

WRESTLING WITH THE BIBLICAL TEXT

“Jesus, Our Eternal Intercessor” (Hebrews 7:25)

By Herbert W. Bateman

Before I share some of the results of my study on Hebrews 7:25, let me repeat an overview for Hebrews chapter seven.

Hebrews 7 highlights the author’s central teaching about a man named Melchizedek and how it is that Jesus resembles Melchizedek, particularly his royal priesthood. The author first retells and interprets a story about Melchizedek found in Genesis 14:18–20 (verses 1–10). He then turns his interpretation into an application about God changing the Levitical priesthood and terminating the Mosaic Law (verses 11–19). He concludes the chapter by way of three contrasts between the priests from the tribe of Levi and Jesus whose priesthood is like Melchizedek’s (verses 20–28). Naturally, verse 25 appears in the third contrast.

Hebrews 7:25 provides the implications (ὄθεν) for the contrast about the duration between Levitical priests and Jesus spoken of in verses 23–24. In essence, verse 25 answers: So what? What’s the big deal about the duration of Jesus as our royal priest versus a Levitical priest? Verse 25 reads, “So he is able to save for all time those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”

Two rather significant implications appear here. First, Jesus “is able to save.” This ability is not a mere possibility. It is a certainty (cf. 2:18; 4:15; 5:7). Naturally, the verb “to save” (σώζειν) could refer to either a person’s physical deliverance or spiritual deliverance. A navy seal might save or rescue a reporter from an outrageous Isis incarceration. That would be an example of physical deliverance. Yet here “to save” speaks of a person’s spiritual deliverance, namely to experience the complete forgiveness of any and all our wrong doings before God (intentional and unintentional; cf. 2:3).

Second, our spiritual deliverance has an unlimited duration. It is “forever” (εἰς τὸ παντελές). Yet some say it means “completely” (as in KJV ESV NIV translations) or “for all time” (as in NASB NRSV NLT translations). On the hand, “completely” suggests the degree to which Jesus saves an individual. It is thorough. On the other hand, “for all time” suggests an unlimited duration. His ability to provide spiritual deliverance is for all eternity. The latter view seems best because it is in keeping with Jesus’ endlessness (v 16) and eternality (v 17). The point: people no longer approach God through a Levitical priest whose role is limited due to their inevitable death that terminates his priesthood but rather through God’s resurrected eternal royal priest, Jesus (cf. John 14:6–7; 1 John 4:23; 5:1). This raises a question: Why? Why is this eternal duration of Jesus’ royal priesthood such a big deal?

The last statement in verse 25 tells us why: “because he always lives to intercede for them.” Jesus lives. Jesus is immortal. The expressed purpose of this eternality is to make “intercession” (ἐντυγχάνειν) on behalf of all those who follow him. Whenever “intercession” is used with “for” or “on behalf of” (ὕπερ), it carries an important message. In Romans 8:34, Jesus “intercedes on behalf of us” therefore no one can bring a charge against those who follow Jesus. Here in verse 25, Jesus as the royal high priest “intercedes on behalf of” those all those who come to God through him (7:25a).

What has been encouraging to me is that Jesus’ intercedes continual for me (and I really need a person to state my case before God because I fail him daily). Unfortunately, this theological concept of intercession has been “grotesquely misrepresented in popular Christian thought.” One commentator puts it this way, “He (= Jesus) is not to be thought of ‘as an ornate, standing ever before the Father with outstretched arms, like the figures in the mosaics of the catacombs, and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God; but as a *throned* Priest-King, asking what He will from a Father who always hears and grants His request.” This reminds me of words in a song: “King Jesus is all, my all in all. I know that he answers, me when I call. Walking by my side, he satisfies. King Jesus is all. My all and all.”

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