

Pleasant Springs Church

Discipleship School — The Order of Melchizedek

The Order of Melchizedek

Tracing Jesus from the Book of Hebrews back through the Old Testament — and through the literature of Second Temple Judaism

with 11QMelchizedek · 2 Enoch · the Genesis Apocryphon · Philo · Josephus · the Rabbis
Septuagint (LXX) & ESV side-by-side throughout

THE BIG IDEA

The Old Testament names a mysterious priest-king — **Melchizedek** — in only two places (Genesis 14 and Psalm 110), then falls silent. Centuries later the Book of Hebrews takes that thread and shows that Jesus, though from the tribe of Judah and never a temple priest, is the true and final **High Priest** — not after the order of Aaron, but *after the order of Melchizedek*. We start in Hebrews, follow the thread back to its two Old Testament roots, walk it through the world of Second Temple Judaism that Hebrews wrote into, and follow it home to Christ enthroned.

KEY TEXTS

Genesis 14:18–20 · Psalm 110:1, 3, 4 (LXX 109) · Hebrews 5:5–6 · Hebrews 6:19–20 · Hebrews 7:1–28 · Matthew 22:41–46 · Zechariah 6:13 · Psalm 85:10

Second Temple witnesses consulted: 11QMelchizedek (11Q13) · 2 Enoch 71–72 · the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen) · Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* 3.79–82 · Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.179–181 · Targums Neofiti & Pseudo-Jonathan · Talmud b. Sukkah 52b; b. Nedarim 32b.

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PART ONE

Why Begin in Hebrews?

Letting the New Testament show us where to look in the Old

There is an old and reliable way to find Jesus in the Old Testament: let the New Testament show you where to look, then go back and read slowly. No book does this more daringly than the letter to the **Hebrews**. Its author takes a figure who appears in only two verses of the entire Hebrew Bible — a priest-king named *Melchizedek* — and builds on him the central argument of the whole letter: that Jesus of Nazareth, who came from the tribe of Judah and never served a day in the temple, is nevertheless the true and final **High Priest**.

How can that be? Because, Hebrews says, his priesthood is not *after the order of Aaron* but *after the order of Melchizedek*. That single phrase is our thread. We take it in hand at Hebrews, follow it back to the two Old Testament passages it depends on (Genesis 14 and Psalm 110), walk it through the world of Second Temple Jewish literature, and follow it home to Christ. As always at Pleasant Springs we read the Old Testament in both the Greek **Septuagint (LXX)** and the **ESV** — because the Septuagint is the Bible the author of Hebrews actually quotes.

THE METHOD IN ONE SENTENCE

Hebrews does not invent a meaning and force it onto the Old Testament; it notices that the Old Testament itself swore an oath about a priest who outranks Aaron (Ps 110:4), points to the only man in Scripture who held that office before Aaron existed (Gen 14:18), and asks the obvious question the whole Bible was waiting to answer: *who is this priest forever?*

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PART TWO

The Whole Old Testament Witness — Two Verses

Genesis 14 and Psalm 110: the entire file on Melchizedek

Melchizedek is named in only two places in the Hebrew Scriptures: a short narrative in **Genesis 14** and a single line in **Psalm 110**. That is the entire Old Testament file on him. Everything Hebrews and the Second Temple writers do, they do with these two texts. So we begin where they begin.

Genesis 14:18–20 · The Priest Who Blesses Abraham

Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

¹⁸καὶ Μελχισεδεκ βασιλεὺς Σαλημ ἐξήνεγκεν ἄρτους καὶ οἶνον· ἦν δὲ **ἱερεὺς τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου**.

¹⁹καὶ ἠλόγησε τὸν Ἄβραμ καὶ εἶπεν· εὐλογημένος Ἄβραμ τῷ Θεῷ τῷ ὑψίστῳ, **ὃς ἔκτισε τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν**.

²⁰καὶ εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστος, ὃς παρέδωκε τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποχειρίους σοι. καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ δεκάτην ἀπὸ πάντων.

English Standard Version

¹⁸And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was **priest of God Most High**.)

¹⁹And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, **Possessor of heaven and earth**;

²⁰and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Read it slowly and the oddities pile up. A king named *righteousness* (Melchi-zedek), of a city named *peace* (Salem / shalom), steps out of nowhere. He is a **priest of God Most High** — centuries before Sinai, before the tabernacle, before the tribe of Levi was born. He holds two offices at once: *king* and *priest*, a combination the Law of Moses will later keep strictly apart (king Uzziah is struck with leprosy for daring to burn incense, 2 Chron 26:16–21). He brings out **bread and wine**. He blesses Abraham, and *Abraham — the father of the faithful — pays a tithe to him*. Then he vanishes, with no record of his birth, his parents, or his death.

Notice one Septuagint detail the English cannot fully carry: where the Hebrew calls God Most High the *Possessor* (qōnēh) of heaven and earth, the LXX reads *who created* (ἔκτισε) heaven and earth. The God Melchizedek serves is the **Maker** of all things — not a local Canaanite deity but the Creator himself. Melchizedek is a genuine priest of the true God, standing outside Israel's later institutions entirely.

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Psalm 110:1, 3, 4 (LXX 109) · The Oath About a Priest Forever

Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

¹Εἶπεν ὁ Κύριος τῷ Κυρίῳ μου· **κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου**, ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου.

³**...ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐξεγέννησά σε.**

⁴ὤμοσε Κύριος καὶ οὐ μεταμεληθήσεται· σὺ εἶ **ιερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδέκ.**

English Standard Version

¹The LORD says to my Lord: **"Sit at my right hand**, until I make your enemies your footstool."

³...from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. (LXX: *"from the womb, before the morning star, I have begotten you."*)

⁴The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are **a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.**"

Psalm 110 is the most-quoted Old Testament chapter in the entire New Testament, and verse 4 is its hinge. David hears the LORD (Yahweh) address *my Lord* — someone David calls his superior, seated at God's own right hand. Jesus presses exactly this on his opponents: if David calls the Messiah *Lord*, how is the Messiah merely David's son? (Matt 22:41–46). The figure in this psalm is more than a descendant; he is enthroned beside God.

And this enthroned Lord is sworn into a **priesthood** — not by descent, but by the irrevocable *oath* of God: *a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek*. Here the two offices of Genesis 14 reunite. The King at God's right hand is also a Priest forever. The Septuagint of verse 3 adds a phrase early Christians read with wonder: *from the womb, before the morning star (ἑωσφόρος), I have begotten you* — a begetting before the dawn of creation. The LXX gives Psalm 110 a deeper, more eternal register than the Hebrew alone — and it is the LXX that Hebrews quotes.

TWO CLUES AND ONE OPEN QUESTION

The Old Testament leaves us holding two clues and one unanswered question. A priest-king who blesses Abraham and then disappears (Genesis 14). A divine oath that the coming royal Lord will be *a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek* (Psalm 110). The Old Testament never tells us who fulfills the oath. It plants the seed and falls silent for a thousand years.

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PART THREE

What the Book of Hebrews Sees

Hebrews 7 reads Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 together

Hebrews 7:1–3 · Resembling the Son of God

Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

¹Οὗτος γὰρ ὁ Μελχισέδεκ, βασιλεὺς Σαλήμ, ἱερεὺς τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου... ᾧ καὶ δεκάτην ἀπὸ πάντων ἐμέρισεν Ἀβραάμ...

³**ἀπάτωρ, ἀμήτωρ, ἀγενεαλόγητος, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων, ἀφωμοιωμένος δὲ τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, μένει ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸ διηνεκές.**

English Standard Version

¹For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God... to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything...

³He is **without father or mother or genealogy**, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but **resembling the Son of God** he continues a priest forever.

Hebrews 7 reads Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 *together* and draws out a chain of reasoning:

- **Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek** — therefore Melchizedek ranks *above* Abraham (7:4–7), for “the inferior is blessed by the superior.”
- **Levi was still ‘in the loins’ of Abraham** — so Levi himself, in effect, paid tithes to Melchizedek. The Melchizedek priesthood therefore outranks the whole Levitical order (7:9–10).
- **No genealogy, no birth, no death** is recorded for Melchizedek. In a book obsessed with genealogies, this silence is deliberate — a literary picture of a priest whose office does not depend on ancestry or end at the grave (7:3).
- **Psalm 110:4 swears by God's oath** that the coming royal Lord is “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” — *not* after the order of Aaron. God himself had always intended a priesthood beyond Levi (7:11–22).
- **Therefore Jesus** — descended from Judah, a tribe Moses never connected with priesthood (7:14) — is not disqualified at all. He holds an older, higher, oath-sworn priesthood “by the power of an indestructible life” (7:16).

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Hebrews 7:15–17 · By the Power of an Indestructible Life

Septuagint (LXX) / Greek New Testament

¹⁵...κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα Μελχισέδεκ ἀνίσταται ἱερεὺς ἕτερος,

¹⁶ὃς οὐ κατὰ νόμον ἐντολῆς σαρκίνης γέγονεν ἀλλὰ κατὰ **δύναμιν ζωῆς ἀκαταλύτου**.

¹⁷μαρτυρεῖται γὰρ ὅτι σὺ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ.

English Standard Version

¹⁵This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek,

¹⁶who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an **indestructible life**.

¹⁷For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

READ HEBREWS 7:3 CAREFULLY — THE ANALOGY RUNS ONE DIRECTION

Hebrews does *not* say the Son of God resembles Melchizedek. It says Melchizedek was *made to resemble* (ἀφωμοιωμένος) the Son of God. Melchizedek is the shadow; Christ is the substance that casts it. The Genesis silence about his parents and death is treated as a portrait — an argument from how the text was written, not a claim that Melchizedek literally had no parents. Christ is the original; Melchizedek was drawn to look like him in advance.

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PART FOUR

Through Second Temple Jewish Literature

The world Hebrews wrote into — where Melchizedek had grown far beyond two verses

Between the Old Testament and Hebrews lies a thousand years of Jewish reflection — and in the centuries just before Christ, the figure of Melchizedek grew far beyond his two verses. The author of Hebrews writes into a world where his readers *already knew* Melchizedek as a figure of enormous significance. This literature does not add to Scripture, but it shows us the conversation Hebrews was joining — and it makes the boldness of Hebrews intelligible.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS · 11QMELCHIZEDEK (11Q13) — THE HEAVENLY DELIVERER

The single most important Second Temple text for our study. In this fragmentary scroll (Qumran Cave 11, mid-first century B.C.), **Melchizedek is no longer merely a historical priest — he is a heavenly deliverer.** He presides over the final Jubilee (Lev 25; Deut 15), proclaiming “liberty to the captives” of Isaiah 61:1, and executes God's judgment, rescuing “the men of the lot of Melchizedek” and destroying Belial. Most striking: the scroll applies **Psalm 82:1** — “Elohim stands in the divine council... he holds judgment” — to Melchizedek himself, and links him to the “messenger who proclaims peace” of Isaiah 52:7. Here is hard evidence that, well before Hebrews, “Melchizedek” named an exalted, royal, atoning, judging redeemer-figure. When Hebrews makes him the template for the eternal High Priest, it is not straining — it engages a figure its readers revered.

PSEUDEPIGRAPHA · 2 ENOCH 71–72 — THE EXALTATION OF MELCHIZEDEK

This text narrates Melchizedek's birth just before the Flood — born from the body of the wife of Nir (Noah's brother) *after her death*, already fully formed, with the priestly seal upon his chest, speaking and blessing the Lord. To preserve the priesthood through the Flood, the archangel carries the child to the **Garden of Eden**, kept safe across the ages. Whatever its date, 2 Enoch shows a living tradition of Melchizedek as a *preternatural priestly figure* — without ordinary parentage, marked for the priesthood before he draws breath, removed from death's ordinary reach. The phrases echo Hebrews 7:3 uncannily: “without father or mother... neither beginning of days nor end of life.”

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DEAD SEA SCROLLS · THE GENESIS APOCRYPHON (1QAPGEN, COL. 22)

This Aramaic paraphrase of Genesis (late first century B.C.) follows the Melchizedek episode closely: Melchizedek, king of Salem, brings out food and drink, blesses Abram in the name of God Most High, and receives the tithe. Its value is quiet but real — it confirms the Genesis 14 tradition was being copied and treasured at Qumran in precisely the era the New Testament was forming, and it plainly identifies “God Most High” (‘el ‘elyon, the title Melchizedek bears) with the LORD.

HELLENISTIC JUDAISM · PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA (LEGUM ALLEGORIAE 3.79–82)

Philo reads Melchizedek allegorically: “God made him both king of peace — for that is the meaning of Salem — and his own priest.” He calls him “the righteous king,” and famously associates him with the divine **Logos** (Reason / Word): the self-taught priest who offers the soul wine instead of water. Philo is not a Christian source and does not equate Melchizedek with the Messiah — but that a first-century Jew could connect Melchizedek with the *Logos* shows how naturally this figure attracted the highest theological language. John says “the Word (Logos) became flesh”; Hebrews makes Melchizedek the type of the eternal Priest — both write into a world already prepared to hold Melchizedek and the Word in one thought.

JEWISH HISTORIAN · JOSEPHUS (ANTIQUITIES 1.179–181; WAR 6.438)

Josephus treats Melchizedek soberly as a real historical king. His name, he explains, means “Righteous King,” “and such he was by common consent.” He was the **first to officiate as priest of God**, and he founded the city — called Salem, later *Hierosolyma*, Jerusalem — building the first temple there. For Josephus the point is continuity: Israel's priesthood and holy city trace back to this righteous priest-king who blessed Abraham. He keeps Melchizedek human and historical — a useful reminder that the figure was anchored in Israel's real memory, not invented.

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TARGUMS & TALMUD · THE RABBIS — SHEM, AND THE FOUR CRAFTSMEN

Mainstream rabbinic tradition pulled *against* exalting Melchizedek — partly in reaction to Christian claims. The Targums (Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan) identify Melchizedek with **Shem, son of Noah**. The Talmud (b. Nedarim 32b) says God first gave the priesthood to Shem-Melchizedek, but because he blessed Abraham *before* he blessed God (Gen 14:19–20), the priesthood was transferred to Abraham's line — explaining away the very superiority Hebrews builds upon. Yet a higher view survived: in b. Sukkah 52b, Melchizedek is listed among the “four craftsmen” of Zechariah 2:3 — with **the Messiah son of David, the Messiah son of Joseph, and Elijah** — the agents of the age to come.

WHAT THE LITERATURE GIVES US

Across these sources Melchizedek is, by turns, a heavenly judge and atoner (Qumran), a priest preserved through the Flood without ordinary birth or death (2 Enoch), the priestly Logos (Philo), the founder-priest of Jerusalem (Josephus), and an end-time deliverer (the Talmud). Hebrews does not borrow any one of these portraits. It does something better: it tells us who the real figure was that all of them were reaching toward.

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PART FIVE

Following Jesus Through the Order

Six things "after the order of Melchizedek" gives Christ that Aaron never could

Now gather the thread in your hand and follow it to its end. "After the order of Melchizedek" is not a decorative phrase — it names six things about the priesthood of Jesus that the order of Aaron could never supply:

- **Royal and priestly at once.** Melchizedek was king *and* priest; the Law kept those offices apart. Jesus reunites them — the King at God's right hand who is also the Priest forever (Ps 110:1, 4; Zech 6:13).
- **Righteousness and peace.** "King of righteousness," then "king of peace" (Heb 7:2). The two great covenant gifts humanity lost are spoken by his name and delivered by his work (Ps 85:10; Rom 5:1).
- **Eternal, not inherited.** Aaron's priests died and were replaced. Christ holds his office "by the power of an indestructible life" (Heb 7:16) — he died once and rose to die no more.
- **Sworn by oath.** The Levites became priests by birth certificate; Jesus by the oath of God himself: "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind" (Ps 110:4; Heb 7:20–22). God cannot revoke it.
- **Once for all.** The priest after Melchizedek does not repeat sacrifices; he offered himself once and "sat down" (Heb 7:27; 10:12). Melchizedek brought out bread and wine; at the table Jesus gives bread and wine as his body and blood (Luke 22:19–20) — a sign the earliest church read straight back to Genesis 14.
- **For everyone who draws near.** Because he "always lives to make intercession" (Heb 7:25), this priesthood is not locked behind a veil once a year. Every believer comes boldly to the throne of grace at any moment (Heb 4:16).

THE ANSWER TO THE OPEN QUESTION

Who is the priest forever after the order of Melchizedek? A priest-king who blesses the children of Abraham, who reunites righteousness and peace, who serves the Most High God the Maker of heaven and earth, who has no successor because he never dies, who gives bread and wine, sworn into office by God's irrevocable oath — that is not finally Melchizedek. Melchizedek was only made to look like him. It is **Jesus**.

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PART SIX

A Careful Word on Identity — and the Words Themselves

Theophany? Angel? Shem? Or a type made to resemble the Son?

Was Melchizedek a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ (a *Christophany*)? An angel, as Qumran nearly suggests? Shem son of Noah, as the rabbis claimed? Or simply a historical priest-king who functions as a *type*?

Hebrews itself answers with great precision. It does not say Melchizedek *was* the Son of God; it says he *was made to resemble* (ἀφωμοιωμένος) the Son of God (7:3). That single word holds the line: Melchizedek is the portrait, Christ is the person; Melchizedek is the type, Christ is the reality. The wonder is not that an ancient king secretly was Jesus — it is that, a thousand years before Bethlehem, God arranged a real priest-king, two cryptic verses, an unbreakable oath, and centuries of longing, so that when the true Priest finally came “by the power of an indestructible life,” we would have eyes to recognize him.

WORD STUDIES

MALKÎ-ŞEDEQ / ΜΕΛΧΙΣΕΔΕΚ — “KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”;

Written in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 in two parts, almost as a *title*. Hebrews 7:2 unpacks it: “king of righteousness,” and then, as king of **Salem** (šālēm / shalom), “king of peace.” Righteousness and peace — the pair Psalm 85:10 says will “kiss each other” when God saves his people. His name is a one-line gospel.

KATA THN TAEIN · KATA TĒN TAXIN — “AFTER THE ORDER OF”;

τάξις means rank, arrangement, or order. Psalm 110:4 does not say Messiah is “like Melchizedek personally” but belongs to his *order* — a category of priesthood defined by oath, royalty, and permanence rather than tribe and bloodline. The whole argument of Hebrews 7 turns on this one phrase: there is a priestly *order* older and higher than Aaron's, and Jesus belongs to it.

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ἌΠΑΤΩΡ, ἈΜΗΤΩΡ, ἈΓΕΝΕΑΛΟΓΗΤΟΣ · &LDQUO;WITHOUT FATHER, WITHOUT MOTHER, WITHOUT GENEALOGY&RDQUO;

Three rare words stacked in Hebrews 7:3 for effect. They describe not a man literally born of no one, but a figure whose *record* gives no parentage, no pedigree, no death. In a Bible where priestly legitimacy *required* a documented genealogy (Ezra 2:61–63 disqualifies priests who could not prove theirs), Melchizedek's blank file is not a gap — it is the point.

ΖΩΗ ἈΚΑΤΑΛΥΤΟΣ · ΖΩἚ ΑΚΑΤΑΛΥΤΟΣ — &LDQUO;INDESTRUCTIBLE LIFE&RDQUO;

Hebrews 7:16 — Jesus became a priest “by the power of an indestructible life.” ἀκατάλυτος is literally “that cannot be loosed or dissolved.” Aaron's priesthood was dissolved again and again by death (7:23). The resurrection is what qualifies Jesus for the Melchizedek order: a life that death tried and failed to dissolve. The empty tomb is the credential of the priest forever.

ἹΕΡΕΥΣ Εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα · HIEREUS EIS TON AIŌNA / ΚŌHĒN LĀ'ŌLĀM — &LDQUO;A PRIEST FOREVER&RDQUO;

The oath of Psalm 110:4, quoted four times in Hebrews (5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21). “Forever” is the load-bearing word: a priesthood with no term limit, no retirement, no replacement. The Levitical line needed unbroken succession because every priest died. The Melchizedek priest needs no successor — he is still serving. There is, at this moment, a man at the right hand of God interceding for you.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Melchizedek appears in only two Old Testament verses, yet they carry the whole argument of Hebrews 7. What does this teach you about reading the “small” details of Scripture? Where else might a single verse be a hidden seed?
2. Hebrews 7:3 says Melchizedek was *made to resemble the Son of God* — not the reverse. Why does the *direction* of that comparison matter? How does it guard us from over-reading the figure?
3. The Septuagint of Genesis 14:19 says God Most High *created* heaven and earth, and Psalm 110:3 speaks of a begetting “before the morning star.” How does reading the Greek Old Testament — the Bible Hebrews quotes — deepen the portrait?
4. 11QMelchizedek shows that some Jews before Christ already saw Melchizedek as a heavenly deliverer and judge. How does knowing the world Hebrews wrote *into* change the way you hear its argument?
5. Jesus' priesthood rests on “the power of an indestructible life” (Heb 7:16). In what practical way does the resurrection function as the credential of your High Priest, and what confidence should that give you when you pray (Heb 4:16)?
6. Melchizedek brought out bread and wine (Gen 14:18); Jesus gives bread and wine as his body and blood (Luke 22). The next time you take communion, how does the order of Melchizedek change what you see in the cup?

CLOSING PRAYER

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*Lord Jesus, our great High Priest after the order of Melchizedek — King of righteousness, King of peace — we thank you that long before you came, the Father planted the clues: a priest-king who blessed Abraham, an oath that would not be revoked, a longing no son of Aaron could satisfy. You are the priest forever, sworn into office by God himself, serving by the power of a life that death could not dissolve. You sat down because the work is finished, and you live to intercede for us still. Give us eyes to find you on every page of the older Scriptures, and bold hearts to draw near to your throne of grace. We bring you no merit of our own — only the bread and the cup, and the name you have been given above every name. **Amen.***

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

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Related Pleasant Springs studies:

- *Malachi to Revelation*, Lesson 11 — Hebrews and the Better Priesthood: ps-church.com/discipleship/malachi-to-revelation/hebrews-better-priesthood
- *Malachi to Revelation* series: ps-church.com/discipleship/malachi-to-revelation

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- *Septuagint (LXX) & ESV Bible Study*: ps-church.com/bible-study-lxx-esv

Compiled for Pleasant Springs Church, Pinson, Tennessee. "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

— Psalm 110:4