

Written by Brad Lippincott; May 2007: Hebrews 7:1-19.

Introduction

The topic of this research paper is Hebrews 7:1-19. It is in this section that the priesthood of Melchizedek is compared to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The writer chose this section because it appears to be the most challenging. If something is challenging, more can be learned. This paper is to investigate the relation, if there is any, between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ. This study will not focus on issues such as Salem, the origin of Melchizedek, or if here was an alternate name for Jerusalem. This study is to try to maintain the focus on issues related to Hebrews chapter 7:1-19, which includes Melchizedek, Jesus Christ, and priesthood.

There are a couple of issues that must take notice before the study continues. The writer cites from the NASB translation in this paper. In this paper the term "Levitical Priesthood" is equavelent with the term "Aaronic priesthood"

Part of the controversy of the book of Hebrews surrounds Melchizedek. It is questioned if Melchizedek is a type when compared to Jesus Christ. The following is a definition of type:

Type, Typology defined:

From the Greek word for form or pattern, which in biblical times denoted both the original model or prototype and the copy that resulted. In the NT the latter was labeled the anti-type, and this was especially used in too directions: (1) the correspondence between two historical situations like the flood and baptism (1 Pet. 3:21) or two figures like Adam and Christ (Rom 5:14); (2) the correspondence between the heavenly pattern and its earthly counterpart, e.g., the divine original behind the earthly tent/tabernacle (Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5; 9:24). There are several categories - persons (Adam, Melchizedek), events (flood, brazen serpent), institutions (feast), places (Jerusalem, Zion), objects (altar of burnt offering, incense), offices (prophet, priest, king)...It is important to distinguish types from symbol and allegory. A symbol has a meaning apart from

its normal semantic field and goes beyond it to stand for an abstract concept, eg., cross = life, fire = judgment. Allegory is a series of metaphors in which each one adds an element to form a composite picture of the message; e.g., in the good shepherd allegory (John 10) each part carries meaning. Typology, however, deals with the principle of analogous fulfillment.¹

This definition as quoted above is the standard definition for the word “type” in the framework of this paper. One of the goals of this research is to find out if Melchizedek is a type.

When the author of Hebrews wrote chapter 7 he borrowed much of his material from Genesis 14:17-21 and Psalm 110:1-4. This study is now going to focus on the passages found in Genesis 14:17-21 and Psalm 110:1-4.

Psalm 110

The writer believes it is best to start this study from Psalm 110. It is Hebrews 7:17 that a direct quote from Psalm 110:4 is found. Hebrews 7:17 and Psalm 110:4 both state: "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek". From a perspective on the book of Psalms what exactly is the meaning of "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4)? This writer believes that the keys to understanding Psalm 110 as related to the book of Hebrews are within Psalm 110:1-4.

One interpretation of Psalm 110 makes a Christological view of Psalms 110:1-4. According to this interpretation Christ is on the divine throne (Ps 110:1) and is in a Priesthood (Ps 110:4).²

¹ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 1222.

² W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms Vol. I* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1939), 97.

There is another interpretation of Psalms 110 which is less Christological.

Concerning Psalm 110:1-3 Arthur Weisler writes:

God calls upon the king to occupy the place of honour at his right hand. By this his kingship is authorized by God; the earthly ruler is shown to be the vice-regent of God, and his office is proved to function in virtue of the divine will. In this religious establishment of the kingship as an institution willed and ordained by God lay its dignity and strength, but also its obligation and responsibility to its divine Lord. . . . At the same time God promises the king that he will be victorious over his enemies. Yahweh himself is the supreme commander; he will conquer the hostile nations and will force them to acknowledge the king.³

Weiser did not individually interpret individual verses of Psalm 110, but grouped Psalm 110:1-3 together. In the commentary, as cited above, Weiser did not elaborate on what he meant by the phrase "vice-regent of God". The fact that "vice-regent" was not defined leaves a cloud of confusion and an endless list of possibilities of who the "vice-regent" could be. Some may believe that the "vice-regent" is referring to themselves, this is how the Hasmonean dynasty interpreted this psalm to justify the new line of priest-kings in 142 B.C.E..⁴ Weiser continues with his interpretation of Psalm 110:4:

That the priesthood will for ever remain vested in the king after the order of Melchizedek, that Canaanite priest-prince of Jerusalem in ancient times who likewise combined both these offices in his person; when David took over the Jebusite kingship of the city of Jerusalem these two offices were conferred on him and, as the psalm shows, continued to be held by the Davidic dynasty.⁵

This interpretation by Weiser on Psalm 110:4 is not Christological and is based on the kingship of King David. It may be possible that the Jews before the first parousia may have understood Psalms 110:1-4 to be applying to human kingship, not necessarily Messiah Kingship. It may be possible that Psalms 110:4 was applying to the throne of

³ Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 694.

⁴ Jakob J. Petuchowski, "The Controversial Figure of Melchizedek," *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion* (Cincinnati): 130.

⁵ Weiser, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 695.

King David and his lineage thereafter. The fact that Psalms 110:4 may apply to King David and his lineage shows more reason why it is necessary that Jesus Christ come from the line of King David.

Because of Jesus Christ, the interpretation of Psalms 110 may have been reinterpreted and lead to political transformation by allowing equality of all people due to a new standard of kingship.⁶ T.K. Thomas notes:

Jesus subverted both the power of Roman legions and the authority of Jewish tradition when he announced the simple good news that God rules the world...This radical good news allowed tax-collectors, sinners, lepers, prostitutes, children, women and men to sit down and eat at the same table in the realm of God. Thus Psalm 110 is not mere artifact of ancient political propaganda. Rather, in relation to Jesus Messiah, it is a world-transforming challenge to every form of politics and power that does not begin with submission of the self to God's claim. Jesus, Messiah and priest . . . guarantees all people access to God.⁷

This interpretation of Jesus challenging political institutions is interesting and is true to an extent. The Bible says "Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1) However true equality does not come until Jesus Christ is the World wide King which is not until the Millennial reign of Christ.⁸

Genesis 14:17-20

Hebrews 7 makes reference to Genesis 14:17-20 where Melchizedek is mentioned. Since Hebrews 7 makes reference to Genesis 14:17-20, the writer believes it is best to study different components from the Genesis account concerning Melchizedek so that a better understanding of the Hebrews account may occur.

⁶ T.K. Thomas, "Melchizedek, King and Priest," *Ecumenical Review* (July 2000, Vol 52 Issue 3): 408.

⁷ Ibid.,408. (cited from *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4, p. 1131).

⁸ Ed Hindson, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (Eugene: Harvest House Publisher, 2004), 234-235.

Bread and Wine

Genesis 14:18 states: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High". What is the symbolism of bread and wine? Is there any relation of bread and wine to Jesus Christ? To understand bread and wine properly we must study how it pertains to Melchizedek and Abram. The Word Biblical Commentary states in a summary of Genesis 14:17-24:

In both words and deeds Melchizedek appears more generous than the king of Sodom. Whereas Melchizedek gives Abram bread and wine, the king of Sodom gives him nothing. Indeed, to start with he says nothing, and when he does speak he is very grudging, considering all that Abram has done for him.⁹

What is known from Genesis 14:18 is that Melchizedek is a "king" and that he "brought out bread and wine" and that he was a priest of "God Most High". From an Old Covenant prospective what does the bread and wine represent? One suggestion is that "the bread and wine presumably represented physical provisions for the exhausted warriors"¹⁰. Another suggestion concerning bread and wine is:

This remark shows that Melchizedek and Abram had a covenant meal together. Melchizedek as the dominant ally provided bread and wine. This seems to be going beyond the evidence. What is being portrayed, however, is the generosity of Melchizedek. Bread and water would have been the staple diet. Bread and wine is royal fare (1 Sam 16:20) and regularly accompanied animal sacrifice (Num 15:2-10; 1 Sam 1:24; 10:3).¹¹

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 315.

¹⁰ Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 408.

¹¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word Books, 1987) 316.

The wine was given by a priest named Melchizedek, who is "the first priest named in Scripture"¹², and the bread and wine was shared with Melchizedek, the king of Sodom, and Abram. This bread and wine may have been accompanied with a sacrifice in the land of Canaan (Num 15:1-10), however the Genesis account does not imply that there was a sacrifice, one should not presume there was a sacrifice because it could lead to misinterpretation of the Word of God.

There is a direct relationship between Melchizedek and Jesus in that both offered and shared bread and wine. It was in Genesis 14:18 that Melchizedek offered and shared bread and wine. Jesus offered and shared bread and wine in what is known as the last supper or last Passover (Mt 26:20-35; Mk 14:22-31; Lk 22:14-23; Jn 13:1-4). The conclusion that this writer reached is that the offering of bread and wine made by Melchizedek is a type because Jesus offered bread and wine.

One could always surmise that due to Num 15:1-10 sacrifice may have been present, but as was stated above; there is no mention of any sacrifice that Melchizedek performed. Therefore there is a discontinuous relationship between Melchizedek performing sacrifice and Jesus performing sacrifice. Melchizedek did not perform any sacrifice where Jesus Christ did perform sacrifice. The sacrifice that Jesus performed was the sacrifice of Himself to the World (Mt 27:46; Jn 3:16-18).

Names, meaning of

Genesis 14:18 also mentions that Melchizedek is "priest of God Most High". "God Most High" is translated from the word *El-Elyon*¹³. *El-Elyon* is one of the titles of

¹² Ibid., 316.

¹³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word Books, 1987) 316.

God worshiped by the patriarchs¹⁴. and Genesis 14:22 "explicitly identifies *Yahweh* with *El Elyon*. The Word *El* is defined as: "Strength, mighty, especially all mighty"

¹⁵ according to Strong. Both Strong's and Young's agree that *Elyon* means "most high"¹⁶

¹⁷ There is only one other OT text that refers to the full name el 'elyon, Ps 78:35: 'they remembered that God [*Elohim*] was their rock, the Most High God [*El Elyon*] their redeemer"¹⁸. *El Elyon* is *Elohim*, the God of Abram (Gen 14:22); later in the Bible *El Elyon* is called the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:6; Mk12:26). Melchizekek is serving the same God who is also the Christian God, *El Elyon Elohim*.

Melchizedek's name means "my king is righteous"¹⁹ according to Young's and "King of Right"²⁰ according to Strong's. There is some continuity between names because like Melchizedek, Jesus is also called "righteous" "King" (Acts 7:52; 1 Jn 2:1; Rev. 19:16). The literal meanings of the name Melchizedek have a similarity with the titles of Jesus Christ. In the of concerning names; Melchizedek is a type, and Jesus Christ is the anti-type.

The Shem Argument

There are some individuals that will argue that Shem was also Melchizedek. This argument became prominent among Jews after the resurrection of Jesus Christ²¹. The

¹⁴ Ibid., 316.

¹⁵ John R. Kohlenberer, III, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), Strong's number 410 concerning the word *El*

¹⁶ Ibid., Strong's number 5945: In the strong's edition the word *elyon* is rendered *El-yone*.

¹⁷ Robert Young, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers), 480.

¹⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 410.

¹⁹ Robert Young, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers), 653

²⁰ John R. Kohlenberer, III, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), Strong's number 4442

²¹ Jakob J. Petuchowski, "The Controversial Figure of Melchizedek," *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion* (Cincinnati): See article for more information.

Jews felt embarrassment of Abraham paying homage to Melchizedek²², the act of Abram paying homage to Melchizedek shows that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood. It is the priesthood of Melchizedek that Jesus Christ holds. The Jews do not want to admit that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood. “But if Melchizedek is identified with Shem, then Abraham was merely showing deference to an ancestor”²³ not someone who is unrelated and superior. If Abram gave to his own relative, then Shem would be the seed of the Levitical priesthood and there would be no need of a “greater priesthood”, thereby eliminating the need of the Messiah to be known.

How do the Jews justify arguing that Shem is Melchizedek? Part of the argument for Shem being Melchizedek is argued with timeline. Jerome, who is one of the early church leaders “says the Rabbis believe Melchisedec is Shem, the first son of Noah. The Rabbis show that there were 290 years from Shem to the birth of Abram, and since Shem lived 210 years after Abram’s birth, while Abram lived only 175 years total, Shem was not only alive at the time of Melchisedec, but he also outlived Abram by 35 years”²⁴.

This argument of Shem being Melchizedek is a way to try to cover up the first parousia of Christ. Overall it is a weak argument, especially considering the fact that Palestinian Judaism identified Melchizedek “with the anointed King or king Messiah”²⁵. This writer is not convinced by the argument that Melchizedek is Shem. It still appears

²² Ibid., 128.

²³ Ibid., 128.

²⁴ Bruce McNair, "Luther, Calvin and the Exegetical Tradition of Melchisedec," *Review and Expositor*(Fall 2004, 101): 748.

²⁵ T.K. Thomas, "Melchizedek, King and Priest," *Ecumenical Review* (July 2000, Vol 52 Issue 3): 406.

that Melchizedek is a type of Christ mentioned in the Old Testament not an anti-type to Shem.

Priesthood

In this section the various aspects of priesthood will be studied. The following contains the findings of this writer concerning priesthood. Much emphasis of this examination will be on priesthood because much understanding about Hebrews depends on this topic.

Historical Context of Priesthood

We must understand the context in which Hebrews chapter 7:1-19 referred to. This context includes the historical context of the time period. Historical Contexts usually show culture of the people and the thought processes behind that culture. Harold S. Songer writes about the priesthood in the First Century:

How priesthood was understood in the first Christian century made it an excellent vehicle for the author to use in communicating the significance of Jesus Christ. Among both Jews and Greeks, the priesthood was perceived as the foundation for meaningful and successful human life in two dimensions. First, it was the priesthood that provided access to deity. Among the Jews this focused on the high priest's role on the Day of Atonement and on the services provided by priests in offering sacrifices related to a multitude of life's experiences. Among non-Jews, the priest provided access to the god to secure special favors or remove burdens. In the second place, the priesthood guaranteed the security and good fortune of races, cities, or nations by the routine performance of the designated rituals. The rites in the Jewish temple and in the Greco-Roman religions were commonly understood as the visible bulwark against national calamity and personal misfortune. This perception of the priesthood in the first century meant that to have a better priest was to have a fuller assurance of the favor of the divinity and a guarantee of the future quality of one's life, as both of these realities were anchored inseparably to the power of one's supporting priesthood.²⁶

²⁶ Harold S. Songer, "A Superior Priesthood: Hebrews 4:14-7:28," *Review and Expositor*. 345.

The priest held an important position. Both Jews and non-Jews depended upon priests and their authority for the betterment of their lives. With the exception of Jesus Christ, priests are all human and are sinful due to living in a fallen world; and according to the above citation, individuals of the first century A.D. were dependent on these sinful priests. Since priests were depended upon so much, having a better priest truly was security, it "was to have a fuller assurance of the favor of the divinity" ²⁷ and a better quality of life. Jesus is the superior high priest and is presented as such in the book of Hebrews. As a result of Jesus being presented as the High Priest, it shows the readers of the book of Hebrews that they to can be dependent on Jesus Christ because he is the Superior High Priest that lives perpetually (Heb 7:3).

Jerome H. Neyrey proposes a theory concerning Hebrews 7:3. Hebrews 7:3 states: "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually". Neyrey argues that the criteria that describes Melchizedek meets the criteria of gods in Greek philosophy. Neyrey proposes that in Hebrews 7:3 Melchizedek is "(1) ungenerated, (2) uncreated in the past and imperishable in the future, and (3) eternal or immortal" ²⁸. It may be plausible that the writer of Hebrews intentionally used the description of Melchizedek to match the qualifications of what constitutes a Greco-Roman god(s) since there were many Hellenized Jews living throughout the Roman Empire during the first century ²⁹ who understood the Greek culture. This Hellenized description of Jesus may

²⁷ Ibid., 345.

²⁸ Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J. "Without Beginning of Days or End of Life," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (Weston School of Theology): 440

²⁹ Trent C. Butler, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1998), 746-748.

have aided the ancient reader of Hebrews to better understand of the importance of Jesus Christ as God.

However, "while the NT was produced in a Hellenistic culture, the Church consistently refused to compromise the Gospel in order to placate Hellenistic cultural expectations³⁰. This theory is interesting, and it does appear that Jesus meets the same requirements that Greco-Roman gods met to be considered divine. This should could as no surprise because many other philosophies and religious systems do contain truth, but not absolute Truth because it is Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no one can come to the Father except by Him (Jn 14:6).

Perhaps the author of the book of Hebrews wanted to bring out the importance of Jesus to Hellenized Jews through a description that combines similarities with Greco-Roman philosophies with traditional Jewish literature by citing a character from the Genesis account named Melchizedek. This Melchizedek is a person that Jews recognize with a description from Hebrews 7:3 that also contain similarities with Greco-Roman gods.

The Priesthood and Genealogy

Hebrews 7:3 compares Melchizedek with Jesus in that both were "without genealogy". It is true that Melchizedek appeared to have a life without an origin or an ending that is "without genealogy". "Genealogically speaking, he was without father or mother. Moreover he has no revealed history. All of a sudden, there he is; then he is gone. There is no record of either his birth or his death, so, symbolically, he had neither beginning nor ending of days"³¹.

To further study we will examine what Hebrews 7:14 can contribute to this study.

Hebrews 7:14 states: For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe

³⁰ Ibid., 748

³¹ John Phillips, *Exploring Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 100.

with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. What does this verse indicate? Concerning Hebrews 7:14 Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes:

It is that Melchizedek who has not received his priesthood via *generationis carnalis* nor transmitted it to others by the same means- because the Gn story knows no genealogy of him-is the type of Jesus the Son and high priest forever. Precisely in that respect in which his priesthood is farthest removed from the Aaronitic type, viz. the lack of hereditary human descent or genealogy, either antecedent or subsequent is Melchizedek the prefigured Jesus. We may wonder at this point whether the author of Heb ever knew the Lucan and Matthaean genealogies of Jesus. But he does know that "our Lord sprang from the tribe of Judah (7,14) according to the flesh-and that is why he hastens to answer this objection with the comment, "with reference to which (tribe) Moses said nothing at all about priests." But the similarity with Melchizedek is found precisely in this, that He possesses "a life which cannot end". Thus has the author of Heb established his basic comparison of Jesus with Melchizedek.³²

It is true that Moses did not mention anything about the tribe of Judah coming into the priesthood. However Jesus Christ has a genealogy that is traced from the tribe of Judah. The writer of Hebrews considers the genealogy of Jesus to silent because Moses was silent about the tribe of Judah becoming the priestly line.

Since the author of Hebrews makes mention about Judah being "a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests" (Heb 7:14). One can surmise that Jesus Christ was without genealogy because it was not expected that the tribe of Judah would ever be part of the priesthood under the "order of Melchizedek".

This writer questioned one aspect about the silence of Moses argument. What if someone mentions Gen 49:10 where it says: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah" and uses this passage to argue that it was known that Judah would be of the priestly line because of this verse? What is interpreted as "the scepter" must be examined.

³² Joseph, A. Fitzmyer, S.J., "Now This Melchizedek. . . .," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (Vol. 25, Woodstock College): 317-318.

"The 'scepter' symbolizes the monarchy that will be Judah's inheritance which was historically realized in David's kingship"³³, and that "Judah will always have a royal progeny"³⁴. One thing for certain is that the sentence: "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" (49:10) makes no mention of priesthood and is simply a reference to Kingship. Genesis 49:10 has nothing to do with the genealogy of Jesus Christ and his priesthood. Hebrews 7:14 was correct when it said that Judah was "a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests". One question remaining is: did Moses speak of any other tribe taking a priestly role? It does not seem Moses spoke of any other tribe, other than Levi, becoming a priest. There is some discontinuity between what tribe of the Jews are priests in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Priestly Act of Receiving Tithes

Hebrews 7:4-10 compares the Levitical priesthood to the priesthood of Melchizedek with the concept of tithing. Hebrews 7:4-10 shows the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek over the priesthood of Levi. William Barclay observes:

in a series of contrasts the writer to the Hebrews works out the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priests. He makes five different points. (i) The Levites receive tithes from the people and that is a right that only they enjoy. Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham although he was not a member of the tribe of Levi. It could be argued that while that put him on a level with the Levites, it does not prove that he was superior to them....(ii) The Levites tithe their brother Israelites; Melchizedek was not an Israelite but a stranger; and it was no ordinary Israelite from whom he received tithes but from no lesser person than Abraham, the founder of the nation. (iii) It was due to a legal enactment that the Levites have the right to exact tithes; but Melchizedek received tithes for the sake of what he was personally. He had such personal greatness that he needed no legal enactment to entitle him to receive tithes. (iv) The Levites receive tithes as dying men; but Melchizedek lives for ever. (v) Finally he produces a curious argument for which he apologizes before he states it, Levi was a direct descendant of Abram and the only man legally entitled to receive tithes. Now, if he was a

³³ Kenneth A. Matthews, *The New American Commentary*, (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 892.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 893.

direct descendant of Abraham it means that he was already in Abraham's body. Therefore when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi also paid them, being included in Abraham's body, the final proof that Melchizedek was superior to him.³⁵

It appears that tithing is an indicator of who is superior in the cultural eras of the Patriarch's and the Sinai Covenant. The Levites are the ones who are to receive tithes. But if the founder of the Levites, which is Abram by genealogy, gives to someone; by birthright all the Levites tithed to someone else. The Levites are not just receiver of tithes but are givers of tithes by heritage. "It was Melchizedek who received tithes from Israel's patriarch, not vice versa. From this Hebrews concludes that not merely Abraham, but Levi, who although as yet unborn was none the less seminally present 'in the loins of his ancestor' (Heb 7:10)"³⁶. Melchizedek is a type of superior priesthood that Jesus Christ possesses.

The Levitical priesthood was never intended to be the most superior priesthood. "God never intended for the Levitical priesthood to remain forever, and nowhere in Scripture is this idea taught"³⁷. According to John MacArthur Psalms 110:4 is evidence that "another priesthood was coming"³⁸. The Aaronic priesthood was never perfect, if the Aaronic priesthood was perfect then another priesthood would not have been unnecessary.³⁹ Since the Aaronic preisthood lacked perfection, the priesthood of Melchizedek had to be formed, with the head priest being Jesus Christ (Heb 7:24).

³⁵ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews, Revised Edition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 76.

³⁶ Marie E. Isaacs, "Priesthood and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *HeyJ* (XXXVIII [1997]): 57.

³⁷ John MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 185.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

The issue of tithes can also bring up the issue of blessing. Melchizedek blessed Abram who is considered the lesser. Immediately after Melchizedek blesses Abram he blesses God Most High in Genesis 14:20 - God Most high is the superior when compared to Melchizedek.⁴⁰ Melchizedek blessed God after blessing Abram, and Jesus Christ did not bless God the Father. Unlike Melchizedek Jesus Christ is God (Mt 27:11) and he does not need to bless Himself. It appears that there is some discontinuity here due to the fact that Melchizedek blessed God and Jesus Christ did not bless God the Father.

Priestly Obedience: death and sacrifice

Concerning Jesus Christ being the high priest in Hebrews 4:14-5:10, Stanley N. Olson observes two things that must be said about the high priest theme. The first observation is that "it is God who appoints Jesus as high priest, makes him perfect, and enthrones him as son"⁴¹. The second observation is that "priesthood is not something Jesus claims by right, 'One does not take the honor upon himself' (5:4). Jesus is Son, but the enthronement at the right hand of power is the result of Jesus' obedience"⁴². Jesus' obedience is what made Him exulted as High Priest. Concerning obedience, Philippians 2:8-11 states: "Being found in appearance as a man. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

⁴⁰ George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary, Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 254-255).

⁴¹ Stanley N. Olson, "Wandering But Not Lost," *Word & World* (Volume V, Number 4 St. Paul): 430.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 431.

Olson further observes "that Jesus was not deflected from God's purpose, even though it meant becoming human, suffering and dying. He did not wander but was faithful to God and was thus made High Priest, the enthroned Son"⁴³.

Another observation is that "the exaltation of Jesus is not merely a reward with no intrinsic relation to Jesus' obedience"⁴⁴. There is a benefit to Jesus Christ being exalted as High Priest. "This obedience in becoming one with humanity, tempted as we, suffering and dying as we, made it possible for Jesus to become the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (5:9). The incarnation and death are essential to Hebrews' understanding of Christ the High Priest."⁴⁵

Concerning obedience to the point of death "it was not the act of killing the sacrifice that atoned sins but it was the providing of blood for purification, food for the communal meal, and a gift to offer to God on the altar fire"⁴⁶. Death was the starting point for the sacrifice in which Jesus played the role of both priest and victim. "His suffering, human nature, and obedient death launched a complex act of sacrifice that culminated in the heavenly sanctuary and in taking a seat beside God's throne".⁴⁷

Eschatology

Some have made theories about Melchizedek being understood as a heavenly figure who is to be a judge, especially in the Qumran communities as evidenced in the Qumran document, 11QMelch.⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid., 431.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 431.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 431.

⁴⁶ Richard D. Nelson, "He Offered Himself", *Interpretation* (July 2003, Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University):253.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 253.

⁴⁸ Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 192-193.

Just as was stated above concerning Melchizedek, there is no record of either his birth or his death. This symbolizes his eternity.⁴⁹ If eternity is being discussed, one would presume it logical that there would be an eschatological component to Melchizedek. In fact, the Qumran text associates Melchizedek “with the deliverance of divine judgment, with a day of atonement, and with a year of jubilee, and with a role that exalts him high over the assembly of heavenly beings”⁵⁰ Continuing with the theme of Melchizedek being judge the following quote states:

In the fragment, the Jubilee year of Leviticus is interpreted as the eschatological release of the captives of Belial, the name of the angelic leader of the forces of darkness common at Qumran. The agent of this release is Melchizedek, whose function is primarily judgmental. As part of the eschatological redemption that he provides, iniquities are removed and expiation effected. These are clearly priestly functions, although Melchizedek is not explicitly called a priest.⁵¹

Melchizedek was viewed as a judge with the acting functions of a priest. There is no other scriptural evidence to support the fact that Melchizedek is a judge. It is a theory that that has no direct scriptural support. There was no other indication of where or what source individuals from the Qumran communities used to conclude with this interpretation of Melchizedek being a judge. In either case the Qumran community did hold to a viewpoint that Melchizedek is a judge.

Palestinian Judaism identified Melchizedek “with the anointed King or king Messiah”⁵². If Palestinian Jews believed that Melchizedek is associated with the Messiah, and that same Melchizedek is to be a judge, this would be a direct link that ancient Judaism believed that the “order of Melchizedek” was linked with the Messiah who is to be the ultimate judge and king. It is at the Millennium Kingdom where the

⁴⁹ John Phillips, *Exploring Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 100.

⁵⁰ T.K. Thomas, "Melchizedek, King and Priest," *Ecumenical Review* (July 2000, Vol 52 Issue 3): 406.

⁵¹ Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 192-193.

⁵² T.K. Thomas, "Melchizedek, King and Priest," *Ecumenical Review* (July 2000, Vol 52 Issue 3): 406.

Messiah Jesus Christ will reign in time and space ⁵³ after judgment thus fulfilling prophecy.

Some Jews believed that Melchizedek is to be a judge and possibly contain some Messianic attributes. The reality is Jesus is the judge because “God has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:27) ⁵⁴. The righteous will and must appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) ⁵⁵, with the wicked being judged according to Revelation 20:11-15 in what is called the White Throne Judgment.

Jesus and the priesthood of Melchizedek are both eternal. When eternity is involved there will be an eschatological view. In view of Jewish tradition it is debatable if Melchizedek is an Eschatological type of Jesus Christ. This writer does hold to the view that the beliefs of Melchizedek formed from tradition, make Melchizedek a type of Jesus Christ. However, using scripture with no tradition involved, Melchizedek is not described as a type of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The overall conclusion of the writer is that there is more continuity than discontinuity concerning the order of Melchizedek when compared to Jesus Christ. At the same time the writer also believes it would be almost impossible for the ancient Jews to figure out that Melchizedek is a type of Christ. The writer is confident that Melchizedek is a type of Jesus Christ in the form of priesthood, in all its variant ways. It seems that the best argument for the superiority of Jesus, through the order of Melchizedek, lies in the tithe that Abram gave to Melchizedek. It is because of Levi's

⁵³ Ed Hindson, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* (Eugene: Harvest House Publisher, 2004), 234-235.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

ancestor Abram that eternal superiority of the order of Melchizedek was established (Gen 14:17-20).

This was an enjoyable research project and much was learned, but there are still many questions remaining. For example when Abram tithed a tenth to Melchizedek (Gen 14:20) did he make himself submissive to Melchizedek? This writer is not sure how tithes affect leadership positions in the culture context. This writer is also unsure if there were cultural differences among the Jews before Hellenization from Greek influence. These questions will be answered with time, but for now the writer will take what was learned and use that as a foundation to get deeper into the Word of God.