The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 7

 Last week the writer explains to us that as Christians we must not ever stop from learning, and we noted that many folks, who proclaim Christ as their Lord and Savior, never get past the stories of Christmas, Easter, and some of the old Testament stories. We are not growing in our faith, and many seem content to just know enough to get by, to become stagnant. Frankly this plays true in life as well as in faith.

 Having said all this, the writer then turns toward a more encouraging note, telling the people and us, that we all can find a better way and there are better things for us. All we have to do is follow the example of Christ, and that these people, as well as we, today, do minister in Christ’s Name, setting the example. That the same energy we put into these physical ministries, we should also put into the continuing of our knowledge of God’s Word.

 The writer gets into the purpose for following and learning about Christ, and that is, God made promises and oaths and because of His infallibility, God’s oaths are the best guarantee. And God’s promises are the hope of believers and the hope is our anchor in troubled times. In that hope is our salvation and our intercessor between us and God like the High Priest. Here the writer again likens Jesus our High Priest with the priest Melchizedek, and now will explain.

 A] Hebrews 7: 1 through 3; (read)

 1] “*For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,-”*

 The use of the word ‘for’ makes this verse a continuation of the previous verse substituting for the word ‘because’, meaning this is the explanation regarding the relationship between Merchizedek and the Priesthood of Jesus. Melchizedek was the king of Salem or the King of ‘peace’ and Salem later becomes Jerusalem, (by the way). The writer explains also, that Abraham was returning from rescuing his nephew Lot and Lot’s family, from King Chedorlaomer and on his return was met by King Melchizaedeck who brought him food and drink and then blessed him. Abraham in turn gave Melchisedek a tithe (or 10%) of all the spoils he received from the defeat of Chedorlaomer.

 2] *“-to whom also, Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated “king of righteousness” and then also, ‘king of Salem’, meaning ‘king of peace’, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.”*

 This then explains more than all the latter scholars have devised as explanations. Simply put, the writer believed the Targum (ancient writings)accounts as to the origins of Melchizedek. Ancient Jewish scholars who compiled all of these Jewish writings believed that Melchizedek was Shem, the son of Noah. Also, in ancient families, the patriarch of the family was pretty much the ‘priest’ of the family, as there was no formal religion, and no formal priesthood. According to some timelines today there are four hundred years from the death of Noah and the birth of Abraham, and we know Shem lived six hundred years, so Shem was living during the lifetime of Abraham. I figured eight or nine generations between them.

 Now we can imagine, that folks living in that era, saw a man born long before their grandparents or even great-grandparents, so for their purposes he had no beginning and no ending, that they knew of. And being the patriarch and priest of his family, (also the king) he was then also a priest forever in-so-far as they were concerned. This is the point, the writer equates with Jesus, who had no beginning and no end and was a priest forever. It was also accepted that Melchizedek was truly a righteous man, and servant of the living God.

 B] Hebrews 7: 4 through 10; (read)

 1] “*Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils,-”*

 What we have here is strong affirmation of how important Melchizedek is, that even Abraham paid him homage, and the writer emphasizes this to the reader. This is to say, Salem was a small city-state, and Melchisedek was patriarch, king, and priest over it, and in the verses before, he is the only man of this era actually called Priest of the Most High God.

 2] *“-and indeed those who are the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham;-”*

 This merely says that the Levites, which descended from Levi, one of the sons of Jacob and great-grandson of Abraham, was authorized to collect tithes from the people according to Law, and the priests got tithes from that collection, whereas with Melchizedek, there was no law governing the giving of tithes to a priesthood.

 3] “-*but he whose genealogy was not derived from them received tithes from Abraham, and blessed him who had the promises.”*

 Alright, this just states that Melchizedek was not descended from Levi nor, for that matter, Abraham, because he was before them, and this would just mess up the science of genealogies, wouldn’t it? and the tithes given to Melchizedek was not a requirement, but a realization of Melchizedek’s superiority as the elder, as the king and as one who had no beginning or end, the quintessential High Priest.

 4] “*Now beyond all contradiction, the lesser is blessed by the better.”*

 When one lays hands on another to bestow a blessing, it is usually understood back in those days that it was one who was superior, or older, that gave the blessing. The family patriarch would bless his offspring, usually just before his death. In this case, Melchizedek after receiving the tithes, blesses Abraham. The writer is trying to emphasize the office of High Priest that Melchizedek held.

 5] “*Here, mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.”*

 Are you getting a handle on this yet? Just a continuing on of the verses before, in this day in age the priests receive tithes, but Melchizedek receives tithes even when he has no ending (that they knew of) (All of this just shows the reader the supposed superiority of Melchizedek and yet Christ was above him.)

 6] “*Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.”*

 Another point to be made is the Levitical priesthood lines even paid homage and tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham, as the writer expresses the idea that just by being in the line of Abraham, the honor was made. You see, the idea the writer is striving to get across, is the comparison of Jesus to Melchizedek, because They were familiar with Melchizedek through the Targum teachings and our writer is attempting to prove that Jesus was actually greater than Melchizedek.

 C] Hebrews 7: 11 through 13; (read)

 1] “*Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the Law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?”*

 He, the writer is just not going to let this go, is he? It is almost like he is answering questions before they are asked. Like wasn’t the Aaronic priesthood (The Levitical priesthood) enough, why do we need another and greater High Priest, in the order of this Melchizedek? Or, If Jesus is our new High Priest, how can this be if He is not from the tribe of Levi? The people do understand these things.

 2] “*For the priesthood being changed of necessity there is a change of the Law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.”*

 It is taking a while, but the whole premise of this section of verses is beginning to take shape. The official priesthood as deemed by God through the Law has been handed down through Aaron through the Tribe of Levi. Now Melchizedek was not from any of the Jewish tribes, was he. (As a matter of fact, he was not from the chosen as through Abraham, which would make him, according to most scholars, a gentile. Fancy that!) And for any other High Priest to come forward who is not from the tribe of Levi, negates the Law, doesn’t it? So, with this new High Priest coming in the order of Melchizedek, who is not of the tribe of Levi, yet sanctioned of God creates a new order. (I’m paddling as fast as I can, folks!)

 D] Hebrews 7: 14 through 19; (read)

 1] “*For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe, Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood,-”*

 The writer turns his attention to this new High Priest, by first showing in the last verse that this new High Priest would be different and not be of the Levitical line and actually coming from the tribe of Judah, whose members were not qualified to be priests. He is telling the folks to put away the old thoughts and ideas about their original faith.

 2] “-*and yet it is far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the Law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.”*

 Going on from the last verse, the people know that Jesus was born from the tribe of Judah, and He was crucified, became dead and was buried. But then He arose, and the people know this. It is evident, This Jesus overcame death and lives forever. That alone gives Him the authority of being High priest according to the prophesy from Psalm 110

 3] “*For He testifies, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’”*

 The writer then quotes Psalm 110: v4; as The psalmist hones in on the Priesthood of Jesus, and His standing which the writer of Hebrews stresses time and time again.

 4] “*For on the one hand there is an annulment of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness,-”*

 Now here we must all be careful. This does not mean the Law of Moses is null and void. On the contrary it is still active. But the law regarding the Levitical priesthood on the other hand was a failed law from the beginning. Let’s face it right from the get-go with the sons of Aaron all the way down through the generations, priests became embroiled in conflict and illicit activities, and many times God had to directly intervene, and many a priest died as a result of their illegal activities.

 5] “-*for the Law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope through which we draw near to God.”*

 What does any ‘law’ do? It lays the foundation for proper societal living. It separates right from wrong in society. The Law of Moses did just that. The Law did not condemn with judgment, but it did set God’s boundaries for behavior toward God, toward man and toward society. God did set the judgments for infractions of the Law. But what the law did not do was dictate corporate behavior. It did not make humanity into little automatons. The Law did not bring hope. One was not saved by the Law. Remember at Eden the rift became unbridgable, didn’t it? How does one become reconciled to God? Certainly not through the Law, but by personal atonement. Through the atonement gifts of sacrifice, and a personal change of heart.

 But the writer then goes on, that there is a better hope, because through the priests there was, our atonement and atonement gifts that were presented to God in the Holy of Holies, but with Jesus as High Priest, He doesn’t have to go into the Holy of Holies does He? He IS the Holy of Holies and is our direct intercessor to the Father. That is the better Hope.

 E] Hebrews 7: 20 through 25; (read)

 1] “*And in-as-much as He was not made Priest without an oath, (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him, ‘The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek),-’”*

 One thing to note here, is in the Jewish religion of that day, if you were a Levite and aspired to be a priest, you studied, probably took tests, and were brought into the priesthood. As the writer states, there was no oath taking. However, with Jesus as High Priest The writer again quotes from Psalm 110, that God did make that oath, and His oath is irreversible.

 The lack of an oath from the Levitical priesthood, simply can say, that the priest makes no promise as to how he carries out his job, and as history pointed out, many priests fell to temptation, there was no promise of behavior and of honesty.

 2] *“-by so much more, Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.”*

 One of the things to remember also, is the fact that the priests being made priests by word and acknowledgement, but not any oath, are fallible and have a definite lifespan. They then act as high priest. They cannot save anybody when they cannot save themselves. However, Jesus was ordained, and sealed with an oath by God Himself as High Priest, and as our personal intercessor forever. There is that guarantee (or surety).

 3] “*Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*

 Because, these priests have that limited lifespan, they are also limited in what they can do. Their intercession is earthly in the earthly Temple and cannot save anybody. However, as the writer points out, Jesus IS forever and He sits at the Right Hand of God, and IS, doesn’t act as high priest, IS OUR High Priest, our intercessor always and forever. Through Him we are saved. He has that DIRECT authority, by GOD’S OWN OATH!!!!!

 F] Hebrews 7: 26 through 28; (read)

 1] “*For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.”*

 The writer is striving to show these folks that there is a new order of High Priest/intercessor, and that the old order of priest is no longer valid because they have no God authority to do what Jesus did. Jesus literally died for the sins of all who would call on His name, these priests could not do that. They show their fallibility by having to offer up daily sacrifices FOR THEMSELVES, even before they can offer up sacrifices for anybody else. How lame is that? This High Priest, is wholly different from us, in every way, isn’t he?

 2] “*For the law appoints as high priests, men who have weaknesses, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”*

 As we discussed, these priests are fallible, but appointed, men who sin and as a result have to offer up sacrifices for themselves, and as habitual sinners, how can they save anybody?

 Jesus, on the other hand, was sinless, Holy, declared by a Holy Oath to be High Priest, and having been perfected through His sacrifice for all sinners, by His death, burial and resurrection to save all those sinners.

 Our writer is clearing up all the misconceptions of the Jewish priesthood, that is constantly badgering and coercing the Jewish believers, showing these believers that they, the priests, do not have any authority over this New High Priest.