

“After the Order of Melchisedec”

“Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. ... Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”
—*Hebrews 5:5,6*

OUR PRESENT STUDY

will be an overview of Hebrews, chapter 7. Two chapters earlier, in the words of our opening text, Jesus is identified as a “priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” There Paul wrote that he had “many things” to say about this, things which to the Hebrew Christians would seem “hard to be uttered” because, as the apostle explains, they were “dull of hearing.”—*Heb. 5:11*

In the seventh chapter, Paul itemizes “many things” about Melchisedec which identify him as a pattern, or type, of Christ. This entire chapter is devoted to showing how much greater in every way was the Melchisedec priesthood than the Aaronic order under Israel’s Law Covenant arrangement.

KING AND PRIEST

Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 7 read: “This Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.”

Melchisedec was both a king and a priest, and from God’s standpoint a very highly honored priest. Abraham, a friend of God upon the basis of his faith, was also highly honored by Jehovah. However, Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec—giving to him a tenth of all the spoils of battle on the occasion when he slaughtered the kings who had taken Lot, his nephew, into captivity.—Gen. 14:18-20, *New Living Translation*

The title Melchisedec is a very significant one, being made up of the Hebrew words *melek*, meaning “king,” and *tsedeq*, meaning “righteousness.” He actually was King of Salem, which means “peace.” Thus, as stated by Paul, Melchisedec was both “King of righteousness” and “King of peace.” What a clearly defined type Melchisedec was, therefore, of Christ Jesus, the one concerning whom the Prophet Isaiah wrote that “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”—Isa. 9:7

Hebrews 7:3, speaking of typical Melchisedec, reads: “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.”

The evident thought of this text is that Melchisedec was without father or mother in the priesthood—

that is, he did not inherit the office from his parents. It was given to him directly by God. Paul emphasizes this point in order to offset the doubts some might have concerning Jesus, that not being of the tribe of Levi he could not therefore be a priest. In Israel's arrangement, it was God who established the Levitical tribe, the one from which priests were to be taken. God also had the authority and power to exalt others to the priesthood. This he did in the case of Melchisedec, and also Christ, the greater Melchisedec.

In the Levitical order of priesthood there was an arrangement of succession, but not so in the higher, or Melchisedec order. Melchisedec had neither predecessor nor successor in the priesthood. In this respect he was like "the Son of God," who similarly is the only one in this highest of all priestly orders. Paul explains that the significance of this is that Christ "abideth a priest continually."

LESS BLESSED OF THE BETTER

Continuing in Hebrews 7:4-10, the apostle writes: "Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the Law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed

that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.”

Paul’s reasoning in these verses is irrefutable. Abraham is counted as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, hero of faith mentioned in the Bible. In Romans 4:13, he is designated the “heir of the world.” Yet he paid tithes to Melchisedec, and, as Paul states, “The less [Abraham] is blessed of the better [Melchisedec].” The head of Israel’s priestly tribe, that is, Levi, himself paid tithes to Melchisedec while still in the loins of Abraham, being his great-grandson. None of the Levitical tribe, not even the priests could, therefore, be as great as Melchisedec.

“Of whom it is witnessed that he liveth,” Paul asserts. (Heb. 7:8) There is no record of the birth or death of Melchisedec. All we know is that he lived. This makes him a fitting type of the perpetual priestly office of Christ, of whom it is prophetically stated, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6) In this statement the apostle may also have been alluding to the testimony of the “two men” at the tomb of Jesus, when they asked the women who were looking for his body, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” or, as the *International Standard Version* states, “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is living?”—Luke 24:4,5

A BETTER PRIESTHOOD AND BETTER LAW

Hebrews 7:11 states: “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that

another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?"

In this verse Paul presents still another argument as to why believers should expect that the Levitical, or Aaronic, priesthood would be succeeded by another and higher priestly order. It was the fact that the Levitical priesthood did not bring perfection to those who were served by it. God had spoken through the prophet David that there would be another priesthood established, one after the order of Melchisedec. (Ps. 110:4) Now the inspired Apostle Paul is pointing out another reason why this was necessary.

Continuing in Hebrews 7:12-17, Paul writes: "The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

Hebrews who had accepted Christ would not find it easy to understand why changes needed to be made in the Law in order for Jesus to serve as a priest. Therefore, in these verses Paul's reasoning is to show why this change was the logical thing to expect, and quite in harmony with God's arrangement. Priests of the Levitical order under the Mosaic Law served by hereditary rights.

Jesus, however, was not of the tribe of Levi, so according to this hereditary arrangement of the Law, he could never be eligible for the priesthood. In God's plan a higher priestly order was designed for him. By the hereditary arrangement one could become a priest regardless of whether or not he was worthy of the office, but under the Melchisedec order this could not be. So far as his priestly service was concerned, Melchisedec was without "beginning of days, nor end of life." (Heb. 7:3) His genealogy is not recorded. None of his qualifications for the priesthood are recorded. His was simply a case of being chosen by God. It is this great fact that stands out in the case of Jesus, the antitype of Melchisedec.

The fact that priests of the Aaronic order inherited their positions was an evidence of the temporary nature of their service. However, with the Melchisedec order the reverse is true. No time element entered into this arrangement. Thus Melchisedec is a suitable pattern of the endless life and continuing priesthood of Jesus. As Paul presents it, the "power" or authority for Christ's appointment as a priest was that of "an endless life," this being in harmony with the prophecy which foretold his appointment.

A BETTER HOPE

Verses 18 and 19 of our lesson read: "There is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the Law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."

The Law was “weak through the flesh,” Paul wrote. (Rom. 8:3) The reason it failed was not because there was something wrong with it, but because of the weaknesses and imperfections of those who attempted to obtain life under its provisions. Since the Israelites proved by their own failure under the Law that its arrangements were not adequate to bring perfection and life to fallen human beings, it was automatically disannulled and the way opened for a new arrangement.

“The Law made nothing perfect.” (Heb. 7:19) This was an additional reason for the appointment of another priesthood, and it is in connection with this that we have been given a “better hope,” a hope which, when it matures, will result in perfection. It is a hope which includes the prospect of serving and reigning with Christ in the future work of blessing the obedient of mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, with “restitution” to perfection. (Isa. 60:3; Acts 15:15-17; 3:20,21) Though this aspect of his work is yet future, we have the assurance that Christ “ever liveth to make intercession” for us now, and that through the merit of his shed blood we are counted as acceptable to God. (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34) Thus, being “justified by faith, we have peace with God,” and can “draw nigh” unto him, going “boldly unto the throne of grace.”—Rom. 5:1; James 4:8; Heb. 4:16

CONFIRMED BY AN OATH

Hebrews 7:20-22 provides further insight. “Inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The

Lord swear and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament [Greek: covenant].”

Jesus was not only appointed by God to be a priest, but his appointment was confirmed by a divine oath. Surely, then, there should be no question in anyone’s mind concerning his right to be a priest, a greater right than those who became priests merely by heredity.

“By so much”—this refers to the great force of Jesus’ appointment to the priesthood as indicated by God’s oath. Although the Levitical priesthood established with Israel was made “without an oath,” God’s original covenant of blessing, made with Abraham, and which embraces the hope of both the church and the world, was confirmed by divine oath. This is probably why Paul associates the “better covenant” with the force associated with the divine oath.—Gen. 22:15-18; Heb. 6:13-20

The expression “better covenant” is in contrast with the Law Covenant. The covenant principally referred to is doubtless the promised “New Covenant,” first spoken of by the Prophet Jeremiah. (Jer. 31:31-34) By Jesus’ death and resurrection he became the “surety” that the New Covenant would indeed be established in due time. By the same token he also made sure our acceptance under the terms of the Sarah feature of the original Abrahamic Covenant, also oathbound, in particular that part of the covenant which calls for the development of the “seed” which is to bless all the families of the earth.—Gal. 3:16,27-29; 4:21-31

ABLE TO SAVE “TO THE UTMOST”

Paul continues to describe the superiority of Christ in Hebrews 7:23-25. “There were many [Levitical] priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He [Christ Jesus], because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”—*New King James Version*

Who could fail to see this advantage of the Melchisedec order of priesthood? Christ “always lives to make intercession”—a priest forever. We can well imagine the case of an earnest Israelite under the Law Covenant seeking to live close to God, and leaning heavily upon a certain high priest for counsel and encouragement. He would become acquainted with the priest, and the priest would get to understand him and be able thus to better serve him; but suddenly this high priest dies. What a tragedy this would be for the one who depended so largely upon him.

This is not true of our High Priest, Jesus, for he “always lives,” and is ready at all times to make intercession for us. He understands us and knows our every weakness, yet loves us with an everlasting love. No wonder he is able to save “to the uttermost” those who come to God through him. (John 14:6) Those who desire to return to God and to his fellowship and blessing are helped and shown the way. The value of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice is imputed to them to cover their defects; and his intercession is able to make their earnest efforts successful. (Rom. 4:16,20-24) What a Savior! What a Priest!

“HOLY, HARMLESS, UNDEFILED”

The final three verses of our lesson read: “Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the Law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the Law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated [Greek: made perfect or complete] for evermore.”—Heb. 7:26-28

Our High Priest, Paul says, was “holy”—entirely devoted to his Heavenly Father, with a dedication prompted by love and based upon knowledge. He was “harmless” also. His every influence was beneficial and uplifting. He was “undefiled,” not only from the standpoint of the Law, but morally pure as well. Finally, he was “separate from sinners.” He was not tainted in any way with human imperfections. Because of his perfection in all of these areas of life and conduct, even unto death, Jesus is now “higher than the heavens,” a reference to his high exaltation when he was raised from the dead, “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.” (Eph. 1:20,21) It was because Jesus was thus exalted that he is now able to appear in the presence of God for us.

The contrast between the sacrificial work of the Levitical priesthood and the sacrifice of Jesus is in the fact that Israel’s priests needed to keep repeating their work, day after day, year after year. Jesus, however, offered himself only once. The typical

priests offered sacrifices, first for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people, Paul states. Then he explains concerning Jesus that “this he did once, when he offered up himself.” That is, he offered one sacrifice which covered the sins of his body members, the church, and also the sins of the people. In confirmation of this, the Apostle John says of Jesus that he became the “propitiation [atoning sacrifice, *ISV*] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”
—I John 2:2

Jesus was perfect as a man, and the experiences through which he passed while offering himself in sacrifice perfected him as a New Creature in the sense of being developed, or made complete. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.” (Heb. 5:8-10) How we should thank our loving Heavenly Father that he has provided such a great High Priest—for us now, and for the entire world of mankind in the coming kingdom on earth.—
Matt. 6:10 ■