



Knowing what the Hebrews knew

Old Testament background for Hebrews 7:1-8:13



Melchizedek: king and priest

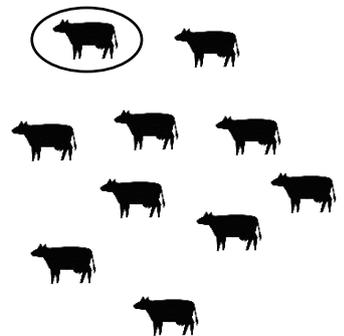
See the section headed "A mysterious priest" in the *Faith that He brews 4* hand-out. Also note that:

- Genesis 14, Psalm 110 and Hebrews 5-7 are the only biblical references to Melchizedek.
- Melchizedek is King of Salem. "Salem" is a shortened version of "Jerusalem" (eg Psalm 76:1-2).
- Peace and justice/righteousness are hallmarks of the Messiah in Old Testament prophecies (eg Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6, 33:15-16). *These qualities are referred to in Hebrews 7:2.*
- No family tree or age is given for Melchizedek in the Bible. Psalm 110:4 implies that he lives forever. *This point is developed in Hebrews 7:3 and 7:8. Psalm 110:4 is quoted in Hebrews 7:17 and 7:21.*

Levites, priests and tithes

God chose Levi, one of the 12 iwi of Israel and gave them the task of looking after the Tabernacle (Numbers 1:46-53). From the Levites, Aaron's family was chosen to serve as priests, assisted by the rest of the Levites (Numbers 18:1-7).

The Law required the Israelites to bring a tenth of their produce and flocks to the LORD, in recognition of the fact that He ultimately provided it all. This tenth was called a "tithe" (Leviticus 27:30). The non-priest Levites received the tithe from the people, and then gave a tenth of this to the priests (Numbers 18:25-32).



The concepts of priests, Levites and tithes are repeatedly referred to in Hebrews 7:4-8:6.

Covenants

In the ancient Near East, a covenant was a treaty that established a relationship between two parties. God made covenants with people at various points in the Old Testament – eg Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), Abraham (Genesis 15:9-21; 17:1-27), Israel (Exodus 19-24), David (2 Samuel 7:1-17).

The first covenant

The most prominent covenant in the Old Testament was the covenant that God established with Israel at Mt Sinai (Exodus 19-24). The terms of the covenant were set out in over six hundred laws that are sometimes collectively known as "the Law of Moses". *This is the "first covenant" referred to in Hebrews 8:7 and 8:13.*

The new covenant

The nation of Israel was eventually thrown out of the promised land due to their persistent unfaithfulness to the LORD. But while they were in exile, God sent them a message of hope through the prophet Jeremiah. This message described a day when God would establish a new and far greater covenant than before.



Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 for a prophetic description of the new covenant. *These verses are quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 (this is the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament!).*





Engaging with the message

Questions & answers for Hebrews 7:1-8:13



Hot spots

- 1) What's alive for you in this passage? (Things that stand out, "aha" moments, questions you have, etc)



Digging into the passage

- 2) What key differences does the author point out between the priesthood of Melchizedek and the priesthood of Aaron?

- 3) According to the prophecy quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12, what will be new about the "new" covenant?



Connecting life and faith

- 4) Why does (or should) it matter to you today that Jesus is much greater than Abraham, Levi and all of the Aaronic priests?

- 5) What is the value of reading the Old Testament Law, given that this passage describes the first covenant as "obsolete" and "out of date" (8:13)?

- 6) What do you think it means to have God's laws in your mind and written on your heart (8:10)?