

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING

How can we know for sure that Jesus is able to save us?

Would any of us have mentioned the fact that He's a better priest than the Old Testament temple priests?

INTRO: *That's what we'll see today. Jesus is the kind of high priest who can definitely save us. You might want to break up the Bible reading through the study, reading 7:1-10, 7:11-28, 8:1-5 and 8:6-13 at the points marked *.*

QUESTIONS

* What can we piece together about who Melchizedek is from 7:1-3?

In what way is he like Jesus?

Who was meant to give tithes to whom? What actually happened? (7:5-6)

What does this tell us about Melchizedek? (7:7)

What does this tell us about the normal Old Testament priests? (7:9-10)

So if Jesus is like Melchizedek, what's His relationship to other priests?

What difference would that make to someone who used to be a Jew?

How does this help us see that Jesus is able to save us?

* What's different about how Jesus became a priest? (7:20-21)

Why does it matter that Jesus lives forever? (7:23-25)

What does Jesus do for us right now?

How is Jesus different from the other priests in 7:26-28?

How does this help us see that Jesus is able to save us?

* Where is Jesus sitting? (8:1-2)

How is this different from where the other priests do their work? (8:2,5)

What would you say to someone who struggled to stop going to the temple because it seemed more real than worshipping a Jesus we can't see?

How does this help us see that Jesus is able to save us?

* In 8:6-9, what's wrong with the old covenant?

How is the new covenant described in 8:10-13?

How does it make you feel to know that we relate to God under this new covenant rather than the old one, with all its priests and rituals?

CONCLUSION & APPLICATION

What things about Jesus have struck you as we've looked at this?

How should these things make us relate to Jesus?

What tangible, religious things are we tempted to look to to save us, like the Jewish Christians would have been tempted to go back to the old priests?

What do we need to remember in those times?

What have we learnt that could help us when we feel guilty?

As we come to pray together now, what difference does it make that Jesus is our high priest?

Imagine that all the others in the group have said they're not sure Jesus can save them. How could you encourage them to keep trusting and living for Him?

Hebrews 7:1-8:13



Theme of *Hebrews*

Hebrews is written because of an urgent problem: the readers are on the verge of apostasy. Apostasy is the opposite of conversion; it is 'falling away from' or 'throwing away' Christ (3:12; 4:11; 5:6; 10:35). That is the 'sin' in Hebrews, and the 'temptation' they face is 'drift' (2:1). But their drifting is surprisingly not into irreligion, but back into the Jewish faith from which they had converted.

The main argument (to warn them against this drift) is that in Jesus God has spoken his **final word** (chs 1-4) and completed a **finished work** (chs 5-9/10): why go back to the 'shadow' (cf 10:1)? All of *Hebrews'* dense theology is included to serve the main application of this 'word of exhortation' (13:22).

Theme Sentence for 7:1-8:13

Jesus is able to save us because He's the perfect priest we need.

How this passage fits in

4:12-13 raised the issue of how sinful people like us can approach a holy God. The answer in 4:14-16 is that we can draw near to God because Jesus is our great high priest. He has gone into heaven, representing us and pleading our case before the Father. We should 'draw near' to God through Jesus confidently.

5:1-10 then explained how Jesus was a perfect high priest appointed by God, and mentioned something about Melchizedek – an idea we come back to in our passage.

In 5:11-6:12, the readers are warned not to slip back into their old religion but to grow up in the faith. This is a very strong warning not to walk away from Christ as it would be impossible to come back if they stayed like that. To encourage them to stick with Jesus, the writer reminded them of God's unchanging promises to Abraham and of how Jesus is our high priest who's gone before us into the presence of God. This is "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (6:19).

Our passage then explains what kind of priest Jesus is and how, as a Melchizedek-like priest, He's replaced the normal temple priests. He's *far* better than that system and is totally able to save people who come to God through Him. The next few chapters will continue to outline how Jesus has replaced the old temple system through His once for all sacrifice on the cross. This is the grounds for our faith in Him and our need to never drift away.

Application

- Praise God for providing a priest like Jesus
- Don't go back to the shadows of religion when Jesus has done it all
- Draw near to God through Jesus

Commentary

The arguments in this passage are quite tightly packed, but once you unravel the logic it's making one big point: Jesus is the ultimate priest to beat and replace all other priests, so we can be confident in His power to save us. As we discover more about the kind of priest Jesus is, we should be bowled over by His greatness.

7:1-4 Melchizedek was a priest and king who appears in Genesis 14:17-20. Abraham had just won a battle and he gave a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek. Mel (for short!) is very much like Jesus. His name means "king of righteousness" and his title is "king of peace". Unusually for the Old Testament, Mel comes with no background information about his parents and nothing about his death, so in a sense he lives forever, like Jesus does. Being a priest forever is a major part of why Jesus is the ultimate priest.

"See how great...!" We're meant to be impressed with all these descriptions and comparisons. Mel must have been great if Abraham gave him a tenth of the goods. (How much better is Jesus!)

5-6 Normal priests from the tribe of Levi were commanded to take a tithe from the people. But Mel took a tithe from Abraham despite not being a Levite. And he blessed him. This is something priests do: take tithes and bless.

7-10 Only superior people bless inferior people, so Mel is superior to Abraham (and his descendants). One way Mel is superior is that the Levitical priests died but he lives forever. In a way, Levi gave tithes to Mel because he was to be a descendent of Abraham ("in his loins").

11-14 If the law had been able to make people perfect, we wouldn't need another type of priest like Mel. If we change who can be a priest, we have a new way of relating to God. There *has* been a change! Jesus was from the non-priestly tribe of Judah, not Levi.

15-17 This need for a change in the system is underlined by Jesus coming along as Mel's type of priest. He's not a priest because He's from the right tribe (He isn't!) but because He lives forever, as shown in Psalm 110.

18-19 The old way of doing things has been shelved because it is unable to make things perfect. But a new thing has come to replace it! A better hope for drawing near to God. 'Drawing near' is what we were told to do in 4:16 and is what priests did on behalf of the people.

20-22 The Levitical priests weren't 'sworn in', but Jesus was as we can see in the wider quote from Psalm 110 in which God swore an oath that Jesus would be a high priest forever like Mel. Being sworn in by God's oath makes Jesus the key person in setting up a better way of relating to God than the way dealt with through the old priesthood.

23-25 You used to need loads of priests because they kept dying. But since Jesus lives forever, He's a priest forever. That means He can completely rescue anyone who draws near to God through Him,

because He is always alive and pleading our case to God. Not only the priest draws near, but now we can draw near to God through our Priest, Jesus!

26-27 Jesus is exactly the kind of perfect priest we need. The old priests had to make sacrifices every day, for their own sins and for the people's sins. But Jesus completed the once and for all sacrifice when He died on the cross (where He was the sacrifice as well as the priest). The law appointed weak people to be priests, but God's oath (which came later and so supersedes the law) appointed the forever-perfect Son of God. 5:8-9 explains how He was made perfect through suffering.

8:1-5 The point of the argument is to show that Jesus is this perfect high priest who is actually in heaven with God the Father. The temple, and the tabernacle before that, were only miniature scaled-down models of the real Holy Place in heaven, where Jesus is now.

In fact, Jesus is so different from the old priesthood that He wouldn't even qualify to be one of those kinds of priests if He applied for the job... because He doesn't make sacrifices! Those priests can't turn up at the temple and go into the Holy of Holies every day without an offering. After all, who has a high priest who *doesn't* make sacrifices?! Answer: we do. We have a high priest who *made* (past tense) a sacrifice. Jesus no longer makes sacrifices and is permanently installed in the true tabernacle made by God, not Moses' copy.

6-8 Jesus' ministry as a priest in the real Holy Place is as much better than the ministry of the old priests in the replica holy place as the new covenant is better than the old. Because it's based on better promises. After all, if there was nothing wrong with the old covenant, God wouldn't have promised a new covenant! The writer quotes this lengthy section from Jeremiah 31 to show that by promising a new covenant, God was implicitly criticising the old covenant.

9 The problem with the old covenant God made when He brought the people out of Egypt was that the people broke it. And when they broke their side of the bargain, God kept His side, which was to reject them if they broke it. The new covenant wouldn't be like that.

10-12 In the new covenant, God would enable people to obey Him by changing their hearts and minds to know and keep His ways. It would fulfil the relational intention of the old covenant of God being their God and them being His people (cf Exodus 6:7). God's people would no longer be a mixed people where some of them really know Him and some don't – they *all* know Him! And at the heart of the new covenant was God's mercy in forgiving the people's sins rather than rejecting them.

13 The new covenant being promised and now having arrived, makes the old one no longer useful nor required. It's ready for the bin. This is a point of application for the original hearers not to go back to the shadows of religion which are heading for the dump. But to stick with our high priest Jesus, who is miles better. If we draw near to God through Him, we will be saved. These details make us more certain.