

## HEBREWS 7 AND THE SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER (OATH AND PRIESTHOOD)

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Oaths are used commonly to confirm statements. To give absolute assurance to the believer, God confirmed His promises with an oath. Hebrews 6:16-20 teaches “two unchangeable things.”<sup>1</sup> *First*, God made a “promise”; and, *second*, He confirmed the promise “with an oath.” Both the promise and the oath are the result of the unchangeable purpose of God. Every believer who lives expectantly in hope of eternal salvation is a secure and stable soul; his sure hope is Christ who has secured him. Christ Himself is the present and future safety of every believing soul. “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered [heaven] as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 6:19-20).<sup>2</sup> Previously the writer of Hebrews declared, “He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (5:10).

### CHRIST AND MELCHIZEDEK

In Hebrews 5:1-10 and 7:1-28 (cf. 5:1; 10:18), Christ Jesus is demonstrated to be superior to Aaron and his Levitical priesthood. Jesus is the perfect High Priest by virtue of His calling by God and His suffering.<sup>3</sup> He is a “high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” The central

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>2</sup> Lehman Strauss wrote insightfully, “The hope is called ‘an anchor of the soul.’ The anchor is frequently used by the classical writers as an accepted symbol of hope. A vessel that is not securely anchored is not expected to outlive the storm. There is little hope that its frail bark will reach port safely. By the same token, he who has not laid hold of the solid anchor, which is the hope of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, is at the mercy of the tempests.... What an anchor is to a vessel in a storm, so the hope of Christ’s return is to the Christian, in times of trial and stress. This hope is a refuge that saves from despair, enabling the ship to outlive the gale. Inasmuch as hope concerns the future, and the Christian’s hope is identified with the second coming of Christ, the child of God is ever looking forward. By looking forward he is kept from looking back. By looking upward he is kept from looking down. Thus he is held steadfast and secure; he is saved from drifting [“Our Only Hope,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (April-June 1963): 157].

<sup>3</sup> Christ’s life sufferings are the verification of His claims. His life sufferings demonstrated Himself as the substitute for sin. Christ did not earn righteousness by His suffering. The atonement is substitutionary because it is objectively directed toward God and the propitiation of His holy character and demands upon the sinner. It is vicarious in the sense that Christ is the substitute who bears the punishment rightly due sinners, their guilt being imputed to Him in such a way that He representatively bore their punishment. The non-atoning view is in accordance with the general idea of sacrifices in the Old Testament and is explicitly taught in the New Testament in such passages as John 1:29, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 9:28, and 1 Peter 2:24. Furthermore, the

plea of the epistle is for the believer to leave “the elementary teaching about Christ,” and to “press on to maturity” rather than remain in their present state or depart into unbelief (6:1). The believer is not to apostatize from the truth and privileges of the Gospel. The threat of apostasy was perceived as greater than that of the Galatians. The Galatian apostasy was the supplementing of faith by the works of the law, but the writer to the Hebrews addressed the temptation to renounce faith altogether by returning to Judaism. The theme, like that of Galatians (also Romans), is salvation by grace through faith in the sacrifice of Christ alone.<sup>4</sup>

The superiority of Christ is above the prophets (1:1-3), angels (1:4-14; 2:5-18), men (3:1-6; 4:2-10, 14-5:10), Aaronic priesthood (7:1-28), Old Covenant (8:1-13), and ceremonies (9:1-10:18) because He is the final revelation of God (1:2) and mediator of a new and better covenant (8:6). Christ is seen as the Redeemer, High Priest, and Immutable One (cf. 1:3; 2:17; 4:14-16; 7:25; 10:11-13; 13:8). The superiority of Christ (1:1-10:18) and the superiority of faith are dual themes (10:19-13:21).

### DIGRESSION CONCERNING FALLING AWAY

The mention of Jesus as “high priest” in 6:20 follows the initial declaration that the believer has eternal preservation because of Messiah’s eternal priesthood; the mention in 5:10 was briefly interrupted by the warning of falling away. The digression concerning falling away (5:12-6:20) encompasses an explanation of why the temptation to stumble or fall away spiritually is so perilous (5:11-14). The Hebrew believers had “become dull of hearing” to the full truth concerning the superiority of Christ’s priesthood; they “ought” to have been “teachers” but they had “need again” to be taught “the elementary principles of the oracles of God.” The remedy was to “leave the elementary [primary] teaching about the Christ and “press on to maturity” (6:1-3; cf. Phil. 3:12). “His specific desire is that they may be aroused to receive his teaching concerning the high priesthood of Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

The command to “press on to maturity” means to grow “in maturity of knowledge.” Erdman continued, “It denotes the condition of ‘fullgrown men’ to whom the writer has previously referred, men who can receive the deeper truths concerning Christ, in contrast with ‘babes’ who must be fed with ‘milk.’”<sup>6</sup> The six fundamental (i.e. “elementary”) truths in Hebrews 6:1-8 were being overemphasized by certain of the Hebrew Christians. The early church was suffering many hardships and temptations, and needed the sufficient fullness of truth to avoid the hopeless peril of falling away and to strengthen them through their various trials.<sup>7</sup>

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non-atoning view is sustained by the use of such prepositions as *pēri*, *hupēr*, and *anti*, which in numerous contexts support the idea of a divine substitute for the sinner in the person of Christ on the cross.

<sup>4</sup> Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews form a trilogy of the essence of faith alone.

<sup>5</sup> Charles R. Erdman, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1934), 67.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to a suffering people. Various temptations were prevalent, and the epistle provided teaching to help the anguished church endure (Heb. 12:1-2). There were instances of legal or official persecutions of Christians. Some were “prisoners” and others had their property seized (Heb. 10:34). It is likely that the writer of Hebrews was thinking of the expulsion of all Jews (including Christians; Acts 18:2) by the emperor Claudius which was around A.D. 49, or the Neronian persecution of Christians in A.D. 64. He could have even been thinking of the persecution of the apostles (Acts 4:3, 21; 5:18, 40-41; 12:1-3). If the Epistle to the Hebrews is dated after A.D. 64, then any of the above situations would have occupied the consciousness of the writer; if it was written before A.D. 64, then the other situations may apply. Not only the benediction in 13:24—“Those of Italy greet you”—but also the persecutions of A.D. 49 or A.D. 64 would apply, if the epistle was sent to Rome.

The “elementary teaching” was an essential foundation, but would not encourage spiritual progress.

All these truths are fundamental. As the author declares, they form “a foundation.” Yet he pleads with his readers to cease fixing their attention on those primary teachings in which in time past they have been well instructed, and to advance to higher stages of knowledge. “And this will we do,” the writer adds hopefully, “if God permit,” or with the blessing of God.

There is a dreadful alternative. If a person does not progress, he will relapse. If he fails to advance, he is in danger of going backward and of forsaking Christ altogether. Therefore the author solemnly warns his readers that if they have made a beginning in the Christian life and now turn from Christ and his gospel, they will find no other means of salvation. They never again can be brought to repentance....

This warning is to be taken in connection with the other similar warnings which express the main purpose of the epistle. It is a practical exhortation addressed to those in danger of neglecting, and so of losing, their knowledge of Christian truth. It is designed to keep the readers loyal to Christ and true to his gospel, as it points out the absolute hopelessness of apostasy.<sup>8</sup>

The seriousness of the situation is given in 6:4-8. The Christian either matures in his faith or falls away which inevitably results in the loss of blessing from God.<sup>9</sup> The perseverance of the saints or the security of the believer is not being questioned here. The passage is referring to a true believer: “those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (6:4-5).

Hebrews 6:6 refers to repentance (“from dead works” as in 6:1; cf. Mt. 3:8) not salvation: “and *then* have fallen away [*parapiptō*], it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.” Hebrews 6:4-8 does not indicate that a believer can lose his salvation. In fact, the writer stated the exact opposite in verse 9: “But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.” The “things that accompany salvation” are the fruit of salvation. Therefore, the text refers to the fruit of the Christian’s life and the rewards that are the result of salvation.<sup>10</sup>

The warning concerns the possibility of losing their reward (cf. Jn. 15:6-8; 1 Cor. 3:11-15). If the believer’s life brings forth fruit, he “receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned” (Heb. 6:7-8). The encouragement to persevere follows in 6:9-20; the Hebrew Christians were demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit and were to continue in diligence (6:10-12). The salvation of the Christian is secured by the promise of God which was confirmed by His own oath (6:12-18). They are to lay hold of the hope—Jesus Christ who is “a high priest forever” and “one which enters within the veil”—“as an anchor of the soul” (6:19-20).

<sup>8</sup> Erdman, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, gen. ed., Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 54.

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent study of the doctrine of rewards, see Paul N. Benware, *The Believer’s Payday* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2002).

## THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

Hebrews 7 resumes the theme concerning Melchizedek which was introduced in chapter 5. The writer already explained the significance of Christ being “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Hebrews 5:1-4 presented the Old Testament qualifications for a high priest which also demonstrated their imperfection (cf. 9:11-14; 10:1-4). The order of Melchizedek was proved to be superior to the Aaronic order. The writer then argued that Christ is the perfect priest (5:5-10).

The writer of Hebrews already commented, “Concerning him [Melchizedek] we have much to say” (5:11). The parenthesis (5:11-6:12) was a warning concerning immaturity followed by the teaching concerning Christ as forerunner (6:13-20). Beginning in chapter 7, the writer had prepared his readers for the next discussion concerning Christ as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The only Old Testament accounts of Melchizedek are recorded in Genesis 14:17-20 and again in Psalm 110:4. He is not mentioned again until the Book of Hebrews (5:6-11; 6:20-7:28). Nevertheless, God predestined the events of his life to be a type of the Messiah (cf. 7:3).

## IDENTIFYING TYPES

By its simplest definition, a type is predictive of something future (e.g. Leviticus and Hebrews). A type is predestined by God to represent the relationship that certain persons, institutions, or events possess that corresponds with a specific person, institution, or event in the future. According to Virkler,

Typology is based on the assumption that there is a pattern in God’s work throughout salvation history. God prefigured His redemptive work in the Old Testament, and fulfilled it in the New; in the Old Testament there are shadows of things which shall be more fully revealed in the New.<sup>11</sup>

One must exercise caution in trying to find an exact correspondence between something in the Old Testament and something similar in the New Testament. The danger of not exercising caution in types is not only allegorism, but also the credibility of the interpreter is in danger. Not every characteristic of a type may be the divine intent (one of the requirements of a legitimate type). Scripture must be the sole criteria for determining a biblical type.<sup>12</sup> Ramm listed three reasons for typological interpretation:<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 184.

<sup>12</sup> The value of understanding types is seen in the quotation of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15; it is an example of a literal event that is typical of a future New Testament event. The passage in Hosea refers to the historical exodus of Israel from out of Egypt. Israel (the national son) is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ (the unique Son). Not only did He go down to Egypt but also (as Israel) Christ is called out of it. The King of Israel comes out of Egypt, even as Moses led Israel out of Egypt. The intent of Hosea 11:1 is not changed in the New Testament. The prophecy is fulfilled in the life of Christ as He returns to Israel from out of Egypt.

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (1970; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 215-217.

- “The general relationship which the Old Testament sustains to the New is the very basis for such a study.”
- “Our Lord’s own use of the Old Testament is His invitation to us to find Him in the Old Testament.”
- “Even more specific is the vocabulary of the New Testament with reference to the nature of the Old.”

There is a difference between types, illustrations, and allegorizing. Zuck wrote,

An illustration...may be defined as a biblical person, event, or thing having historical reality, that pictures or is analogous to some corresponding spiritual truth in a natural and unforced way and is not explicitly designated in the New Testament as a type. In this definition an illustration has three of the six elements necessary for a type: correspondence or resemblance, historical reality, and divine design. However, illustrations are not predictive, they do not include a heightening or escalation, nor are they called types.<sup>14</sup>

Types and illustrations have correspondence or resemblance, whereas an allegory does not have natural correspondence but contains a hidden meaning within the biblical passage. Historical reality is characteristic of types and illustrations, but not an allegory. A type will contain resemblance with that which it prefigures or foreshadows (i.e. its “antitype”). An allegory contains a meaning hidden behind the text in contrast to predicting something in the future. Zuck stated,

In a type-antitype relationship there is heightening, whereas this is not true in either an illustration or allegorizing. Divine design is present in both types and illustrations, but not in allegorizing, which is the result of the interpreter’s imagination. A type is so designated in the New Testament, whereas this is not true of either an illustration or allegorizing.<sup>15</sup>

Scripture does employ riddles and enigmatic sayings (similar to normal speech), but whenever they are used the historical-grammatical context will alert the interpreter to this fact. However, some interpreters assume enigmatic sayings in contrast to meticulous detail that would demonstrate otherwise. The interpreter is not to eisegete meaning into the text. In fact, he is to abandon himself of presuppositions and biases in order to understand the intended meaning of the divine Author. Those who introduce a deeper sense and secondary meaning into the text, produce an element of obfuscation and confusion into biblical interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 1991), 176-177.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>16</sup> Four principles when interpreting types include: (1) Verify if a type is truly present. A genuine type will be identified as such in the New Testament; (2) Identify the main point of resemblance. Generally, the New Testament will demonstrate all the points of resemblance rather than requiring the interpreter’s judgment; (3) Identify contrasts or differences. Genuine types will have similarities, but some contain contrasts (e.g. Adam as a type of Christ), and, (4) Interpret a type as designated by the New Testament. Usually, the New Testament will provide the interpretation which leaves the interpreter to identify a kind of application [Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983, 1992), 259-266].

## IDENTIFICATION OF MELCHIZEDEK

Since his mention in Scripture is brief, Melchizedek is often considered an enigmatic figure.

One of the most interesting but least known characters in the Bible is the ancient priest named Melchizedek. He shows up only once during Abraham's life, but he became an archetype of the high priest that Jesus himself is most often compared to. Despite his remarkable association with Jesus, we have scant biographical data about him.<sup>17</sup>

Most critics identify Melchizedek as a Canaanite priest because both elements of the name, El and El Elyon, who Melchizedek served "occur as names of specific deities, the first in Ugaritic and the second in Phoenician; the Aram. inscription from Sujin [Syria] combines the two into a compound."<sup>18 19</sup> The same critics regard the Old Testament accounts of Melchizedek as syncretism of Canaanite worship with Yahwism which would result in the formation of the Davidic dynasty.<sup>20</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, when El is used with a definite article it describes the one true God. It can also be combined with adjectives to establish names of God, such as *El Shaddai* ("God of the mountain"), *El Elyon* ("God Almighty"), *El Gibbor* ("Mighty One"), *El Roi* ("God of Seeing"), etc. If El was a common term for divinity among the Hebrews, then they went beyond the common name El as a designation of the God of Israel.

It is no problem then that the Ugaritic texts use the root of El as the name for the chief god of the Canaanites. Melchizedek worshipped El Elyon as "the possessor of heaven and earth" which was contrary to the polytheistic belief of spirit and matter as co-eternal. Melchizedek worshipped the same God as Abraham which is evident from the tithe given to him (Gen. 14:20) and the rejection of the gift from the king of Sodom (14:23). Abraham referred to the God that he and Melchizedek worshipped as the same El Elyon. The patriarch regarded him as a priest-

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<sup>17</sup> Jonathan A. Michaels, ed., *Mysteries and Intrigues of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 126.

<sup>18</sup> Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955).

<sup>19</sup> Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 104.

<sup>20</sup> It would seem impossible to state that biblical writers never referred to contemporary mythology. However, when the sacred writers used pagan myths it was not the result of an influence of the pagan culture; rather, the references would likely seize the attention of the people since they were based upon familiar stories of their day (cf. Gen. 27; Isa. 51; Ps. 74; Rev. 12 as examples). It is not to say that the Israelites copied Canaanite thoughts and beliefs into their writings. Again, the allusions to familiar myths of the day would likely arouse the attention of their Canaanite neighbors. It would seem quite apparent that if the biblical writers borrowed from Canaanite thought and belief that one would expect to find other prevalent Canaanite myths in the earliest Scriptures. The mythical accounts are found in Scripture at fairly late dates when the beliefs of the Israelites were firmly grounded in the belief of the one true God who stood alone and lacked any equal to challenge His sovereignty. In the *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, the contributors provide the following conclusions: "We know that the Hebrews lived next to the Canaanites and were familiar with their lifestyle, world view, religion, and literature. Many times the Hebrews adopted the Canaanite religion.... Much of the prophets' stern warning was a reaction against the Canaanites. At times the Hebrews borrowed freely from the Canaanites. From which areas of Canaanite life did they borrow? Certainly from their architecture and their literary techniques.... But these borrowings were rarely religious. To be faithful to its God, Israel had to stand apart from its pagan neighbors. It dared not tamper with what God called loathsome and unacceptable to Him [J. I. Packer and M. C. Tenney, eds., *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), 147]."

king who held a greater rank than himself. Therefore, the text indicates that Melchizedek was a real man who serves as a type of Christ. There is no pedigree of father or mother, as with the Levitical priests, which also identifies him as a type of Christ.

According to Psalm 110:4, a Davidic king is approved by divine oath as “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The background for this approval is King David’s conquest of Jerusalem (c. 1000 B.C.) which entitled David and his dynasty to become heirs to Melchizedek’s dynasty of royal priest-kings (cf. Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:2).

Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus is viewed as the One to whom Yahweh in Psalm 110 says not only “Sit at my right hand”...but also “You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek”. David, by his conquest of Jerusalem, became heir to Melchizedek’s royal priesthood....<sup>21</sup>

The king who God approved is both David’s son (man) and Lord (God)—Jesus Christ (cf. Mk. 12:35). Jesus is the Davidic Messiah, and therefore “high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The kingdom will witness the dual offices of Jesus Christ as king and priest. Based upon the kingship of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18), the prophecy in Psalm 110:4, and the exposition of Hebrews 5-7 (specifically 7:3), the unavoidable conclusion is the superiority of Melchizedek to the patriarchal priest, Abraham, and by implication, to the Aaronic priesthood who are descended from Abraham. Prior to the inception of the Aaronic priesthood, Melchizedek already served as “a priest of God Most High.” The superiority of Christ’s priesthood to the Old Testament priesthood is clearly expressed (Heb. 5:6-11; 6:13-7:28).

The writer to the Hebrews describes superbly the kingly authority and permanence of Christ’s priesthood by the simple phrase “according to the order of Melchizedek” in 6:20 (Heb. 7:23-24). The Aaronic priesthood was not permanent since the priests, because of their sinfulness, were subject to death. Since Christ is priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” the everlasting continuance of His priestly office is expressed (in contrast to the Aaronic). “He is able to save forever...since He always lives to make intercession” (7:25). It is important to note that although the writer to the Hebrews is the only New Testament writer to name Christ as Priest, the concept of this ministry is expressed throughout because He gave “His life a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45); the atoning outcome of His death is reason alone to consider Him as High Priest.

In contrast to the view that Melchizedek was an actual historical man, some Bible scholars and students believe Melchizedek was an angel since it is stated “he abides a priest perpetually” (7:3). The word for “perpetually” is *diēnēkēs* which means “continuous” or “uninterrupted”;<sup>22</sup> it means the ministry of the Melchizedekian priesthood “does not necessarily indicate duration without any end but rather duration which lasts through the circumstances indicated in the particular case.”<sup>23</sup> The order of Melchizedek remains without cessation. “When Melchizedek is described as having “neither father nor mother, without a genealogy,” and having “neither beginning of days nor end of life” it is not suggested that he was a biological anomaly,

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<sup>21</sup> F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 79.

<sup>22</sup> William F. Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 195.

<sup>23</sup> Morris, *Hebrews*, 65.

or an angel in human guise.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, to view Melchizedek as the preincarnate Christ is to lose the typology. Similarly, Ironside wrote,

There is no reason to think of Melchisedec as a mysterious person, possibly supernatural, or even as some have supposed a preincarnate appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. If any ask, “Who is Melchisedec?” the only proper answer is “Melchisedec.”<sup>25</sup>

What is important in the account of Melchizedek is what is recorded and not the opposite. If there was more that needed to be said then the Scriptures would not be silent. Melchizedek simply appears among the living as “king of Salem and “priest of God Most High,” and then disappears from history. Bruce commented as follows:

...In the silences as well as in the statements—he is a fitting type of Christ; in fact, the record by the things it says of him and by the things it does not say has assimilated him to the Son of God. It is the eternal being of the Son of God that is here in view; not His human life.... But in his eternal being the Son of God has really, as Melchizedek has typically, “neither beginning of days nor end of life”; and more especially now, exalted at the right hand of God, he “remains a priest in perpetuity.” Melchizedek remains a priest continually for the duration of his appearance in the biblical narrative; but in the antitype Christ remains a priest continually without qualification. And it is not the type which determines the antitype, but the antitype which determines the type; Jesus is not portrayed after the pattern of Melchizedek, but Melchizedek is “made conformable to the Son of God.”<sup>26</sup>

The writer here believes all the evidence to favor Melchizedek as type and to identify him as an angel or Christophany is entirely opposed with the writer’s argument to the Hebrews. It is an integral component of the writer’s argument that Melchizedek is “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but *made like the Son of God*” (7:3; emphasis added).

### **MELCHIZEDEK AS TYPE (7:1-10)**

The writer of Hebrews referred to the account of Melchizedek in Genesis 14:17-20 for his descriptions and comparisons to Christ (7:1-10). Four details from the Genesis narrative are emphasized. The *first* detail is his name and title. Melchizedek’s title was “king of Salem” (early name of Jerusalem which appears as early as 1400 B.C. in the Tell-el-Amarna letters; cf. Ps. 76:2). The *second* detail emphasized is “priest of the Most High God.” He is a type of Christ since he held dual offices of king and priest (cf. Zech. 6:12-13); his name meaning “king of

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<sup>24</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 159.

<sup>25</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Hebrews*, rev. ed., Ironside Commentaries (1932; reprint, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1996), 69.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 160.

righteousness” is reminiscent of Isaiah 11:5 and his title, King of Salem (sc. “king of peace”), is reminiscent of Isaiah 11:6-9.<sup>27</sup>

The *third* detail emphasized is his blessing of Abraham. The patriarch met Melchizedek after returning from a military victory and “apportioned a tenth part of all *the spoils*” (7:2). After Abraham’s return “from the defeat of Chedorlaomar and the kings who were with him,”<sup>28</sup> Melchizedek came out to meet Abraham (Gen. 14:18).<sup>29</sup> He brought out “bread and wine” (i.e. memorials of sacrifice) for the exhausted men and blessed Abraham as a spiritual brother (14:18-19). Abraham responded to the blessing upon himself and God by giving Melchizedek “a tenth part of all *the spoils*” taken from the invading armies (14:19). The tithe is the *fourth* detail emphasized from the Genesis narrative. Hebrews 7:7 records the significance of this tithe: “But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.” The tithe of Abraham to Melchizedek is expanded in Hebrews 7:4, 6, 8-10; it indicated the superiority of the king-priest to Abraham.

Melchizedek was “made like the Son of God” (7:3) which meant even in the Old Testament there was a superior priesthood than the one beginning with Aaron.<sup>30</sup> Abraham is the father of the child of promise, Isaac (Gen. 18:10-14; 21:1-8; Gal. 5:28), and Jacob, who God would choose to give His blessing (Gen. 25:19-34; 32:9; 50:24; Mal. 1:2-3). Levi is born the third son of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 29:34; 35:23; Exod. 1:2; 1 Chron. 2:1); he is still in Abraham’s loins when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (since the lesser always pays tithes to the greater, as in Hebrews 7:4-10).

God’s law designated “every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to [Him]” (5:1). The priests were men chosen of the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron. The priest does not take “the honor to himself, but *receives it* when he is called by God, even as Aaron was” (5:4). The priests “have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people” (7:5). The Jewish people and priests trace their heritage to Abraham. When Melchizedek, “the one whose genealogy is not traced from them” (7:6), received the tithe from Abraham, the former had no genealogical relation to the chosen people. However, Abraham recognized a non-Jewish priest as his superior (7:4-6a). Melchizedek, then, blessed Abraham which was an action of the greater to the lesser (7:6b-7).

In the Aaronic priesthood, the “mortal men” received the tithes, but their priestly ministry ended when they inevitably died. Since there is no mention of his birth, death, or genealogy, Melchizedek “abides a priest perpetually” to the extent that the Old Testament account is concerned. The Melchizedekian priesthood is described in a manner that indicates it is perpetual (7:8). God’s law required Levites to be given tithes from the rest of Israel. Abraham, as the patriarch of Israel, gave Melchizedek the tithes which means the Aaronic priesthood, “so to

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<sup>27</sup> Isaiah 11 presents Christ as the rightful heir of David, that is, the Messiah-King. The emphasis is upon the righteousness which will be characteristic of His kingdom (cf. Ps. 85:10b where the psalmist wrote, “righteousness and peace have kissed each other”).

<sup>28</sup> The victory is a result of the covenantal promise of God (Gen. 12:1-3).

<sup>29</sup> Beginning with Genesis 14:17, there is an obvious chiasm between the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. Both go out to meet Abraham after the battle (14:17-18), but only Melchizedek brings “bread and wine” (14:18). Abraham and God are blessed by the king of Salem, and then Abraham gives Melchizedek a tithe (14:19-20). The king of Sodom offered wealth to Abraham for the people (14:21). Abraham recognized that God blessed him with the victory and swore an oath to God that he would take nothing that belonged to the king of Sodom, lest he take credit for the victory (14:22-24).

<sup>30</sup> Aaron was the elder son of Amram and Jochebed. His father belonged to the tribal family of Kohath, the son of Levi (Exod. 6:16), which meant Amram was a grandson of Levi.

speak,” paid tithes to him (7:9).<sup>31</sup> Abraham’s actions established the Melchizedek priesthood as superior to all of his descendants, which would include the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron.

### **SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD (7:11-28)**

The fact that Christ is “another [one of a different kind] priest...according to the order of Melchizedek” (7:11) has several implications. First, it indicates the imperfection of the Aaronic priesthood (7:11-14) since there would be no need for the Melchizedekian if the other was capable of producing the holiness that God demands. “Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need *was there* for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated to the order of Aaron?” (7:11). If the Levitical priests functioning under the Law could have created perfection, there would be no need for “another priest.” The quotation of Psalm 110:4 revealed the imperfection of the Levitical priesthood. The argument of Hebrews 7:11-19 is to reveal the need and benefit of a better priesthood.

The “Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12); the problem was the imperfection of the priests who were inseparably connected to the Mosaic Law. The Melchizedekian priesthood indicated a change, “and of necessity there takes place a change of law also” (7:12). Paul stated, “Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24).

The parentheses throughout the Book of Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:7-19; 4:11-13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-31; 12:25-29) are progressive warnings to those who wanted to express their Jewish heritage and nationality that was contrary to faith in Christ. It was essential that the Hebrew Christians recognize that Christ’s death rendered the Law inoperative and was no longer in effect. The Mosaic Law in its totality (including the Levitical priesthood) is no longer authoritative in the life of the believer who lives by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 7:1-6). Believers “also were made to die to the Law through the Body of Christ” (7:4). “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4).

The Mosaic Law formed the basis of the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:11-19). The inseparable connection between the Mosaic Law and the imperfect Levitical priesthood required a new priesthood and “a change of law also.” Christ “belongs to another tribe” (7:13), Judah (Mt. 1:1-16; Lk. 3:23-38; Rev. 5:5), as opposed to the priestly tribe of Levi. If the Mosaic Law was still operative, then Christ could not be High Priest since He is from the tribe of Judah, “a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests” (Heb. 7:14). According to the Mosaic Law, Christ could not be “a great high priest” for the believer (4:14), unless He was from a different priesthood which was possible according to the order of Melchizedek. The basis of the new and better priesthood in the order of Melchizedek is the “setting aside” of the Mosaic Law (including the Levitical priesthood). “For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness” (Heb. 7:18). The Levitical priests interceded and sacrificed for those obedient to the Law, but Christ now ministers to those who live by grace through faith.

The benefit of the new priesthood is that it is based on Messiah’s “indestructible life” (7:16). “Every act of His holy and blessed priesthood, every application of the fruits of His

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<sup>31</sup> The unborn Levi, and unformed Levitical priesthood, paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham.

eternal redemption, is wrought in **the power of an endless life.**<sup>32</sup> There is no record of Melchizedek's "beginning of days nor end of life" (7:3), and there is no end to the life and priesthood of Christ (7:15-17). The ministry of a Levitical priest ended upon his death, but Christ has "the power of an indestructible life" or "authority of endless duration,"<sup>33</sup> which qualifies Him to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. There are no limits to Christ's priesthood, and therefore no limits to Him introducing a perfect state for those who are under grace and live by faith.

Furthermore, the commandments of the Mosaic Law have been set aside and "there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which [believers] draw nigh to God" (7:18-19). Christ can accomplish what the Law could never do, that is, make sinners perfect. Although "the Law made nothing perfect," it was effectual for revealing man's total depravity and need for a Savior. Paul wrote, "I would not have come to know sin except through the Law" (Rom. 7:7). The Levitical sacrifices, however, could never provide assurance of salvation since they were repeated continually as they could never provide a final solution to the problem of sin. There was no Old Testament sacrifice that was a final substitution on the sinner's behalf.

On the other hand, Christ is the perfect substitute; the innocent takes the sinner's guilt and imputes His righteousness through a faith relationship in a legal transaction ordained by the Father (cf. Lev. 1:4; Isa. 53:6, 10-11; Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Jn. 10:11; Rom. 5:6, 15; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 2:9). The grace of God ordained the death of Christ as the perfect and final substitute for the sinner; through His death, Christ did what the sinner could never do for himself.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, any synergistic views of salvation (sc. man can assist, or collaborate with, God in his salvation) do not comprehend the benefits of the death of Christ; the individual believing in synergism can never be "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20) and "raised up with Christ" (Col. 3:1) to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Christ gives "a better hope" because His death is the final substitution for sin. Romans 7 details the conflict that arises from attempting to please God solely through the Law. By contrast, Romans 8 describes the deliverance from the bondage of sin "for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The Old Testament sacrifices and feasts were inseparably connected to the Law which was the schoolmaster to salvation solely by faith in the sacrifice of Christ. The Levitical priesthood actually prevented believers from drawing near to God because the sacrifices were continually offered and the Holy of Holies (where God Himself would dwell) was separated from the Holy Place by a veil. Christ the perfect priest allows believers to "draw near to God" "with confidence to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16; cf. Rom. 5:1-2).

The writer of Hebrews has provided a more quantitative emphasis upon the similarity of Christ to Melchizedek since his argument is historically based on two priesthoods in the Old Testament.<sup>35</sup> The quotation of Psalm 110:4 is continuous (cf. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 17, 21) throughout his argument since it confirmed the perpetual priesthood of Messiah. In addition to

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1894; reprint, Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1993), 260.

<sup>33</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1855), 162.

<sup>34</sup> If the sinner dies apart from the love of God through faith in Christ, the Father's holiness and justice demands eternal death from the unbeliever. Propitiation demonstrates the love and holiness of God. Apart from the provision of Christ, the sinner will endure eternally the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18). God demonstrated His love by ordaining Christ as the sinner's substitute (Rom. 5:8). The sinner appropriates God's provision, and God is the "just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (3:26).

<sup>35</sup> A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (1963; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 250.

his description and comparison of Melchizedek with Christ as a superior high priest, “there was the solemnity of the oath by which he [Christ] was set apart to the office.”<sup>36</sup> Hebrews 7:20-22 emphasizes the divine oath which made Christ “a priest forever.” “Sometimes the writer of Hebrews puts the stress on the oath, at other times on the fact that God will not repent, or on the priesthood, or on the ‘forever,’ or ‘on the order of Melchizedek.’”<sup>37</sup> Hebrews 7:23-25 emphasizes the permanence of Christ’s eternal priesthood. Again, the priesthood of Christ is presented as better than the Levitical priesthood.

The first coming of Christ to Earth was to be obedient unto death. Since Christ was obedient and faithful unto death, He became the sinner’s substitute under the wrath of God, but He is sinless, and therefore, rose from the grave and ascended to the Father, returning to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was created (cf. Jn. 17:5). Following His ascension, Jesus Christ entered the heavenly throne room and was declared the *Son of Man* (i.e., the Son relating to mankind who was a partaker of humanity; Heb. 2:14). The *Son of Man* approached the *Ancient of Days* to be exalted and glorified (Jn. 13:31-32; cf. Phil. 2:8-11; Heb. 12:2). Presently, the *Son of Man* is seated at His Father’s right hand (Ps. 110:1) which occurred after Jesus was presented as the *Son of Man* to His Father (Dan. 7:13-14).

Following the *Son of Man*’s presentation to the *Ancient of Days*, Christ entered the Holy of Holies through (by means of) His own blood, and is now seated at His Father’s right hand. All worldwide authority is given to Jesus, the *Son of Man*. The Father has divinely directed for the *Son of Man* to co-reign with Him over all creation (Ps. 110:1; Dan. 7:13-14; Eph. 1:20-22). At the close of the tribulation, the *Son of Man* will depart from the heavenly throne room of the *Ancient of Days* and will return to Earth in power and glory to reign historically and visibly as Messiah upon the throne of David.<sup>38</sup>

Jesus Christ is the “king of righteousness” and “king of peace” which Melchizedek typified (7:2; cf. Isa. 11:4-9). When Christ returns to Earth at “the end of the age” (Mt. 24:3), it will be to judge wickedness and establish the Kingdom age wherein He will reign visibly as both king and priest (Mt. 24:37-25:46; Rev. 19:11-21). The crowning of Joshua foreshadows the Kingdom age when Messiah “whose name is Branch...will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between his offices” (6:13).<sup>39</sup> The prophet Zechariah explicitly described this coming day of Christ as King and Priest (Zech. 6:9-15).<sup>40</sup> The expected fulfillment of the promise is an encouragement that believers will “completely obey the LORD your God.”

There are many passages which emphasize the ascension of Christ and his position at His Father’s right hand, but the most important sole value of the Book of Hebrews is the primary teaching concerning His present ministry and priesthood (of course, Jn. 14:1-3 and Rom. 8:34

<sup>36</sup> Barnes, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 163.

<sup>37</sup> Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 249.

<sup>38</sup> Ron J. Bigalke Jr., “Government of the Future,” in *One World: Economy, Government, and Religion in the Last Days*, gen. ed. Ron J. Bigalke Jr. (Springfield, MO: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Press, 2005), 221-222.

<sup>39</sup> Ordinarily, priests are not crowned as king. Peace will exist between the two offices of king and priest because they are united in one Person, Jesus Christ.

<sup>40</sup> Merrill F. Unger, “Melchizedek,” in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Roland Kenneth Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 832.

are exceptions). The quotation and explanation of Psalm 110:4 in Hebrews are important to understand because it gives added details concerning the believer's assurance of salvation in Christ. A promise connected to an oath confirms the immutability of God's mind (cf. Heb. 6:17). The Levitical high priest ministered to believers who were obedient to the ordinances and sacrifices of the Old Covenant, but Christ, in perfect degree, ministers to those under grace. Christ is a superior High Priest because no earthly high priest could minister beyond mercy and sympathy through the blood of the sacrifice. The Old Testament believer who witnessed the beginning of the "stewardship of God's grace" (Eph. 3:2) and the end of the Old Testament sacrifices would have received great assurance from the High Priest, who "abides forever" and "holds His priesthood permanently" (Heb. 7:24).

By His commandment in the Mosaic Law, God instituted the Levitical priesthood. One occupied an office in the Levitical priesthood by belonging to the tribe of Levi. Christ assumed His office as priest because "the LORD has sworn" that Christ is "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" and He "will not change His mind" (7:17, 21). Therefore, "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant" (7:22).<sup>41 42</sup> Delitzsch wrote, "He is a priest by virtue of the promise of God confirmed by an oath. The oath is not merely a pledge of fulfillment of the promise, but also a seal of the high significance of its purport. God the absolutely truthful One (Num. 13:19) swears...."<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to the ever changing Levitical priesthood, the immutable oath which God swore is assurance that Christ's priesthood will never cease. The Mosaic Covenant<sup>44</sup> could not

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<sup>41</sup> The "better covenant" is the New Covenant recorded in Jeremiah 31:31-37 (cf. Isa. 55:3; 59:21; 61:8-9; Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 16:60; 34:25-31; 37:26-28; Rom. 11:25-27; Heb. 8:7-9:1; 10:16-17). There are eight main provisions of this covenant. First, it is an unconditional covenant between God and Israel (Jer. 31:31). Second, it is distinct from the Mosaic Covenant (Jer. 31:32). Third, it promises the regeneration of Israel (Jer. 32:33; Isa. 59:21). Fourth, the regeneration of Israel would be universal among the Jews (Jer. 31:34; Isa. 61:9; Rom. 11:25-27). Fifth, it would provide a provision for permanent forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34). Sixth, the provision is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Jer. 32:41; Isa. 61:8; Ezek. 34:25-27). Seventh, Israel is promised many material blessings (Jer. 32:41; Isa. 61:8; Ezek. 34:25-27). Eighth, it will provide for a new Temple (Ezek. 37:26-28) [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1989), 586-587]. The New Covenant amplifies the blessing aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant, particularly in relation to salvation. The covenant is not an elaboration of the Mosaic Covenant since it ultimately replaced the Law (Jer. 31:31-32; Rom. 6:14-15).

<sup>42</sup> The relationship of the church to the New Covenant has caused some confusion since the prophet Jeremiah specified that the covenant is with Israel, not with the church. Nevertheless, there are numerous passages that connect the New Covenant with the church (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 7:22; 8:6-13; 9:15; 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20). Scripture is clear on the following: Israel, not the church, will fulfill the New Covenant. However, the church does partake of the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic and New Covenants (Rom. 15:27). Some have tried to teach there are two New Covenants: one made with Israel and one made with the church. The two New Covenants view is quite difficult to defend from the Scriptures. Others have tried to teach that there is only one covenant, but that there are two aspects of the covenant. The solution to the problem is to be found in Ephesians 2:11-16 and 3:5-6. The two Ephesians passages teach that God made four unconditional covenants (Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New) with Israel. It is through these four covenants that all of God's spiritual blessings will be mediated.

<sup>43</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. Francis Bolton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866-1891; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 5:697.

<sup>44</sup> The Mosaic Covenant was the "barrier of the dividing wall" between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). The Law prohibited the Gentiles from experiencing the blessing of the four unconditional covenants. For a Gentile to experience the blessings of the four unconditional covenants, he had to submit himself completely to the Mosaic Law. Since this was not possible because of the weakness of human flesh, the Gentiles were "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise" (2:12). Christ death abolished the "barrier of the dividing wall" and ratified the New Covenant (Lk. 22:20). The church celebrates the New Covenant and the

be sustained by the Levitical priesthood, but the “guarantee [“surety,” KJV] of a better covenant” is sustained by the priesthood of Jesus. The sinlessness of Christ means He alone can give assurance of an unending relationship between the God and the redeemed. The assurance of salvation for the believer is based on Christ the Priest—who is perfect—and gives His people confidence to “draw near to God through Him.” Explaining Hebrews 7:22, Barnes wrote,

It properly means, a bondsman; one who pledges his name, property, or influence, that a certain thing shall be done...Jesus is the ‘security’ or the bondsman...he will maintain the covenant and be true to the promise which he makes....

It cannot be that he becomes responsible for the divine conduct in any way—for no such responsibility is needed or possible. But it must mean that he is the security or bondsman on the part of man. He is the pledge that we shall be saved. He becomes responsible, so to speak, to law and justice, that no injury shall be done by our salvation, though we are sinners. He is not a security that we shall be saved *at any rate*, without holiness, repentance, faith, or true religion—for he never could enter into a suretyship of that kind: but his suretyship extends to this point, that the law shall be honoured; that all its demands shall be met; that we may be saved though we have violated it; and that its terrific penalty shall not fall upon us.<sup>45</sup>

...no man can rely on the suretyship of Jesus but he who expects salvation on the terms of the gospel. The suretyship is not all that he shall be saved in his sins, or that he shall enter heaven no matter what life he leads; it is only that *if* he believes, repents, and is saved, no injury shall be done to the universe; no dishonour to the law [i.e. “no injury shall result from the pardon and salvation of the sinner”]. For this the Lord Jesus is responsible.... The former covenant...was administered through the instrumentality of the Levitical priesthood, this by the Son of God; that was transitory and changing, this is permanent and eternal.<sup>46</sup>

The Levitical priesthood “existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing” (7:23). The ministry of each priest was temporary because it was limited by his own mortality. Christ, “on the other hand...abides forever” and “holds His priesthood permanently” (7:24). Since He is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1 Tim. 1:17), Christ’s priesthood is permanent.

The Christian never needs to doubt the assurance of his salvation because God’s provision is a surety. Christ will never change His ministry. Those who are once justified, remain always justified because the Savior “always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb.

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ratifying of it through the death of Christ (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Through Christ the church partakes of the spiritual blessings of the covenant (Rom. 11:28-29; 11:17; Eph. 1:3), but it is the nation of Israel who will receive the material and national promises. The relationship of the church to the New Covenant is explained in Galatians 3:13-14. All of the biblical covenants contain two types of promises: physical and spiritual. The physical promises are, and will continue to be, fulfilled and limited to Israel. Nevertheless, some of the spiritual blessings of the covenants will extend to the Gentiles. Since the death of Christ is the basis of salvation for all people, for all time, the church has become a partaker of the Jewish spiritual blessings. The church does not assume fulfillment of the Jewish covenants; only Israel will fulfill the New Covenant as promised in the Old Testament. The New Covenant was given and will be fulfilled by Israel. The church participates in the promises but it is not possible for her to fulfill the covenants given to Israel.

<sup>45</sup> Barnes, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 264.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

7:25). Nothing in the present or future will separate those Christ has justified in the past (Rom. 8:29-39). Christ is the eternal priest of the believer who is always active in His ministry to give surety of salvation to those who trust in Him alone. Dr. Griffith Thomas commented,

There is one and only one class of people to whom this applies—He is able to save completely “them that come unto God by Him.” The phrase “them that come,” is literally “them that draw near” or “them that come right up.” It is found seven times in Hebrews (4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:18, 22). It is the word for worshippers, meaning those who enter into the presence of God and realize their union and communion with Him. It includes acceptance and access, and implies assurance within and the right to the fullest possible appeal.<sup>47</sup>

The final verses (26-28) of Hebrews 7 form a summary of what the writer has been teaching about Christ as a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Verses 26-28 also form the background for 8:1-10:31 which emphasize the better covenant (8:1-9:28) and the better sacrifice (10:1-31) of Christ. Perseverance of the saints<sup>48</sup> comes from the confidence that Christ is the only “holy, innocent, undefiled” High Priest (7:26; cf. Col. 1:21-22) and His position is preeminent (“exalted above the heavens”). By contrast, the Levitical priests were themselves sinners and in need of daily sacrifices so they could intercede for the people before God. The continual offering of sacrifices indicates the fundamental lack of efficacy of those sacrifices. Hebrews 10:1-4 (cf. 9:9) states, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” “[Christ] does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (7:27). His once-for-all sacrifice abolished the Levitical priesthood because it is efficacious (the superiority of His sacrifice is explained in 9:11-15 and 10:11-14).

The Mosaic Law appointed “men as high priests who are weak.” Christ is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek because of the oath, “which came after the Law,” that God swore (7:28). God’s oath supersedes the Law meaning Christ’s priesthood is better than the Aaronic priesthood and the totality of the Law. The sworn oath of God constituted the Son as High Priest whose character is “perfect forever.” Since Christ is the perfect High Priest, then He is the perfect and only way to the Father (cf. Jn. 14:6). Dr. McGee aptly summarized the contrasts between the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Melchizedek as follows:

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<sup>47</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 95.

<sup>48</sup> The term “security” is a more cultural term which often leads to a misconception of surety of ultimate salvation to the exclusion of the character of one’s life. Arminians condemn the doctrine since they believe it leads to complacency which is certainly true if one does not understand biblical teaching about the believer’s perseverance. Security of the believer should not be thought as surety of salvation to the exclusion of one’s character; rather, assurance of salvation is best expressed by the term perseverance which indicates effort toward sanctification. Of course, Romans 8:1 states, “There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” because justification is a once-for-all act on the part of God. However, it is impossible for a person who is truly justified to continue in sin (cf. Rom. 6). Justification is the judicial basis for the practical work of sanctification. Assurance of salvation is the result of believing salvation is by grace; it is unconditional justification meaning salvation is permanent (1 Jn. 5:13-21). Perseverance of the saints is related to election, justification, and sanctification. All whom God “foreknew” and “predestined” are “also glorified” (Rom. 8:29-30). Therefore, justification is unconditional and nothing can revoke it (8:31-39). God “began a good work” within the believer, and He “will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6; cf. Rom. 8:28).

Law vs. Power  
*(law restrains—power enables)*  
 Commandment (*external*) vs. Life (*internal*)  
 Carnal (*flesh*) vs. Endless (*eternal life*)  
 Changing vs. Unchanging  
 Weakness and unprofitableness vs. Nigh to God  
 Nothing perfect vs. Better hope<sup>49</sup>

### THE SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

As the Great High Priest, Christ overshadows Aaron and his successors (i.e. the lesser priests; Heb. 4:14-7:28). Christ's superiority to Aaron is because He mediates a better priesthood (4:14-7:28), better covenant (8:1-9:28), and better sacrifice (10:1-31) which produces a better way to God, that is, through faith (10:32-12:29). Although the Old Covenant was "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12), it was "weak as it was through the flesh" (8:3). However, the New Covenant is better (Heb. 8:6) because of its eternal Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is superior in every way. Christ is a living priest (7:1-17) constituted by an oath (7:18-25; cf. Acts 2:30). Hebrews 7:26-28 demonstrates His superiority in relation to sacrifice.

The priesthood of Messiah assures the fulfillment "of a better covenant" (7:22) which means the realization of the Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New Covenants. Although "the former priests...existed in greater numbers," the Messiah "holds his priesthood permanently" (7:23-24). Since Christ is both divine and human, He is qualified to minister as High Priest and his capacity is superior to the Aaronic priesthood. His ministry cannot be terminated by death (7:24). Furthermore, the scope of His ministry is in the heavenly sanctuary, that is, the very presence of God (9:11-12). His sacrifice never needs to be repeated (9:15; 10:10, 19). It should be noted that under the Mosaic Covenant it was necessary for the sacrificial blood, which was shed in the court, to be brought then into the Holy of Holies. However, this was not required for the New Covenant. Christ accomplished the one oblation that Aaron and his sons did in two acts, that is, the slaying of the sacrifice and the offering of the blood in the Holy of Holies.

The Old Testament high priest entered into the Holy of Holies annually with the expiatory blood. However, Christ entered the Holy of Holies "through" [*dia*] (preposition with a genitive), or by virtue, of His own blood (Heb. 9:12; 13:12). Christ entered into heaven through His blood, and not with His literal blood (Heb. 9:25, 10:19; 13:20) ("with" [*en*] and the locative "blood" [*haimati*]). Christ entered after securing (aorist middle participle, "obtained" [*hēuramenos*]) eternal redemption. The eternal redemption He has purchased is realized only by faith (viz. the same kind [content being different] of faith exercised by Old Testament saints).

Hebrews 9:12 states through His shed blood Christ ascended into heaven. Christ, as the elect's High Priest, who was entirely without sin, did not need to bring any blood into the heavenly sanctuary. The blood was the proof indisputable that He, the sinner's substitute had truly died. He was both the offering and the offerer, completely acceptable to God, and effectual to remove the sins under the law and under grace (9:15; 10:10, 19). Christ presented Himself in heaven as the risen Savior having complete right of entrance there. Jesus serves effectively as the believer's High Priest because He has made "propitiation for the sins of the people" (2:17) and has "obtained eternal redemption" (9:12) for His people. The merits of His once-for-all sacrifice make the Lord Jesus Christ the perfect and only intercessor for the believer.

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<sup>49</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Hebrews—Volume I* (Pasadena: Thru the Bible Books, 1978), 131.

God's "word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever" (7:28). The oath of God was referenced in 7:21 which quoted from Psalm 110:4. Human priesthood has been replaced by the divine, perpetual priesthood of Messiah. "Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25). Ultimate salvation is assured because of the continual application of the merits of the High Priest's own blood to those who are under grace and live by faith.

The Priesthood, which is the theme of Hebrews, seems to refer specifically, if not exclusively, to the prevention of sin, while the Advocacy, which is theme of the First Epistle of John, seems to refer mainly, if not exclusively to its cure. Thus, there is no need for the believer to sin (I John 2:1), and the Priesthood has been provided to prevent this (Heb. 9:24); but if he should sin (I John 2:2) there is an Advocate provided, who, while not showing any leniency ("the righteous"), will nevertheless provide an absolute sufficiency of restoration.<sup>50</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The significance of the High Priest's intercession is given in 7:25. Ultimate salvation is secure through the continual application to each believer the merits of the own blood of the High Priest. It is when the just who live by faith confess their sins, "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). Christ Jesus is "the source of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9) because His perfect sacrifice never needs to be repeated (7:27; 9:12, 25-26, 28; 10:10, 14) and because His ministry as intercessor is "according to the power of an indestructible life" (5:6; 6:20; 7:3, 8, 16-17, 21, 24-25, 28; cf. Ps. 110:4).

A forerunner was an individual who gave assistance to a vessel. The forerunner would leave the ship close to port, wade through the water to reach shore, and then fasten a rope to a large permanent rock which would allow the vessel to reach port safely. A forerunner was also an advanced scout who would warn of an army making a sudden attack (cf. Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12). It could also be used as a metaphor for the first ripe fruit (Numb. 13:20; Isa. 28:4 in the Septuagint; cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-23). The Greek term is *prōdrōmōs* which basically means "one who runs ahead."

The priesthood which began with Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17-20) has reached its fulfillment in Christ who has run ahead into heaven "within the veil" (Heb. 6:19) for the believer (6:20). Since he is already in the very presence of God the Father as the believer's High Priest, "we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus...having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (10:19-22). The presence of Christ in heaven is the guarantee and hope that all His people will also be there when He returns. Jesus has already gone to prepare a dwelling place for the believer (Jn. 14:1-3). He promised, "'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also' (14:3). It is Jesus as High Priest who is "within the veil" and who is coming to reign as King who sustains His people through the very oath God swore. Expounding upon the resolute hope of the Christian, Lehman Strauss wrote the following:

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<sup>50</sup> Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews*, 95.

Christ's presence in heaven, and the hope of His coming again, are warrant enough for assurance, and adequate ground for steadfast endurance. The tendencies of our day are toward drifting. We urgently need the divine anchor of the soul to hold us steady, "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58). Since Christ our Forerunner has left the ship, and fastened the anchor to the throne of God in the Holy of holies, we shall be kept steadfast. "We have an anchor that keeps the soul, steadfast and sure while the billows roll, fastened to the Rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love."<sup>51</sup>

—End—

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<sup>51</sup> Strauss, "Our Only Hope," 157-158.