

The Book of Hebrews

Part 18: On the Shoulders and Heart of God (Heb. 6:20 – 7:3)

I. Looking Back: A Review of the Journey

We come to the chief focus of the book of Jesus's role as a *"high priest in the order of Melchizedek."*

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

From here, the author introduces Melchizedek...

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. 3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. (Hebrews 6:19-7:3)

This is the main message the author was building toward. This started back in the first few verses with this incredible statement about the person of Jesus:

3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high... (Hebrews 1:3)

This was followed by several statements about Jesus being a merciful and faithful high priest (2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15), which all led up to these words:

10 ...designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. 11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (Hebrews 5:9-11)

The writer of Hebrews then took a long break here to address this issue of being "dull of hearing," which we found has to do with being unable to hear and receive the reality of one's true identity.

Much of the letter has been about addressing this call to listen and pay more attention to the voice of our Father, embracing the same journey of Jesus in trusting in our beloved sonship no matter what comes our way.

This is the solid foundation we are to build our life upon when everything else is shaking. With this, we also looked at the call to be immersed (baptized) in the Spirit, and to move on to a mature life of *agapè* love.

Our rest in this foundation will overflow into a life of love. This is the goal of our faith and of everything being taught.

II. The Revelation of an Unending Priesthood

The people were “dull of hearing” because they were not listening the message that they were righteous sons and daughters of God who didn’t any more of the sacrifices carried out by the local priests of Israel.

Earlier in our study we discussed the one who supervised the entire priesthood—the High Priest, whose most important job was on the Day of Atonement.

This day of national forgiveness provided only a temporary relief for people’s conscience. As new sins accrued throughout the year, the High Priest would need to do this again—and again. This would happen year after year until eventually the High Priest died and his mantle would be passed to one of his sons. This went on for hundreds and hundreds of years.

The timing of this letter was truly supernatural. In a few short years after it was written, the position of the High Priest would be permanently canceled due to the events of 70 A.D. The author is rightly pleading with the people to let go of the “old order” (which was an earthly priesthood passed down through the tribe of Levi) and embrace a completely new order.

Before we look further at this new *order of Melchizedek*, there is another important feature of the High Priest that bears a lot of weight on this subject. This has to do with names that the High Priest wore on his shoulders and over his chest as he carried out his duties.

9 "Take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the tribes of Israel. 10 Six names will be on each stone, arranged in the order of the births of the original sons of Israel. 11 Engrave these names on the two stones in the same way a jeweler engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in settings of gold filigree. 12 Fasten the two stones on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod as a reminder that Aaron represents the people of Israel. Aaron will carry these names on his shoulders as a constant reminder whenever he goes before the Lord.

(Exodus 28:9-12 NLT)

17 Mount four rows of gemstones on [the chestpiece] ... 21 Each stone will represent one of the twelve sons of Israel, and the name of that tribe will be engraved on it like a seal. ... 29 In this way, Aaron will carry the names of the tribes of Israel on the sacred chestpiece over his heart when he goes into the Holy Place. This will be a continual reminder that he represents the people when he comes before the Lord.

(Exodus 28:17, 21, 29 NLT)

The most important person in the nation would carry the names of Jacob's (Israel) twelve sons in very significant places—on his shoulders and over his heart. These names were the tribes that descended from each son.

In that time, your tribe was entire identity. It was your home, your purpose, your future. You were bound up with the name and people of your tribe. The High Priest wearing your tribe's name as he went into the Holy Place (and the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement) was incredibly meaningful. It had an impact on the people's hearts and minds.

Earlier, we looked at how the people *identified* with the High Priest. They put all their hope in the High Priest doing his work properly before God so they would be accepted with him.

One other way we can understand this identification further is to think about how people can strongly identify with a sports team in their city.

People will often say "*we won last night*" or "*we lost*" as though they were the ones playing on the field. The average person knows they do not come anywhere close to the skills of the players on the team; nonetheless they share the same city and the same goal of triumphing on the field. This affiliation makes a connection where they truly identify with the team. This identification is so strong that people can feel intense emotions with every goal or missed shot.

The High Priest would wear the name of their tribe—their team—and went into God's presence with a sacrifice. When that sacrifice was accepted by God, they celebrated this as a victory as they felt their own complete acceptance before God.

With this identifying reality of a High Priest, the author of Hebrews is now unpacking this quote from the Psalm 110 that describes the Messiah as a King who is also "***a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.***"

Put simply, Melchizedek is someone from the life of Abraham in the book of Genesis, described as both a king and a priest. He shows up mysteriously during a battle Abraham engages in. Unlike other kings and priests throughout the Old Testament, this person does not have a genealogy and there is no mention of his birth or death.

The writer of Hebrews takes this symbolically, suggesting he was foreshadowing someone who would one day function as a king and a priest who was also eternal. This is Jesus Christ, the One who sustains and stretches out the cosmos.

The author then gives the translation of Melchizedek's name and his city of Salem, calling him the "king of peace" and the "king of righteousness." He uses this to make a further connection to Jesus, which shows us that the meaning of words in the Bible has prophetic significance and can unveil different facets of the Gospel. The art of translating the literal meanings of words is an inspired way of discovering revelation from Scripture.

We will explore Melchizedek in greater detail as Hebrews goes on; for now, the main point is that he represents an *unending priesthood*. This is stated in verse 3 of Hebrews 7:

3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

In light of what we know about the role of the High Priest who functions on our behalf, *this is unimaginably good news!* The Jewish people, in order to maintain a sense of acceptance and blessing from God, always needed to replace the High Priest (and then hope he did his work well).

Now there is no longer an earthly person or a religious system to rely on. Now there is only a permanent reality of forgiveness, acceptance, and blessing from God—based on the finished work of the eternal Son of God.

We are on the winning team with the star player who has overcome death itself. We have won the championship of resurrection. Our sins are forgiven, and we are raised with Christ, seated at the right hand of God. This is our victory to claim!

III. The Stones of Love's Judgment

With this, it is also beautiful to ponder the truth that Jesus continually carries our names on his shoulders and over his heart. We are the living stones that God is building his Kingdom through (1 Peter 2:4). This means the High Priest of Israel, all along, was doing something symbolic that pointed a higher and permanent reality. *The High Priest was pointing to God himself.*

Jesus—God with us—carries our names on himself. Regarding his shoulders: Jesus bears not only our burdens (he carries our pain and understands our sorrow), but he also carries entire lives. He is responsible for us. He is the author and the finisher of our faith. Our destiny is in his hands.

Even when we mess up or invite darkness into our lives that brings unnecessary suffering and loss, Jesus still walks with us through it. He still covers us with mercy and provides continual paths to restoration. We are eternally loved in spite of our deception.

- As we've learned from 2 Peter, it is losing sight of this beautiful truth that prolongs darkness in the first place (2 Peter 1:9).

This is amplified when we consider the stones on the chestpiece that went over the heart of the High Priest. The reality that the Creator is also an eternal “High Priest” who carries our names means that we have unfathomable value.

Each stone in this breastplate was of a different color and variety and each carried significant value and rarity. This affirms how unique and precious each of us are to God. Sin and deception has blinded us and perverted our paths, but God has always seen the true value of our lives, and the unique beauty of each soul. He will never forget this—because it’s written on his heart.

This truth is meant to sober us up from being drunk on disappointment, hopelessness, low self-worth, etc. We are not living alone in a dark, cold universe. Our names are engraved upon the heart of a Creator who is both holding and spreading out the universe around us.

This chestpiece was specifically called the “breastpiece of judgment.”

**29 Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually.
(Exodus 28:29)**

God’s “judgment” over us is based on the truth of his heart toward us. In other words, God sees us and judges us as his precious children, hewn from the Rock of his own being—born from the eternal love in his heart.

This is why Jesus’s coming as our High Priest *was* the very judgment of God.

**17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.
(John 3:17 NKJV)**

Because of this, we can rest in the words of Paul that says God our Father is *for us*.

**31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?
(Romans 8:31)**

It’s also powerful to note that the word for “judgment” can be translated as **justice**. God has come to bring us divine justice, which comes from a heart that is *for us*. God judges us as righteous and beloved, and therefore he decides in our favor against the accusations of the enemy.

Everything we are talking about here—because it is based upon the symbolic order of Melchizedek—these things are unending and permanent. There is no end to these truths.

So, we are invited to the place of rest still. The warnings about remaining under the law and the prophecies about a coming shaking were not the main point of the letter. This letter was not

written to inspire fear, but overcoming joy! It was meant to alleviate anxiety and call people into a deeper celebration of the eternal priesthood of Christ.

Follow-up Encounter:

As you take communion, ask for a fresh awareness of what it means to “identify” with Jesus as a High Priest. Perhaps you can think of other analogies that describe the experience of identifying with someone else’s victory. Journal or discuss with others how we can better understand our identification with our High Priest Jesus.

As you receive the communion elements, praise the Father that you are a precious gemstone resting over his heart and abiding on his shoulders!