**Jesus-High Priest Forever After the Order of Melchizedek**

Heb 5:5-11

*So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek"; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," NKJV*

The two largest denominations in the world, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, have priests. These groups also have a “high priest.” In the Roman Catholic church he is called the Pope. In Eastern Orthodoxy, he is called the Patriarch. The Mormon church also says that it has priests of the type found in the Old Covenant. The question that follows is this: Does the church that is only Christian and not denominational have priests?

The answer is yes, but the scriptural design is not like the Old Covenant or hierarchical churches. First, in the New Testament church, every Christian is a priest. Such is the statement made by John the apostle in Revelation 1:6. We also have a high priest whose name is Jesus Christ. Because of this God given structure, we have no need for a special class of priests.

The Biblical priesthood that is most well-known is the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant. This covenant was made by God between Himself and the people of Israel. It was never promoted as a covenant for all peoples. Priests in this covenant had to be from the tribe of Levi with high priests specifically from the lineage of a Levite named Aaron, the brother of Moses (Exodus 40:13). The high priest had the responsibility of making the atoning sacrifice annually for the people of Israel. The issues Israel faced were that the high priest was not sinless and had to make an offering for himself first before he could make an offering for the people. These facts meant that the offering had to be done every year. You also had the High Priest die and another would take his place. This entire system of priesthood was supported by the tithes of the people (Numbers 18). What does all this have to do with Christian stewardship and Jesus being “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek?”

Melchizedek first appears in Scripture in the book of Genesis. Abraham met Him on the way back from a battle victory against invaders who had taken his nephew Lot as captive. Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and priest of God Most High. Melchizedek gave Abraham bread and wine and Abraham in return gave Melchizedek a tithe of all the spoil he had recovered (Genesis 14:18-20). This exchange is not accidental as Melchizedek’s gift is a figure of the communion or the Lord’s Supper. Abraham’s response to this priest was not something he had been ordered to do. Rather, Abraham gave the tithe because he believed it was the right thing to do. He was responding to the gifts Melchizedek had given him. Remember that Abraham lived many years before the law given to Israel at Mt. Sinai.

Melchizedek is next mentioned in the prophetic Psalm 110:4: *The Lord has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."* This psalm gives prophecy regarding Jesus as ruler, priest, and judge. It is the role of Jesus as priest that the writer of Hebrews explores. The writer makes the point that Jesus is THE High Priest able to make THE sacrifice that cleanses us from all sins. The issue here is that Jesus is not of the Levitical priesthood. How then can He be our High Priest? This is the point of the text. Jesus is a priest from a different order, not the order of Levi, but the order of Melchizedek. What the writer of Hebrews declares about this idea is that it is not simple milk for a babe in Christ, but it is meat for the mature in Christ to chew on. We are being challenged to step above the idea of doing things because of rules. We are being challenged to go beyond the work that God had done with Israel and to accept His plan in which the Law of Moses for Israel had a temporary place and return to the idea that God has had a design for ALL of humanity. We should be doing what is right because of the gift given us by the of supreme High Priest who gave us the gift of communion with him via bread and wine by His death on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Let us go further.

The writer of Hebrews makes some important points about the priesthood of Jesus. First, Jesus did not take on the role of High Priest on His own authority. Jesus was called by God to be High Priest forever. Second, He was called to do this because He is the Son of God. Our goal is to imitate the behaviors or actions of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise (Hebrews 6:11,12). Our hope is an anchor for our soul, and by it we enter the Most Holy Place. Jesus, as the High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek, is that hope. Look at this description of Melchizedek: King of righteousness; King of Salem (King of peace); Priest of the Most High God; Without father, mother, or genealogy; Has neither beginning of days nor end of life; Made like the Son of God; Remains a priest continually. Abraham’s tithe recognized the greatness of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1-4). Here is a crucial point. Israel paid tithes to the Levites who descended from Abraham, but since Abraham was their ancestor, the Levites through him actually paid tithes to Melchizedek, the greater priest. By this action of Abraham to Melchizedek, God was establishing the idea that there is a greater priesthood than the Levitical priesthood. Living, mortal men receive tithes, but Abraham, and thus Levites, paid tithes to Melchizedek as a testimony that Melchizedek was alive. He was real (7:5-10).

Since perfection could not come through the Levitical priesthood, God stated that another priesthood would arise according to the order of Melchizedek. This priesthood would not be from Levi, but through Judah. Thus, Jesus’ priesthood is not according to the Law but “according to the power of an endless life.” Jesus’ priesthood didn’t come about because He met the requirements of the Law, but because He met the requirement of living forever. Jesus is our King of Peace; is High Priest of the Most High God; gives us bread and wine; gives us a blessing. How does all this relate to stewardship and giving a tithe?

Since Abraham recognized Melchizedek as priest of God Most High, he paid tithes to Him. Tithing is our testimony that Jesus is our High Priest and LIVES FOREVER. Galatians 3:7 says, *Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.* John 8:39b records Jesus: *If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham.* Sons of Abraham do the works of Abraham. If Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, then WE pay tithes to Melchizedek. We do it not because of a law, we do for the reason Abraham did. It is the right thing to do. The meat to chew on: If I do not pay tithes like Abraham, I deny the priesthood of Jesus and really do not believe that He is alive. Where my treasure is, that is where my heart is. Stewardship is not about being rich or poor, it is about being spiritually mature and trusting our High Priest to take care of us.