), p. 187. He goes on to say that not only is Chapter 7 the heart of the teaching in Hebrews, but is a demonstration of the “meat” the author was urging the Hebrews to get prepared for (p. 191).

Trantham, Charles. *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 12: Hebrews-Revelation, General Articles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), p. 13.

V. Heart of the argument (7:1-28)
 1. Melchizedek (7:1-3)
 2. Superiority of Melchizedek (7:4-10)
 3. A divine priesthood (7:11-14)
 4. An effectual priesthood (7:15-19)
 5. An eternal priesthood (7:20-22)
 6. A perpetual priesthood (7:23-25)
 7. The perfect priesthood (7:26-28)

VI. The new tabernacle (8:1-6)

VII. The new covenant (8:7-9:28)
 1. Inward and effective (8:7-13)
 2. Place of the old covenant (9:1-28)
 (1) Ark of the covenant (9:1-5)
 (2) System of exclusion (9:6-10)
 (3) A superior tabernacle (9:11)
 (4) A superior sacrifice (9:12-23)
 (5) The superior hope (9:25-28)

Perkins, Pheme. ***Reading the New Testament: An Introduction: Third Edition* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), p. 250.**

Jesus is the high priest in the order of Melchizedek (7:1-10:18)
 a) Melchizedek symbolizes an eternal priesthood higher than the Levitical priesthood of the old
 covenant (7:1-18)
 b) Christ ministers in the true heavenly sanctuary that fulfills the promise of a new covenant
 (8:1-13)
 c) Christ as mediator of the new covenant makes the sacrifices of the old covenant unnecessary
 (9:1-22)
 d) Christ’s sacrifice for sin takes place once for all in the heavenly sanctuary (9:23-10:18)

Bruce, F. F. ***The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. lxiv.**

IV. The Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
 1. Melchizedek the priest king (7:1-3)
 2. The Greatness of Melchizedek (7:4-10)
 3. The imperfections of the Aaronic priesthood (7:11-14)
 4. Superiority of the new priesthood (7:15-19)
 5. Superior because of the divine oath (7:20-22)
 6. Superior because of its permanence (7:23-25)
 7. Superior because of the character of Jesus (7:26-28)

V. Covenant, Sanctuary, and Sacrifice (8:1-10:18)
 1. Priesthood and promise (8:1-7)
 2. The old covenant superseded (8:8-13)
 3. The sanctuary under the old covenant (9:1-5)
 4. A temporary ritual (9:6-10)
 5. Christ’s Eternal Redemption (9:11-14)
 6. Mediator of the new covenant (9:15-22)
 7. The perfect sacrifice (9:23-28)
 8. The old order a shadow of reality (10:1-4)
 9. The new order the reality (10:5-10)
 10. The Enthroned High Priest (10:11-18)

DeSilva, David A. ***Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 73-74.**

7:1-10:18 Resumption of argument: The Christian’s access to God’s favor is superior to anything enjoyed previously in the history of God’s dealings with humanity because Jesus’ priestly mediation is superior in every way
 7:1-10 The founder of Jesus’ priestly line (Melchizedek) was of greater dignity than the founder of the
 Levitical line (Aaron)
 7:11-28 Jesus’ qualifications for priesthood are superior (he possesses an indestructible life rather
 than meeting genealogical requirements; God’s oath establishes Jesus as priest in place of
 those whose priesthood was based on an ineffective law; Jesus’ sinlessness means that
 there is one less stumbling block between the Christian’s mediator and God than existed
 between the Levitical priests and God)
 8:1-5 Jesus carries on his mediation in the heavenly sanctuary, in immediate proximity to God
 8:6-13 Jesus’ mediation stands on a firmer covenant basis, not one already broken by the sins of the
 people, but one resting on God’s avowed will to forgive (with proof from scripture,
 Jeremiah 31:31-34)
 9:1-28 The Levitical priests could not prepare the worshippers to enter God’s presence (symbolized
 by the earthly places), but Christ’s single sacrifice has cleansed the consciences of the
 worshipper for direct access to God’s favor; Christ’s ascension into the heavenly sanctuary
 allows him also to cleanse the true tabernacle of the defilement of human sins, erasing
 their negative testimony from God’s memory.
 10:1-18 proof from scripture (Psalm 40:6-8): God has set aside the repetitious, ineffective animal
 sacrifices in favor of Jesus’ single offering of himself, which cleanses the worshipper’s
 consciences once and for all

Jobes, Karen H. ***Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic Publishing, 2011), p. 52.**

C. Melchizedek and Jesus (6:20-7:28)
 1. Jesus’ priesthood in the order of Melchizedek (6:20)
 2. About Melchizedek (7:1-10)
 3. The new priesthood (7:11-22)
 4. The Son is the final, perfect Priest (7:23-28)

D. A New Priesthood Means a New Covenant (8:1-13)
 1. Our High Priest ministers in heaven itself (8:1-2)
 2. The ministry of Jesus is superior to the priesthood of the old covenant (8:3-13)
 a. The new covenant is based on better promises (8:3-6)
 b. The new covenant is written on hearts (8:7-12)
 c. The old covenant is obsolete and will disappear (8:13)

Chapter 7:1-3 – “The writer first compresses into one single compact sentence (vers. 1-3) everything, both in the utterances and in the very silence of holy Scripture, which may be regarded as Characteristic of the person of Melchizedek, so as to convey a vivid impression of his mysteriously significant and unique personality.” Delitzsch, Franz. Delitzsch’s Commentary on the Hebrews: Volume I (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1868), p. 327.

He goes on to say: **“All before [“first then”] is simple *repetition* of what is recorded in the history (Gen. xiv). All that follows is *Christological* interpretation and application of the historical record.” (pp. 327-328)**

**So, in verse 1 and the first part of verse 2, we have the historical reality of Melchizedek, while in the last part of verse 2 and verse 3, we have the application/interpretation of how Jesus as Christ matches up to and exceeds Melchizedek.**

**Remember how Hebrews 1 emphasized that Jesus was greater than/better than the angels? Did you know that one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (not a biblical one, but one associated with the religious sect at Qumran similar to the Essenes), from Cave 11, Scroll 13 taught that Melchizedek was a heavenly figure—either a supernatural Messiah or an angelic being. Here’s an excerpt of how a scholar named G. Vermes translated some of this scroll: “And the Day of Atonement is the end of the tenth Jubilee, when all the Sons of Light and the men of the lot of Melchizedek will be atoned for…For this is the moment of the Year of Grace for Melchizedek…And Melchizedek will avenge the vengeance of the judgments of God….And your *elohim* is Melchizedek, who will save them from the hand of Belial.” [as quoted in Jobes, Karen H., *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic Publishing, 2011), p. 52.**

**8:1-13 Jesus is a better priest/mediator and has a better covenant**

**First, the emphasis is on the tabernacle. Notice that the Book of Hebrews in no place talks about the temple; it talks about the tabernacle. That is because it was in the tabernacle in the wilderness that God made Himself known to His people in a formal way. But many interpreters think this emphasis on the tabernacle as merely a shadow of a heavenly tabernacle may have been a way of saying that Christians could experience God’s presence even without a physical temple. Why? Because a spiritual/heavenly/true tabernacle is even better than a physical place of worship!**

**As Christians, the fact that Jesus has entered the heavenly tabernacle for us is a way of demonstrating that we have better access to God than in the old covenant. I hope I don’t offend anyone by pointing this out, but remember that in the Pauline writings, the church (and individual members therein) acts as the temple of the Holy Spirit—the place of access to God’s presence.**

**Josephus indicated that the rabbis taught that when Moses gave the instructions for the tabernacle to Moses, the bronze sea represented the sea on which the world sat and the columns at the front of the tabernacle represented the earth itself. So, the courtyard area representing sea and land were for humans, the tabernacle itself represented heaven and was reserved for God. Priests could serve in the Holy Place, the first division of the tabernacle, but only the High Priest could enter the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was found. Since the Ark of the Covenant was supposed to represent God’s footstool or throne, that represented the presence of God. But now that Jesus entered the heavenly tabernacle, the real presence of God, everyone can have access to God. So, again, He is “better than” the Levitical priests.**

**In the medieval period, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, taught that the tabernacle was, in its Exodus 25 description, a description of the church. He wrote that as the tabernacle represented the Church as a whole, the first five (5) of ten (10) curtains stood for the Books of Moses in providing historical background, the four colors of curtains represented four (4) ways of reading Scripture (historically, allegorically, figuratively, practically), the other five (5) curtains as representing the Books of Moses as spiritual types (symbolic figures much like Melchizedek does in tonight’s two chapters), the table with the bread represented the Scripture in general while the loaves represented the word of salvation that the church was supposed to preach. Consistent with this, the altar should represent God’s promise of atonement through Jesus. [Levy, Ian Christopher, *Introducing Medieval Biblical Interpretation: The Senses of Scripture in Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Publishing, 2018), p. 193.] I just found that interesting. It probably won’t be useful to your students except to demonstrate that the tabernacle is still an important symbol in Christendom, no matter how it’s interpreted.**

**The passage quotes directly from Jeremiah 31:31-34. The following is a summary of the context of that passage. It is part of a “book within the book” in Jeremiah from Chapter 30-33**

**30:5-11 God hears the distressful cries of His people and promises to restore them as a nation. Even so, God remembers the sins of His people and will punish them according to His purposes.**

**30:12-17 God discusses His people’s sinful condition and that His punishment is the result of the sins of the people. He also says that the enemies of His people will be punished and again tells the people that they will be restored.**

**30:18-22 God describes His people as a restored nation and the blessings they will receive. Perhaps the prince in verse 21 is a prophecy concerning Christ.**

**30:23-31:1 God’s wrath has been turned loose to accomplish His purposes which will not be fully understood by His people until a later time. At that time, God and His people will enjoy the beautiful relationship described in 31:1.**

**31:2-6 God tells of His love for His people and His faithfulness to them. Once again He tells of His plan to restore and build His people.**

**31:7-14 God tells of the praises His people will voice when He has restored them.**

**31:15-22 God responds to the oppression of His people by telling them to be strong and not worry for there is still hope for their future. He also remembers them.**

**31:23-34 God tells of the praise He will receive when His people are restored. God also tells of the new covenant He will make which seems to describe His relationship with the New Testament Church.**

**31:35-37 God foretells the permanence of Israel as God’s nation. God uses His control over nature to assure this.**

**31:38-40 God describes the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its sacredness and permanence.**

**32:1-25 Jeremiah is imprisoned for prophesying the defeat of Zedekiah and Judah by the Babylonians. Jeremiah purchases a field in Anathoth from his cousin. The purchase of the field is a symbolic action foretelling the buying of property in the land when Judah is restored.**

**32:26-44 God warns His people that He is giving Jerusalem into the hands of the Chaldeans and Nebuchadnezzar. He also says that the city will be destroyed by fire. God then foretells of a time when He will restore His people and establish an everlasting covenant.**

**33:1 Introduction to the second time God’s word happens to Jeremiah, while he is still imprisoned.**

**33:2-9 The defeat of Jerusalem is the subject matter once again, followed by God’s plan to restore His people. At that time, Jerusalem will be a blessing to God.**

**33:10-13 The defeat of Judah and Jerusalem will be followed by desolation. Once again, restoration of God’s people to their land in the future is promised by God.**

**33:14-26 When God restores His people, He will also restore the royal house of David on the throne. Only if God’s covenant with day and night is broken will the royal line of David be broken. This seems to point to the kingdom of Christ.**

**When you read Jeremiah 31:31-34 as the new covenant, remember that covenants usually contain four (4) important aspects.**

* **Treaty – a matter of peace and cooperation**
* **Contract – an agreement on what will be done**
* **Confession – an affirmation of values to build on**
* **Constitution – a plan for securing and remember the
 values to be built on**

**NOTE: The Bible speaks of many covenants. God makes a treaty with Noah and points the bow at Himself by placing the drawstring on the ground so that it can’t be used or, if it could be nocked by a future flood, it would shoot at God Himself. God makes a treaty with Abram, but walks between the bloody sacrifices Himself to guarantee His promises with His own life. God makes a treaty with Moses, but rather than have His priests climb the steps of a high altar, both showing their nakedness and symbolically suggesting that God’s presence can be reached by human effort, God orders a low altar and descends Himself in the form of a cloud to meet His people and accept their offerings. God makes a covenant with David with a unilateral commitment to NEVER withdraw His Spirit from David’s house as He did with Saul and his house. And finally, in Jeremiah 31, He promises to make a NEW covenant. The Mosaic Law/Covenant was written on stone; this will be written on the hearts. In other words, God will not only help us to KNOW what to do, but because heart equals will, God will help us to be able to want to do what He wants.**

**As an activity, you might ask your students how Jesus built these aspects into our new covenant of His blood.**

**And, while we’re talking about Jesus, I found this handy chart showing the use of titles for Jesus in order of the times used in the Book of Hebrews. [You can also download the spreadsheet directly if you’d like to put it in Chinese.]**

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| --- | --- |
| **Title for Jesus in Hebrews** | **Scripture References** |
| **High Priest** | **2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15, 5:1-5, 10, 6:20, 7:26-81, 8:3, 9:7, 11, 25, 13:11** |
| **Christ** | **3:6, 14, 5:5, 6:1, 9:11, 14, 24, 28, 10:10, 11:26, 13:8, 21** |
| **Son** | **1:2, 5, 8, 2:6, 10, 3:6, 4:14, 5:5, 8, 6:6, 7:3, 28, 10:29** |
| **Lord** | **1:10, 2:3, 7:14, 13:20** |
| **Mediator** | **8:6, 9:1, 12:24** |
| **Firstborn** | **1:6, 12:23** |
| **Heir** | **1:2, 11:7** |
| **Pioneer** | **2:10, 12:2** |
| **God** | **1:8** |
| **Forerunner** | **6:20** |
| **Shepherd** | **13:20** |
| **Apostle** | **3:1** |

**[Abridged from Jobes, Karen H., *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic Publishing, 2011), p. 90.**