

“The Perfect Type of Christ”

Heb. 7:1-10

- INTRO. - Hermeneutics is the art (and science) of properly interpreting the Bible. The goal of good hermeneutics is always to discover the original author’s meaning – but this has become a real problem in the Evangelical church in recent decades.
- How often have you heard someone make a case for this own sinful lifestyle, and when they are confronted by another believer with what the Bible says, they respond with, “Yes, but that’s just your interpretation”?
- We live in a postmodern world, and most absolutes have gone out the window -- in fact, everyone wants to believe that the Bible can be interpreted any way we want to interpret it.
- And (of course) the comment “That’s just your interpretation” is the trump card that is played, any time someone doesn’t like being confronted with biblical truth.
- Everyone has their own customized version of “truth,” and no one wants to acknowledge any absolute truth from God. This is one of the main problems with politics and news programs. What you see is people debating about whether their version of “truth” is better than someone else’s.
- But we (as Christians) know that the Bible is God’s absolute truth – and we understand that the *goal* is to do a good job of interpreting the Bible so we can know what God intends for us to know (and do).
- We know that the primary question is *not*, “What does it mean to me?” but “What does it mean?” We know that the Bible is God-breathed. It is God’s divinely-revealed truth – and our job is to discover the original intent of the original author (who was divinely-inspired by the HS).
- But when it comes to proper Bible interpretation, we have to acknowledge that there are some passages of Scripture that are more difficult to deal with than others. The passage we are beginning to look at today is one of those more difficult passages.
- In fact, the author of Hebrews has said that the truths concerning Melchizedek are “for mature audiences only.” We read (back in chapter 5) that he wanted to go into these truths, but he said he couldn’t do that because his readers were “dull of hearing” and were *not* mature enough to handle it.
- He is (in fact) coming back to give that deeper revelation, but we will see right away why he hesitated earlier. And one of the main reasons why this chapter is so difficult is because it is built upon what theologians call “typology.”

- George Guthrie says, “The word ‘typology’ comes from the Greek term *typos*, which can mean ‘pattern, prefiguration, model, impression, [or] foreshadowing’.”
- John MacArthur says, “In biblical study, a type refers to an Old Testament person, practice, or ceremony that has a counterpart, an antitype, in the New Testament.”
- A type is (in a sense) predictive, in that it foreshadows a reality that is to come in the future. It prefigures the antitype. There are many examples of types in Scripture, such as the bronze serpent in the wilderness pointing to the crucifixion of Christ, or the blood sacrifices pointing to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.
- Typological interpretation involves identifying preordained connections between events, persons, things, or institutions in the realm of salvation history.
- But we need to be very careful with typology because it is often abused. There are common misconceptions about typology that we need to avoid.
- For example, we need to be very careful that typology doesn’t slide into some sort of allegorical interpretation of Scripture. *That* approach to the

Bible has led to a great deal of false understanding and false teaching.

- There is a big difference between a proper understanding of true biblical typology and an allegorical approach to biblical interpretation. The church has been very adversely affected by the allegorical approach of the Alexandrian school of hermeneutics.
- We see examples of this often in the contemporary American church, especially when it comes to the Old Testament, as people read things into the text that are *not* there. But even though typology is *not* as dangerous as allegory, we still need to be careful about it.
- A good rule of thumb is, that you should never understand something as a type unless the NT clearly indicates it is a type. We should never arbitrarily see something as a type unless it is clear from Scripture.
- In fact, I would go so far as to say that we (amateurs) should never try to use typology ourselves. Just because the NT writers (under the inspiration of the HS) used it, does *not* mean that *we* should use it.
- In the same way (that we have to acknowledge) that there are many unique things God did in the lives of certain chosen individuals in history that

we should not see as “normative” for us Christians today – so there are certain hermeneutical methods the writers of the NT employed that *we* should *not* employ today.

- They were divinely-inspired and we are *not*. So we should just stick with using good hermeneutical rules to understand what they intended to convey. We should not come up with our own typologies (or even worse, allegorical understandings).
- But (having said all that) there *is* legitimate typology in Scripture, and the passage we are looking at (beginning today) is an example of that. The truth of the matter is, Melchizedek is a perfect *type* of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Now, when I say that, I don’t mean that Melchizedek (himself) was perfect, or even that he was in *every way* like Christ. But in v. 3 we are told that he was “made like the Son of God.”
- The person and attributes of this mysterious man are perfectly suited as a type for which Jesus Christ is the antitype. He was *not perfect* (as Christ was) but he perfectly pointed to Christ.
- You see, one thing we have to understand about biblical typology, is that the type doesn’t have to correspond to the antitype in every way. In fact, the antitype is much greater than the type.

- In *this* case, the type (Melchizedek) is imperfect and temporary, while the antitype (Christ) is perfect and eternal. And yet, there are attributes in Melchizedek that *point* to those truths.
- The type (here) is a real, historical person that points to another real, historical Person. He’s *not* some sort of phantom or a supernatural being. He is a real human being who points to the Son of God, Jesus Christ.
- But he *is* a human being that is pointing to the divine Son of God. Because of this, we can’t say that he shares in the same perfections as Christ. For example, just because he is pictured as one who was a priest forever, doesn’t necessarily mean he was eternal like Christ.
- We’ll see this as we go through it, but what we have to understand is that types are illustrations (at best). They are analogies, but they can’t be pushed to the full as far as detail.
- Melchizedek is pictured as “righteous,” but we can’t say he was perfectly righteous in the same way Christ was. The point of this passage is *not* that Melchizedek was equal to Christ, but that he had a unique priesthood (and other qualities) that allowed him to point to Christ.
- Even his *name* was a type of Christ. So what we have in this passage of Scripture is this extensive

use of typology. This should be our interpretive strategy for understanding this chapter.

- This is the key to understanding Melchizedek's superiority over the Levitical priesthood, and Christ's superiority over Melchizedek. In fact, *that* is how this chapter is divided. Verses 1-10 detail the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood, and verses 11-28 proclaim the superiority of Christ.
- Some have called vv. 1-10 a "servant text" in the sense that it lays the foundation for the main point of the chapter, which is that Jesus' priesthood is greater than that of the Levitical priesthood. That is the "punch line" he will get to later.
- Now, this chapter is really the focal point of the entire book – because it deals with the central concern of Judaism, which is the priesthood. No sins could ever be forgiven without the blood sacrifices, and no sacrifices could ever be offered without the priests.
- This is why the priesthood was greatly exalted in Judaism, and it is why the author of this book is making it his central focus.
- He is tying it *all* to a man named Melchizedek, but the amazing thing is, we have very little about this man in Scripture. There are four verses about him in Gen. 14, there is one verse about him in Ps. 110,

and everything else we know about him comes from right here in the Book of Hebrews.

- Some people may wonder why the author of Hebrews would put so much focus on such an obscure figure, but Melchizedek is really the perfect type for the superior priesthood of Christ.
- And (by the way) this shows the amazing reality of the divine authorship of Scripture and the progressive nature of God's revelation. Moses wrote four verses about Melchizedek (with very few details), then (about a thousand years later) David came along and wrote one verse (in Ps. 110), which added an important detail – but another thousand years passed before the author of Hebrews gave us the most significant information about him.
- As John MacArthur writes, "He reveals things about Melchizedek that even Melchizedek, or his contemporary, Abraham, did *not* know—and of which David had only a glimpse."
- Now, at the risk of making this entire sermon just an introduction, I think there are some key elements of our author's approach to the Scripture that we need to understand.
- For example, this writer finds what the Old Testament narrative does *not* say very relevant for his argument. He utilizes a common exegetical

practice known as “an argument from silence” to capitalize on a lack of information about Melchizedek’s ancestry, birth, or death.

- His point is *not* that Melchizedek did *not* have an ancestry (because everybody has some kind of lineage), or to say that he was *not* born or died. He was not some sort of superhuman being.
- No, his point is to utilize this lack of information about these things in order to be able to point to the realities of the uniqueness of Christ. He is going to point to these omissions as an argument for the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood over that of the Levitical priesthood, and then go on to show that the priesthood of Christ is superior to that. (It’s going to take this entire chapter to do this...)
- Now, another thing to note is that the author also utilizes what is called “verbal analogy.” We have seen this before, but what this means is that he interprets Gen. 14 in light of Ps. 110:4.
- In fact, another way of dividing this chapter, is to say that vv. 1-10 is an exposition of Gen. 14:17-20, while vv. 11-28 expound on each phrase of Ps. 110:4.
- Do you remember what Ps. 110:4 says? He quoted it in 5:6 and again in 6:20. It says, “The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘Thou art a

priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.’”

- So what the author of Hebrews is doing (here) is comparing Scripture with Scripture. That is always a good thing to do. In this case, Ps. 110:4 sheds light on the account of Gen. 14, and the word “forever” associates eternity with a Melchizedekan-type priesthood.
- That is the main point the author of Hebrews latches onto – and this will be his primary point in this entire chapter. It becomes the perfect symbol to point to the uniqueness of Christ.
- And that brings us to another important element in our author’s hermeneutics – that of interpreting the Old Testament Christologically. There has been a lot of debate about this among scholars, but we (as Christians) should always interpret the Old Testament in light of its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.
- In fact, Jesus Himself modeled this approach to the Scripture. He pointed to certain people in the OT as types of himself, such as David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, and Jonah. He referred to OT institutions as types of himself, like the priesthood and the covenants. He saw many of the experiences of Israel as foreshadowing His own (and that of His disciples).

- So while we need to be careful about reading Christ back into the text of the OT (when it is *not* warranted), we must always understand the OT as that which points to the fulfillment of God's salvation plan in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.
- This is clearly what the author of Hebrews is doing in this chapter. I believe one commentator explained it well when he wrote, "In terms of approaching the text, whether Old Testament or New Testament, we must be guided by the author's intention. We do also, however, read the Scriptures in light of the person and work of Christ. We must resist superimposing Christian theology on Old Testament texts and should feel no compulsion to give every Old Testament text, or even most of them, a Christological conclusion. But we will have failed if we do not ask how Old Testament texts function in the whole context of Scripture. Without allegorizing the Old Testament, we must seek to understand God's overall purpose with His people."
- In other words, we must read the whole of God's Word (both Old and New Testaments) as describing God's salvation history. At the same time, we must avoid the danger of allegorizing the text, or any other form of reading into it what is *not* there. This is why context is such a critical key for proper biblical interpretation.
- Now, the last thing we need to understand (before we move into the text itself): Since the priesthood of Melchizedek is going to be compared with the Levitical priesthood, we need to note some key aspects of this particular priesthood. First of all, the priests had to be Jews from the tribe of Levi. But even that was *not* enough. They also had to be descendants of Aaron (Moses' brother).
- Levites who were *not* descendants from Aaron served as helpers to the priests – such as singers, instrumentalists, and equipment managers. But the point is, the priests were strictly national – strictly Jews from one single tribe.
- Second, the priesthood was hereditary. A man who served as a priest did so, *not* because of a holy life, but because of his genealogy. If he was from the right tribe he could serve as a priest regardless of his lifestyle.
- Third, his service as a priest was temporary. He could only be a priest between that age of 25 and 50. It was only in that 25-year period that he could serve.
- Fourth, the sacrifices for sins that the priests made was also temporary. They had to be repeated over and over again. There was no permanent forgiveness, no permanent righteousness, and no permanent peace.

- Fifth, the priests were all subject to the king (except in their priestly service). A priest could *not* be a king, but was subject to the king just like anyone else in Israel. Of course, we are going to see these things compared (and contrasted) with the priesthood of Melchizedek (and ultimately Christ).
- So, with all that introduction, let's move (now) into our text, and it is divided into two sections of unequal length. Verses 1-3 give a summary introduction to Melchizedek and vv. 4-10 give an argument as to his superiority over the Levitical priesthood.
- So this is how we will divide it (although we won't get through all of it today). We begin with:

I. THE SUMMARY (vv. 1-3)

- Verses 1-3 are (essentially) a summary of the account recorded in Gen. 14. These verses tell us who Melchizedek is, and what he did in connection with Abraham.
- He also gives us his title (and how that applies to his argument). In this summary we find five key elements. First of all:

A. His Prominence (v. 1a)

- Look at v. 1, "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem..." (Stop right there.) The first thing we

learn about him is that he was the king of "Salem" (which is an ancient name for Jerusalem). Remember, the Levitical priests could *not* be kings, but Melchizedek was (in fact) a king.

- He was *both* a priest and a king – and this (of course) is his first point of superiority over the Levitical priesthood. But four times in these first two verses we see Melchizedek referred to as a "king."
- And this points to the fact that Messiah would also be both a Priest and a King. As Zech. 6:13 prophesied, "Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices."
- And the fact that he was the ancient king of Jerusalem is significant because the Bible tells us this is a city that is especially close to God's heart. Ps. 132:13-14 declares, "For the LORD has chosen Zion (Jerusalem); He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it."
- Now, we're *not* told in Scripture *when* (exactly) God chose Jerusalem as His special city, but here we read about a prominent king of this city in the time of Abraham – hundreds of years before the

Levitical priests served there or the kings of Israel ruled there. Secondly, he mentions:

B. The Priesthood (v. 1b)

- Look at v. 1 again, “...priest of the Most High God...” The key here has to do with the name for God. As you probably know, the name for God used by the Jews was Yahweh (or Jehovah).
- This name was considered so holy that no Jew would pronounce it out loud. Any time the Scriptures were read, they would substitute the title Lord (Adonai) for the name of God.
- But both the name of God and His title were related to His covenant relationship with Israel. This is why the Levitical priests were considered priests of Yahweh. They were limited in service to the God of Israel.
- But Melchizedek is called “priest of the Most High God...” (El Elyon) This is a more universal name for God. In Gen. 14:19 it includes the explanation, “Possessor of heaven and earth.”
- This name points to the truth that God is above all national distinctions. He is God of both Jews and Gentiles. He is God of heaven and earth – and the very first time this name is used in Scripture, it is used in reference to Melchizedek.
- Of course, the ultimate application (here) is to Jesus Christ (because He is the antitype to Melchizedek, the type). Jesus came, *not* just as the Savior of Israel, but as the Savior of the whole world.
- Melchizedek’s priesthood is pictured (here) as universal, and so is the priesthood of Christ. As we are going to see, Abraham (the father of the Jews) offered a tithe to a universal priest.
- This is important because the Jews were entrenched in their belief that the only legitimate priesthood was the Levitical priesthood (that was limited to Israel).
- It is very interesting (and significant) to go back to the Gen. 14 account (where this is given) and to see that two verses later (in v. 22) Abraham speaks to the king of Sodom about “the Lord God Most High.” That is a combination of His covenant name and His universal name.
- This is a powerful argument, because *not only* is this saying (to these uncommitted Hebrews) that the priesthood of Melchizedek (and ultimately of Christ) is superior to the Levitical priesthood in its scope – but that the Bible recognizes a priesthood *apart* from Aaron – that existed long *before* Aaron.
- Melchizedek preceded Moses and the Levitical priesthood by hundreds of years. In fact,

Melchizedek is the first person to be referred to as a priest in the Bible. The only priestly function we see here is that of blessing Abraham in the name of God Most High. But he is pointed to (here) as a superior priest by virtue of his universal scope. (Pause) Thirdly we see:

C. His Participation (vv. 1c-2a)

- Look at the last part of v. 1, "...who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all *the spoils*..."
- This takes us back to Gen. 14 where Melchizedek appears suddenly after Abraham routs four kings in battle. If you go back and read that chapter, you will see where Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, joined three other kings and raided the Transjordan (or "circuit of Jordan").
- This area included Sodom and her neighbors – and in the process a large number of captives were taken, including Lot, Abraham's nephew. When Abraham heard about this, he took his men and went after the invaders.
- He overtook them near Damascus, launched a surprise attack against them, and recovered all the captives and the plunder. On his way back to meet up with a very grateful kind of Sodom, he suddenly encountered Melchizedek.

- Listen to the words of Gen. 14:18-20, "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' And he gave him a tenth of all."
- Now, the king of Sodom is going to propose that the captives be returned to him, while the material plunder be retained by Abraham as spoils of war. But before he can ever get to the king of Sodom, he has this encounter with Melchizedek and he ends up giving him a tenth of the spoils.
- This is the first mention of the tithe in Scripture. The fact that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek suggests that he recognized him as a true priest of the true God. How Abraham knew this, we are *not* given in the text, but his giving him a tithe was evidence of that.
- Here is tithing long before the Law was given (and I want to come back to this next week because we need to talk more about it), but here is everything we know about this mysterious person named Melchizedek.
- And yet, that is more than enough for the author of Hebrews, because he is more interested in what is

not said about him than what *is* said about him. The mysterious nature of this character allows him to be used as a “type” of Christ.

- In fact, there are those who even point to the fact that he served up bread and wine as a *type* of the Lord’s Supper that would later be an ordinance in the church.
- An early church father named Cyprian wrote, “For who is more a priest of God Most High than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered a sacrifice to God the Father, and offered that same thing which Melchizedek had offered, namely bread and wine—that is, his body and blood.”
- Now, we’re going to have to stop here for today. We are *not* even through the summary yet, but we will come back and finish this up next week.
- PRAYER