



A Historical and Theological Survey of the Person of Melchizedek in Genesis, Psalms, and Hebrews

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ABSTRACT

This biblical and theological survey concentrates on the significant theological implications of Melchizedek reflected in the books of Genesis, Psalms, and Hebrews. This mysterious name and personality speak of its importance and significance in sacred canon of Genesis, Psalms, and Hebrews. This paper focused on the analysis of the commonality and uniqueness of Melchizedek's role in every reference cited in the biblical books. Moses' mentions of Melchizedek in Genesis were considered in determining his historical background. David's assertions of Melchizedek in Psalms show connection between Melchizedek and Jesus. Moreover, Paul pointed Melchizedek in Hebrews in connection to the new order of priesthood of Jesus Christ. This study explained in some details the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, as well as the superiority of Christ's priesthood over both Melchizedek's and Aaron's priesthood. The findings presented in this study indicate that though Melchizedek is little mentioned of in Scripture, he was an important figure closely tied to the significance of priesthood in Scriptures in relation to human salvation. He serves as a type of Christ, one who resembles the Heavenly King-Priest.

Keywords: Levitical Priest, Melchizedek, Jesus, Priesthood

INTRODUCTION

The plan of redemption is a theme that continues to fill the mind of man with wonder and awe. Jesus incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and His ministry above in the heavenly sanctuary are subjects that cannot be exhausted, every insight leads to an interest for more. And these subjects are typified in the sanctuary service and symbols, yet in the book of Hebrews Christ is said to be a High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek," a greater order of priesthood than that of the Levitical priesthood.

Out of nowhere Melchizedek appeared in Scripture, in the book of Genesis, a king-priest who blessed Abraham the great patriarch and received tithes from him, and then disappears without leaving any record of his ancestry or descent (Gen 14:18-20). It is in this first

appearance of Melchizedek in Scripture where the first mention of the office of a priest is found, and for the first time in the New Testament it is in Hebrews where Jesus is mentioned as our “Great High Priest.”

This mysterious person, Melchizedek, cannot be ignored when it comes to studying priesthood in the Scriptures. Since Jesus is a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, to understand Jesus priesthood and priestly ministry, one must better understand Melchizedek. Melchizedek appears only three times in Scripture: In Genesis, Psalms and Hebrews. However, in Hebrews, Paul stresses the importance and superiority of Melchizedek and his priesthood in comparison to the Levitical priesthood. Melchizedek’s appearance in Scripture leads to many questions as to who was this man and why is he mentioned in a way of such importance? Therefore, this study is an intent to shed a better understanding of Melchizedek without losing sight of our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

The problem focused on in this study is: How does Genesis, Psalms and Hebrews introduce and describe Melchizedek? How does Genesis and Psalms contribute to Paul’s argument in Hebrews about the superiority of Christ’s priesthood? These are the questions addressed in this study.

The purpose of this study is three-fold: first to discover who was Melchizedek and the nature of his priesthood. Second to understand the difference between the priesthood of Melchizedek and the priesthood of Aaron. Third, to identify the implications of Christ being a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, in order that a better understanding of Jesus’ ministry and priesthood may be shown.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Identity of Melchizedek in the Bible

The discussion that follows explains who Melchizedek was in the Old Testament. It explains the identity and significance of Melchizedek in Genesis, where he is both priest and king, and ends with Melchizedek in Psalms where he is used in a Messianic context.

Melchizedek in Genesis

In the Bible, Melchizedek is only mentioned in three books: Genesis (14:18-20), Psalm 110:4, and Hebrews 5,6,7. And it is in the account of Melchizedek where the office of priest and priesthood are first recorded in the Bible:

“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all” (Gen 14:18-20).

According to F. Duane Lindsey (1988:1433) Melchizedek is a “mysterious biblical personality” whose historical record is contained in Genesis 14:18-20. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman (1998:546) explain that, “Melchizedek is one of the mystery figures in the Bible, a character whose evocative splendor is all out of proportion to the brevity of space devoted to him. His story is told in a mere three verses (Gen 14:18-20).” As Richard L. Likte (2011:75,76) says, “scripture does not yield much personal information about this mystery man... even intense searching yields few facts, so for the most part, this character will have to remain one of the great unsolved mysteries of the Bible. Yet the facts we do have make some important points.”

Melchizedek’s appearance and disappearance in Genesis are somewhat mysterious. Melchizedek and Abraham first met after Abraham’s defeat of Chedorlaomer and his three allies. Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, in conjunction with three other Mesopotamian kings, raided a vassal confederacy of five kings near the shores of the Dead Sea. In the ensuing massacre and rout by the Mesopotamian confederacy, Abraham's nephew Lot and his family and possessions were captured. Abraham led an attacking force in pursuit of Lot’s captors, achieved victory, retrieved the plunder, and secured the release of Lot and his family.

Upon his return, Abraham was greeted at the valley of Shaveh, which may have been near Jerusalem and possibly identical to Kidron (2 Sam 18:18), not only by the grateful kings of the Dead Sea confederacy, but also by Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, who presented bread and wine to Abraham and his weary men, demonstrating friendship and religious kinship. He bestowed a blessing on Abraham in the name of El Elyon “God Most High” and praised God for giving Abraham a victory in battle. Melchizedek then received tithes from Abraham of all the booty he had gathered.

According to Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman (1998:546), “In the original text Melchizedek gains additional meaning by being a foil to the king of Sodom, who also interacts with Abraham after his military conquest. Whereas Abraham accepts Melchizedek’s hospitality, he refuses to accept the offered gift of the king of Sodom.” According to *The Global Concise Dictionary* (1999:377) Melchizedek’s blessing of Abraham took place approximately 2085 B.C.

The Meaning of His Name

The name “Melchizedek” according to D. W. Burdick (1986:312) “appears to have been a Canaanite royal name.” It is very similar to “Adonizedek” (Josh.10:1,3), a later king of Jerusalem who was slain by Joshua. Burdick (1986:312) explains, “‘Melchizedek’ is composed of the words ‘melek,’ which means ‘king,’ and ‘sedeq,’ ‘righteousness.’” Although each of these terms was frequently used in West Semitic names, only here are they found together.”

Paul, who hundreds of years after Moses expounds on Melchizedek, explains in the book of Hebrews that the meaning of ‘Melchizedek’ to be ‘king of righteousness’ (Heb 7:2). Burdick (1986:313) further explains that “Philo’s explanation that it means ‘the righteous king’ confirms that this was the first-century understanding of the term. The Amarna and Râs Shamrah parallels suggest however, that the original meaning was ‘my (the) king is righteous.’”

Melchizedek as Priest

Moses says of Melchizedek “he was the priest of the most high God” (Gen 14:18).

Abraham in recognition of Melchizedek’s priesthood, presented Melchizedek with a tithe (a tenth) of all the booty he had gathered (Gen 14:20). By this act Abraham indicated that he recognized Melchizedek as a fellow-worshiper of the one true God as well as a priest who ranked higher spiritually than himself. Melchizedek’s existence shows that there were people other than Abraham and his family who served the one true God.

Wick Broomall (1960:348), explains that like Abraham, Melchizedek was a monotheist. And Lindsey (1988:1433,1434) speaking of the “Most High God” mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20, explains clearly, “El Elyon is not the pagan deity of Canaanite worship by the same name but rather the title of the true God who created heaven and earth, an idea foreign to Canaanite religion. Melchizedek correctly viewed Abraham as worshiping this same God and praised God for giving victory to Abraham. Abraham identified himself with the worship of the one true God represented by Melchizedek in that he received his gifts and blessing and ‘gave him a tenth of everything’ (v 20), thus recognizing Melchizedek's higher spiritual rank as a patriarchal priest.”

Melchizedek as King

Moses first introduces Melchizedek as “Melchizedek king of Salem” (Gen 14:18). According Siegfried H. Horn (1960:703), “Salem is most probably an abbreviated form of Jerusalem, as Ps 76:2 indicates.” Also, Burdick (1986:313) confirms this by saying, “that ‘Salem’ was a designation for Jerusalem is confirmed by its use in Ps. 76:2 in synonymous parallelism with

‘Zion.’ The Amarna letters of Abdu-Heba to the king of Egypt reveal that as early as 1400 B.C. Urusalim was an important Canaanite city-state.”

Melchizedek was therefore not only a priest of the Most High God but he also occupied the office of King and his residence was Jerusalem, a city of great significance in the later history of God’s chosen people. In the little mention he gets in Genesis, Melchizedek appears as a person of great responsibility and power, with no mention of his ancestry or descent.

Melchizedek was: 1) king of Salem, 2) priest of the Most High God, 3) He brought forth bread and wine for Abraham and the multitude Abraham and saved, 4) He blessed Abraham, 5) He blessed the Most High God, 6) Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek of all, 7) His identity is mysterious.

Melchizedek in Psalms

The second place in the Bible where Melchizedek is mentioned is in the book of Psalms. The Psalmist writes the words spoken by the Father to the Son:

“The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4)

Leslie C. Allen (1983:83) states that “In form Ps 110 is a royal song.” He explains that the psalm represents the enthronement ritual of David. However, he says “a sizeable group of scholars have refused to associate the psalm with any activity of the human Davidic king and regard it as eschatological and messianic from the outset.” However, Allen (1983:86,87) explains that the psalm contains “a solemn pledge of the king’s sacred role in Yahweh’s purposes. There was now a divinely appointed successor to the dynastic line of Jebusite priest-kings, but his rule was destined not to be superseded as theirs had been. From his Jebusite predecessors he inherited the title of priest of the Most High God, as sacred mediator between God and His people.”

In other words David or the author of this psalm depicted the enthronement of David himself to the Jebusite throne in Jerusalem. A throne that had been occupied by succeeding king-priest. Melchizedek was a king-priest of Jerusalem in the time of Abraham and most probably was succeeded by a line of king-priest of which Moses made no mention of in Genesis. So Melchizedek most likely was a Jebusite or an ancestor of theirs. Thus, David ascending to the throne of king-priest and remembering God’s promise in 2 Sam 7:13,16 to establish his throne forever wrote “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). However, the psalm is messianic for according to

Allen (1983:85) it is “a basic witness to the heavenly exaltation of the ascended and risen Christ” and is used in Hebrews as “a testimony to his eternal priesthood.”

To understand the use of Melchizedek on Psalms it is important to know: 1) Melchizedek was a king-priest of Jerusalem in the time of Abraham. 2) David took over over Jerusalem and became king where Jebusite king-priest’s reigned before him. 3) David was promised by God that his throne would be established forever if his children were true to God. This is probably why David wrote “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). However, this statement is Messianic considering: 1) The Messianic overtone of the rest of psalm. 2) David was not a priest. 3) Paul’s use of this Ps 110:4 which affirms it to be Messianic. 4) God Himself swore, this is something that is not common in Scripture.

Significance of Melchizedek in Hebrews

The following discussion explains Paul’s use of Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews, how he uses both accounts of the Old Testament to describe Jesus as a Priest after the order of Melchizedek. It then explains the superiority of Christ priesthood and ends with its characteristics

Jesus “A Priest after the Order of Melchizedek”

The third place in all of Scripture and the only place in the New Testament where Melchizedek is mentioned is in the book of Hebrews. It is here where this figure is most expounded and has a greater length of scripture concerning him than in the Old Testament. However, it is impossible to talk of Melchizedek without also mentioning Jesus because Melchizedek was mentioned in Hebrews for the sole purpose of explaining and describing Christ’s priesthood. The Global Concise Dictionary (1999:378) explains, “while the whole argument may seem obscure to modern readers, it was compelling to first-century Jewish Christians, who were struggling to justify their abandonment of Judaism and who could see in this discussion evidence that the high priesthood of Jesus is biblically defensible and demonstrably superior to that of the OT.”

Paul quotes David in Psalms 110:4, “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” Four times Paul uses these words (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:21), indicative that it is messianic in character and implication. In fact, the title given to Jesus as our “Great High Priest” is given nowhere else in the NT but in Hebrews. It is evident that Paul found in Melchizedek a perfect representative of Christ, for though He was not Christ, Ellen White (RH.Feb.18,1890:Par.10) explains, “it was Christ that spoke through

Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God. Melchizedek was not Christ, but he was the voice of God in the world, the representative of the Father.”

According to Broomall (1960:348) “Melchizedek becomes the pattern of the Messiah’s priesthood” because Melchizedek “illustrates the superiority of Christ’s priesthood to Aaron’s priesthood. The history in Genesis and the prophecy in Psalms unitedly demonstrate how Melchizedek’s name (“king of righteousness”), residence (Salem, “peace”), life (without birth or death), ordination (with an oath), office (both priest and king) and functions (a bestower of blessings and a receiver of tithes) also surpass Aaron’s. Almost incidentally, and yet pregnantly, Christ (in Melchizedek) is likewise superior to Abraham (Heb 7:4,6) and Levi (Heb 7:5,8).”

Superiority of Jesus Priesthood

Paul saw Jesus as the “Great High Priest” and had no problem with identifying Him as such, even though He was clearly not a member of the priestly family of Aaron. However the problem lay in the hearts of the people. It was very difficult for Paul to present an argument in favour of the truth which would be accepted by the Jews who found pride and valued greatly their Levitical priesthood.

Likte (2011:76) explains, “Paul obviously wished to speak of Jesus as a wonderful gracious High Priest - One who is beautifully patient with all our human weaknesses because He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). But how could Jesus of Nazareth be a High Priest- or a simple, ordinary priest for that matter- when He didn’t belong to a priestly family? All the Jewish people new full well that only the descendants of Aaron of the tribe of Levi, could serve as priests, and Jesus had been born into the royal family of David, which came from the tribe of Judah and not even from the tribe of Levi, to say nothing of the family of Aaron. So, as far as the Jews were concerned, Jesus genealogy disqualified Him for the priesthood.”

Therefore, according to Likte (2011:77), “Jesus’ genealogy posed a problem for Paul and others who wished to explain His nature and ministry.” Paul wanted to make clear the ministry of Jesus but how could he explained Christ’s priesthood if Jesus was not a descendant of Aaron or Levi? “How could His serving in the high-priestly office be explained in a way that would satisfy those who would be concerned about His genealogical qualifications?” Paul looked for some other priesthood, one besides the Aaronic priesthood and “providentially found this need met in the priesthood of the godly king of the ancient Canaanite city of Salem.”

Likte further explains that the Old Testament presents Melchizedek as a valid high priest who ministered in the name of the true God and he even ruled as king over the heathen city of Salem. He was not linked to the family of Aaron of the tribe of Levi, rather Melchizedek lived long before either Aaron or his forefather Levi was born. And even Abraham the forefather of Aaron and Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek. Speaking of the priesthood of Melchizedek, Likte (2011:78) explains, “the mysteries surrounding that order of priests were sufficient to obviate any criticism of that conclusion.”

Thus, as Melchizedek was a priest, so is Jesus, both of greater priesthods than that of the Levites. Even more, their appointment was given directly to them by God Himself rather than being inherited by genealogy. There is little mention of the characteristics of Melchizedek’s priesthood, however, though Melchizedek’s order of priesthood was superior and prior to the Aaronic priesthood, Jesus priesthood was still superior to it.

According Hebrews 7:3 Melchizedek resembled (Gk. *aphōmoiōménos*) the Son of God. Burdick (1986:313) explains “the verb *aphomnoiōō* always assumes two distinct and separate identities, one of which is a copy of the other. Therefore as the Aaronic priesthood was a shadow of Christ’s priestly ministry, Melchizedek’s priesthood was a shadow of Christ’s priestly attributes. Christ is the great original and Melchizedek was just the shadow, a symbol of Christ. Therefore, since Melchizedek is not Christ, he was created by Him and to serve Him. As Ellen White (RH.Feb.18,1890:Par.10) explains, “it was Christ that spoke through Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God.” Further evidence of Christ superiority over Melchizedek is that Melchizedek’s priesthood was an earthly priesthood in a earthly city, while Jesus priesthood is heavenly. The sanctuary in which Jesus ministers is in heaven, Jesus brings a new covenant, also Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice once and for all.

Melchizedek Greater than Abraham

There are many reasons, found in Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews, why Christ’s priesthood, which is after the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the Levitical Priesthood. Paul first begins to explain how Jesus priesthood is greater than the Levitical priesthood by demonstrating that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, Levi and the Levitical priests; therefore, his priesthood was greater than the Levitical priesthood. Thus Paul finds an example in Melchizedek which proves that the Levitical Priesthood was not the first nor the greatest priesthood and therefore, there could exist a priesthood greater than it.

Tithes of Abraham

Paul recalls the Genesis account where Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. He says, “Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils” (Heb 7:2,4). Burdick (1986:313) explains, “the greatness of Melchizedek puzzled Jewish scholars. Abraham’s paying tithes to Melchizedek and being blessed by him suggested that his importance exceeded even that of the patriarch.” Just the fact of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek shows that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, and Paul makes this clear by stating in Heb 7:5-6:

“And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.”

Paul shows the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priests by making a few points. The first point, he notes that the Levitical priests tithe their own brethren, that is, their fellow Jews. The second point, they do this as a result of legal enactment. On the contrary, as Barclay (1976:69) explains, “Melchizedek tithed Abraham who had no racial connection with him whatsoever and was in fact the founder of the Jewish nation; further, he exacted the tithes not because the law gave him the right to do so but because of an unquestionable personal right.” The third point of Paul is that the priests who received tithes were mortals while Melchizedek, representing Christ, it is witnessed that he liveth. Christ unlike the mortal priests has immortality. And the fourth point, Paul explains that Levi from whom come the priests, paid tithes to Melchisedec for Levi was still in Abraham’s loins. Fudge (1973:72) explains, “just as he can say that Levi received tithes (in the person of his descendants), so he can say as well that Levi paid tithes (in the person of his ancestor).”

Melchizedek was therefore greater than Abraham for he received tithes of Abraham the patriarch who is greater than his descendants. Melchizedek was also greater than Levi because Levi paid tithes to him in Abraham. Melchizedek was also greater than the Levitical priests because they exacted tithes by legal enactment but he did so because it was his personal right given him by God and not by any man or law. Also, he possessed immortality while the Levitical priests were mere mortals, this though is in reference to Jesus. In like

manner, all who claim to be Christians pay tithes because they acknowledge that all belongs to Christ.

Abraham Blessed

Upon Abraham's return from saving Lot and the five kings of the Dead Sea valley from Chedorlaomer and his three ally kings, Melchizedek "met Abraham... and blessed him" (Heb 7:1). Paul states that Melchizedek "blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better" (Heb 7:6-7). In other words the superior blesses the inferior. Therefore Melchizedek, according to Fudge (1973:71) was greater or "better in terms of rank and office" than Abraham though Abraham was the patriarch and founder of the Jewish nation and the recipient of the promises of God.

Also Barclay (1976:72) speaking of Melchizedek's gift of "bread and wine" to Abraham and his host, says "in light of what we know, (it) sounds so sacramental." Melchizedek's gift to God's chosen, Abraham, was bread and wine, so Jesus' gift of himself, his own life, to humanity is symbolized in the giving of bread and wine to his disciples at the Lord's Supper. This is the greatest gift humanity has ever received, for it is through this blessing we receive eternal life and our fellowship with the Father is restored.

Characteristics of Jesus' Priesthood

Paul, after demonstrating Melchizedek's superiority to Abraham and the Levitical priesthood, then notes the different similar characteristics of Christ's priesthood with Melchizedek's, though some of the characteristics of Christ's priesthood have no similarity with Melchizedek's, however, they do show that Christ's priesthood is superior by far to that of the Levitical priesthood. These are the characteristics that Paul sets forth:

Dual Office

Jesus not being of the priestly tribe of Levi but of Judah was disqualified to be a priest in the eyes of the Jews, because a Jew must be of the family of Aaron from the tribe of Levi to be a priest, and being a priest he could not also have the office of a king for only those from the tribe of Judah had the right to be a king, however, Paul says that Jesus is not of the levitical order of priesthood but "after the order of Melchizedek." Melchizedek was both king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. Therefore, Melchizedek's office was composed of being both a king and priest. In the same manner Jesus being of the royal tribe of Judah was both king and Priest.

Now the Kingship of Melchizedek is interesting. First, because His name, which means he is a "king of righteousness" (Heb.7:2). And second, because of his residence, Salem. Taking

this meaning in a literal sense, Melchizedek was the king of Jerusalem, and as seen above Melchizedek resembles the Son of God and while Melchizedek's priesthood is earthly Christ's is heavenly. So as Melchizedek was king of the earthly Jerusalem, Jesus also is the King of the heavenly or New Jerusalem (Rev 3:12, 21,2). But Salem, also stands for the Hebrew shalom or "peace" (Heb.7:2), Thus Jesus is a King of righteousness and a King of peace. According to Edward Fudge (1973:69) "when the people maintained righteousness, 'peace' was the result." It was expected that righteousness should result in peace. Since Jesus is the King of righteousness, He inevitably becomes the King of peace, and at the same time He is the Priest of the Most High God.

Not Inherited or Passed On

One of the most disputed questions concerning Melchizedek has to do with his identity, who was he? However, this question and the different conclusions to which many have come to, arise from a misunderstanding of Paul's words and argument in Hebrews.

Paul says "He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Heb 7:3). As a result of this many have come to different conclusions as to who Melchizedek really was. According to Burdick (1986:313) some Jews identified Melchizedek with Shem, who was thought to have lived until Abraham's time." This identification of Melchizedek as being Shem is possible, yet it is just a speculation.

Ronald F. Youngblood (1995:819) states "attempts have been made to identify Melchizedek as an imaginary character named Shem, an angel, the Holy Spirit, Christ, and others. All are products of speculation, not historical fact... Melchizedek was a real, historical king-priest who served as a type for the greater King-Priest who was to come, Jesus Christ." Likte (2011:76) explains that the phrase "without father and mother" is "probably just a convenient way of saying that neither his history nor his genealogy were preserved in the Sacred Writings." Melchizedek's genealogy was simply unknown or unrecorded. According to Burdick (1986:313), Paul's argument of Hebrews 7 is "similar to the rabbinic argument from silence, which assumed that nothing exists unless Scripture mentions it. Since Genesis says nothing of Melchizedek's parents, genealogy, birth, or death, he serves as a type representing the eternal Son of God."

He further explains that "some have thought that Melchizedek was a christophany rather than a historical character and thus understood Heb. 7:3 literally rather than typologically." However, there is a major objection to this which is found in the statement that Melchizedek resembled (Gk. *aphōmoiōménos*) the Son of God (Heb 7:3). He explains that "the verb

aphomnoiōō always assumes two distinct and separate identities, one of which is a copy of the other. Thus, Melchizedek and the Son of God are represented as two separate persons, the first of which resembled the second.” So, clearly Melchizedek was not Jesus revealing himself in human form in the time of Abraham, but was a person who lived in his time and was both a priest and king, and whose priestly office was by special divine appointment.

Therefore, as is the case with other suppositions, Lindsey (1988:1434) explains that “the identification of Melchizedek as a theophany, or appearance of the preincarnate Christ in the OT, is sometimes reached on the basis of Hebrews 7:3: ‘He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life.’ However, this is simply to be understood in the sense that his priesthood was isolated rather than a continuation of a priestly family line... his priesthood was isolated and not received through a priestly pedigree.” In other words, Melchizedek’s order of priesthood was altogether different than that of the Levitical priesthood, it was not inherited from fathers or passed down to children. Fudge (1973:70) explains, “this man neither received his office by hereditary right nor passed it on to a physical descendant... he was ‘without father or mother;’ not that he was other than human, but that he did not belong to any line of priests.”

The whole Levitical priesthood depended entirely on its descent from Aaron. According to William Barclay (1976:68,69) “Under Jewish law a man could not under any circumstances become a priest unless he could produce a certificated pedigree going back to Aaron... On the other hand, if a man could produce a pedigree reaching back to Aaron, apart only from certain specified physical blemishes nothing on earth could stop him being a priest. Genealogy was literally everything.” No Israelite who was not from the lineage of Aaron could ever be a priest no matter how hard he tried to be because, as Barclay (1976:68,74) explains, “character and ability had nothing to do with it; the one essential was the pedigree... Personal qualities did not enter into it at all.”

However, He (1976:74,75) explains, “Jesus Christ was the true Priest, not because of what He inherited but because of what He was... Jesus’s authority was in Himself and came from no man.” According to Barclay (1976:69), While the Aaronic priesthood depended on geneological decent, “the priesthood of Melchizedek depended on personal qualification alone.” While the Levitical priesthood was based on legality, Melchisedec’s was based on personality.

Paul says in Heb.7:3 that Melchisedec is “without descent” (*agenealogētos*). Barclay (1976:74) explains, “that is a word that... no Greek writer ever used before. It may well be

that in his eagerness to stress the fact that Jesus's power did not depend on descent, he invented it. It is very likely a new word to describe a new thing." Paul wanted to make the point clear that Jesus was a priest because of who he was rather than inheriting that privilege from a priestly lineage.

Hebrew 7:3 indicates that Melchizedek was not only a predecessor but also a type of Christ as "a priest forever." White (1877:14) speaking of Melchizedek's priesthood, explains that "this order of priesthood was not to pass to another, or be superseded by another." Jesus' priesthood which was after the order of Melchizedek is not to be passed on or inherited by genealogy, it is His because of who He is, and is an eternal priesthood.

Unchangeable Priesthood

Melchizedek's priesthood is unchangeable unlike the Levitical priesthood which was changed. The Levitical Priesthood had a beginning as well as an end. According to White (1897:101) "with Caiaphas the Jewish high priesthood ended." This is made evident by Paul in Heb.7:12 where he says the priesthood has been "changed" and also further explains in verse 18 that "there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof." Also in verse 21, Paul quotes David, who said in Psalms 110:4 "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Here David is speaking of another priest who is not a descendant of Levi, in other words, David prophesied of a change of priesthood. Just the fact that a new priesthood was promised by God shows that the old priesthood was inadequate. Burdick (1986:313) explains that this statement of David is "taken as proof that the Levitical priesthood was replaced by a priest like Melchizedek, namely Christ."

In contrast of the Levitical priesthood, Christ's priesthood is an "unchangeable priesthood." Paul in Hebrews 7:3 shows that Jesus "abideth a priest continually," this word "continually means perpetually or without interruption, also in Hebrews 7:24 he says: "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." The word "unchangeable" (Gr. *Aparabatos*), is a legal word which means inviolable, unalterable or non-transferable. Thus, no other priesthood will ever follow Christ's priesthood, His is eternal and is the last and greatest. It can never be changed.

Everlasting Priesthood and Immortal Priest

Paul speaking of Melchizedek, speaks of him as "having neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Heb 7:3). This statement is simply based on the fact that scripture is silent about the genealogy of Melchizedek. The Bible does not mention Melchizedek's birth neither does it

mention his death, therefore because of its silence, Melchizedek in Scripture did not die, simply because there is no record found and not because he literally did not die. Harley E. Finley, (1996:520) explains that Hebrew 7:3 is to be understood as “referring to the kind of priestly order rather than the longevity of a particular priest of Abraham’s time.” Paul uses this statement to show Jesus likeness to Melchizedek, Jesus has “neither beginning of days nor end of life” and also “abideth a priest continually.”

Since Jesus is a priest “forever” after the order of Melchizedek, this statement is a characteristic of Christ’s priesthood. In Hebrews 5:7 is found the phrase “In the days of his flesh” which indicates the double nature of Christ, and His existence before His incarnation. Micah 5:2 says “His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity.” So “In the days of His flesh” and “Having neither beginning of days nor end of life (Heb.7:3),” show that Jesus has His beginning in the Father or in other words He was from eternity with the Father and has eternal life. “Jesus even carries a longevity of His priesthood back to the Godhead” says Finley.

Paul speaking of Jesus says, “who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life” (Heb 7:16). And in the following verse, a Priest who “continueth ever” (v. 24) (Gr. *Paramenein*), this word means to remain in office, or in other words no one can ever take the place of Jesus, no one could ever fill his office. Jesus has an eternal priesthood, one that does not end and He Himself has immortality.

In contrast the Levitical priesthood had “many priest, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death” (Heb.7:24). The priests of the Levitical priesthood were mortals having no immortality of themselves and were subject to death, thus they were transient, having their priesthood past down from generation to generation. As Barclay (1976:70) puts it, “under the old system the priests died and there was no permanency” No one priest was sufficient. But in Jesus we have a High priest who lives forever.

A Better Priest

Paul contrasts the High Priest of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, from the Old Covenant priest, showing the superiority of the first. He first made it clear that Jesus is immortal while the Levitical priests were mortal beings. He says that Jesus is “made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:16). Also the Levitical priests were sinful while Christ is sinless. Paul writes “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself" (Heb 7:26-27).

On the Day of Atonement, the day on which the high priest would perform his supreme function, he would wash and clothed himself in the holy garments, then he would offer a sacrifice for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people (Heb 5:3). Barclay (1976:84,85) explains, "the very first item on the ritual of that day was a sacrifice fo the sins of the High Priest himself... That was a sacrifice that Jesus never needed to make, for He was without sin. The Levitical high priest was a sinful man offering animal sacrifices for sinful people; Jesus was the sinless Son of God offering Himself for the sin of all men." Jesus was sinless, having no need to sacrifice for Himself.

The Lion Handbook to the Bible (2005:743) says "Aaron was appointed by God as the first high priest of Israel. He was the intermediary between a holy God and is sinful people, the go-between who represented each to the other... but in Christ, the writer says, we have a High Priest who fulfils all the statutory requirements, and far more, because He has no need to atone for His own sins. He is the perfect High Priest appointed by God as Mediator for all time."

Jesus Christ is our perfect priest who will never be replaced. He is the immortal and sinless High Priest who doesn't need to offer a sacrifice for Himself, but offers the perfect sacrifice in our behalf. Other characteristics of Jesus which shows His superiority are the following:

Appointed with an Oath

The Levitical priesthood was based on a law of lineage, Barclay (1976:78) explains, "to be a priest he must be a pure descendant of Aaron. Even then there were one hundred and forty-two physical blemishes which might disqualify him; some of them are detailed in Leviticus 8." However, Jesus was not a descendant of Aaron, so this leaves the question as to how was this priesthood given and appointed to Him?

According to White (1897:101) "Christ glorified not Himself in being made High Priest. God gave Him His appointment to the priesthood." Paul points out, "And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb 7:20-21). God appointed Jesus to the priesthood and he did this with an oath. The priests of the Levitical priesthood never were appointed with an oath.

According to Barclay (1976:80) “the idea of God taking an oath is startling. Long ago Philo saw this. He pointed out that the only reason for taking an oath is because of man’s bare word may be disbelieved; and the oath is to guarantee that his word true. God never needs to do that because it is impossible that His word should ever be disbelieved. If, therefore, God ever confirms a statement by an oath, that statement must be of extraordinary importance.” Also Fudge (1973:66) explains that the act of God taking an oath shows “the unchangeableness or immutability of God’s counsel or purpose and design.”

Jesus was ordained from before the world was, and with an oath. This is why the Levitical priesthood and the sacrificial system was just a shadow of things to come, they were patterned after the original and pointed to Christ and His priesthood which was surely to come.

A Better Ministry

According to Barclay (1976:66) “It was to make that access to God possible that two things existed. First, the law. The basic idea of the law is that so long as man faithfully observes its commandments he is in a position of friendship with God and the door to His presence is open to him. But men cannot keep the law and therefore their fellowship with God and their access to His presence are interrupted. It was exactly to deal with that situation of estrangement that the second thing existed, the priesthood and the whole sacrificial system.”

Barclay further explains that “the Latin word for priest is pontifex. Which means bridge-builder; the priest was a man whose function was to build a bridge between men and God by means of the sacrificial system. A man broke the law; his fellowship with God was interrupted and his access to God was barred; by the offering of the correct sacrifice that breach of the law was atoned for and the fellowship was restored and the barrier removed.”

This is why the sacrificial system and the ministering of the priests were so important, it was needed to build a bridge to God and to restore the fellowship, however, according to Fudge (1973:72) “the levitical sacrifices and priesthood could not do this -either perfectly or permanently.” Paul explains to the Hebrews that the priests constantly ministered, everyday they entered the holy place and the high priest entered the most holy place once every year. And the high priest could not enter the most holy place without blood (Heb 9:6,7).

The fact that the the high priest could enter only once a year into the presence of God, and the continual offering of sacrifices by the priests shows that the fellowship between God and man was not restored, and man did not have free access to the presence of God (Heb 9:8). The ministry of the levitical priesthood consisted in the offering of “both gifts and sacrifices, that

could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:9,10).

There was a need for a better ministry which could restore the fellowship that had been broken between God and man. Paul says “but Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:11,12).

Christ, as in the day of atonement, our High Priest has entered the presence of God bearing the offering, His own blood. He has restored the fellowship that was broken because of the entrance of sin. Man can now come into the presence of God through faith in the sacrifice and ministry of Jesus his High Priest. Christ’s people wait for Him to return to them to bestow to them that eternal inheritance that is promised, and they rest secured in the assurance that “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb 7:25).

A Better Sacrifice

According to Fudge (1973:105) “God has never desired sacrifices above human obedience. If man had obeyed, in fact, he would not have needed sacrifices at all.” However, man fell into sin and therefore needed to offer sacrifice. The sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood served a great purpose, that of pointing forward to the true sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The sacrifices offered by the priests had no power whatsoever for the remission of sins. The fact that those offerings and sacrifices were a symbol of Jesus and thus represented His sacrifice, is what gave it its importance. It was by trusting God’s word and in obedience offering a sacrifice which through faith symbolized Jesus that the sinner obtained pardon.

Paul says “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:1-4). The blood of animals could never take away the sins of man, they could never free his conscience because year after year he must sacrifice; a sign that the true sacrifice had not come yet, which would take away sins.

The sacrificial system of the levitical priesthood demanded the sacrifices of certain animals. But what was the sacrifice of the new priesthood? Jesus said “Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me” (Heb 10:5). Christ came to offer Himself. Paul says “so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb.7:18) Christ offered Himself to bear our sins. “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;” (Heb. 10:12) Jesus offered one perfect sacrifice which never has to be repeated again, and by this one sacrifice Christ opened the way to the presence of God forever.

Paul writes “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,” he says, “Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (Heb10:14,18). There is no need for a second sacrifice. Christ has “obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12). According to Barclay (1976:117) “the life and death of Jesus was an act of perfect obedience and, therefore, the only perfect sacrifice.”

Fudge (1973:78) explains, “Christ made but one sacrifice, but He ever lives to make intercession on the bases of that sacrifice. In terms of His death, He was the sin-offering. In terms of His resurrection and present work, He is High Priest.” According to Barclay (1976:104,105) Wescott outlines four ways in which Jesus’s sacrifice of himself differs from the animal sacrifices of the old covenant: 1) The sacrifice of Jesus was voluntary. While the animal’s life was taken from it, Jesus willingly gave up His life. 2) The sacrifice of Jesus was spontaneous. While animal sacrifices were entirely the product of the law, Jesus’s sacrifice was the product of love. 3) The sacrifice of Jesus was rational. The animal victims did not know what was happening, but Jesus knew full well what He was doing. 4) The sacrifice of Jesus was moral. While the animal sacrifices were mechanical. Jesus’s sacrifice was made through the eternal Spirit, Jesus was obeying the will of God for the sake of men. This is why Christ Sacrifice is far greater than that of the levitical priesthood. Christ is the perfect sacrifice. And through His sacrifice we find pardon, salvation and a restored fellowship with God.

A Better Sanctuary

The Levitical priests ministered in a sanctuary which was a figure of the true (Heb.9:24). Moses was to make the tabernacle after the patterns God showed him. Paul says, “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;” While the levitical priest served in a

temple made and pitched by men, Christ is “a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb 9:11).

And where is this true tabernacle? “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24). The true sanctuary of which the old was only a figure of, is in heaven. Paul says “We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;” Our High Priest is ministering and interceding in our behalf before God!

A Better Covenant

The most beautiful thing about Jesus and His Melchizedekian priesthood is that Jesus was “made a surety of a better testament” (Heb 7:22), not only this but He also is “the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6). The word “testament” is the same as “covenant.” According to Fudge (1973:96) covenant refers to “the divine disposition or arrangement imposed by God on Israel, through which He brought Israel into a special relationship with Himself.” But “In the New Testament times, however, this same Greek word was used commonly for a last will and testament.” The difference is that “a covenant provides for both benefits and punishments, but a will provides only for benefits – which are assured by the death of the man who makes the will.”

Now why was there a need for a new covenant? Paul answers this, “for if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second” (Heb 8:7). Fudge (1973:84) explains that “the fault lay with the people to whom the first covenants was given, because they did not keep their part of the arrangement. Yet the first covenant was of such nature that all blessings depended on the ability of the people to do just that. This made the covenant itself faulty in effect, or from the point of view of the people.” It was because of this weakness that God promised his people that he would make a new covenant with them, not according to the old one He had made with their fathers (Heb 8:8,9).

God said “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 8:10).

Fudge (1973:86) concerning the promises explains, the first promise given in the new covenant is that, while in the old covenant the law was written on stone and was external, in the new covenant God's law would be written in their hearts and put in their minds, it would be internal. The second promise is that God's people who are under the new covenant will know Him personally. "The covenant at Sinai was entered by a nation including many who did not know God personally until after they were involved in the covenant. All who were later born into the relationship as Jews had to be taught of God and learn His former acts of deliverance and provision." However, individuals enter the new covenant one by one and only on the knowledge of God and His saving acts in Christ. Those who enter know God and there is no need for others to teach them of who God is. In other words they cannot enter the covenant without a knowledge of God and what He has done. The third promise is that God will be merciful to them. He will forgive their sins. The Law will be written in their hearts and will not be foreign to their nature but when they do break the law, forgiveness will be available because of what Christ has done.

There is a fourth promise as well, Paul writes in "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance"(Heb 9:15). Those under the new covenant have the promise of an eternal inheritance and therefore eternal life.

However Paul said, "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth." The blessings and promise cannot be of effect unless the death of the testator has occurred. Jesus has died and lives again therefore He has become a surety of the new covenant. According to Fudge (1973:83) "The first covenant was also given through a mediator (Gal 3:19) and the people approached God through him (Exo 20:19). But while Moses was mediator and Aaron high priest, Jesus is both!"

Conclusion

Only little is written in Scripture concerning Melchizedek. He appears only three times in Scripture, in Genesis, Psalms, and Hebrews, twice in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. However, there is great importance in the little that is said concerning Melchizedek. In Genesis is found his narrative. It is here where the first mention of the office of priesthood is found. Melchizedek is a priest of the Most High God, Jehovah, and is also

King of Salem which is Jerusalem. Melchizedek blesses Abraham and Abraham then pays tithe to Melchizedek recognizing his superiority as priest of the Most High God.

In Psalms Melchizedek's name is mentioned in a royal psalm which is also a messianic psalm. It is a psalm depicting the enthronement of king David upon the throne in Jerusalem which had been the throne of Jebusite king-priests. It is in this same city where Melchizedek the king-priest in the time of Abraham had reigned. Therefore, David remembering Melchizedek and also the promise God had made to David to establish his throne forever, writes, "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4). These words however were prophetic, pointing to the time when Christ was to ascend victorious and sit at the right hand of the Father as the Great High Priest of humanity.

The third and last place that Melchizedek is mentioned is in the book of Hebrews. It is only here where Christ is given that awesome title of Great High Priest. Here Paul expounds on Melchizedek. Paul was faced with the dilemma of presented to the Jews the truth that Christ is our High Priest in Heaven. For the Jews who loved and felt pride in their Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, only one who was born of the lineage of Aaron of the tribe of Levi could become a priest. Thus, Paul found in Melchizedek the perfect example of one who truly typified Christ and was superior to their Levitical priesthood. Paul uses the history of Melchizedek in Genesis and God's Messianic oath in Psalms to build his argument. From the two appearances of Melchizedek in the Old Testament Paul finds characteristics of Jesus' priesthood. The Jews could not argue with the facts. Paul argues that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, Levi and the Levitical priests.

Paul then shows how Melchizedek typifies Christ and His priesthood. Paul uses the rabbinic method of argument from silence by building his argument on the silence of Scripture. Since Moses was silent in regard to Melchizedek's ancestry, descendants, birth and death, he concludes that Melchizedek is "without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life" (Heb 7:3). But he uses this to show the contrast between Melchizedek's priesthood and that of Aaron's. He presents Melchizedek as a symbol of Christ. He shows that while the Aaronic or Levitical priests receive their right to the priesthood through pedigree, that is family lineage, and pass it on to their children because they cannot continue by reason of death, Melchizedek did not receive his priesthood from a family line nor was it to be passed on as Aaron did and his descendants after him. But

Melchizedek's priesthood was his and only his by personal right by God's appointing and not by physical descent.

While this fact about his priesthood is true, Melchizedek was a human and had parents and maybe children. Yet Paul seems to mix the human with divine in saying that he is without beginning of days nor end of life (Heb 7:3) in order to represent Christ. Because of the silence in Scripture Paul builds his argument this way which the Jews could not refute. Paul then concludes by showing that as Melchizedek's priesthood was prior and greater than the Levitical priesthood so Jesus' priesthood is greater by far than the Levitical priesthood. Jesus like Melchizedek holds a dual office, being both King and Priest. He did not receive His priesthood through pedigree but by His own personal right and He will never be succeeded by another. Jesus who is perfect in all ways, has immortality and ministers in the sanctuary in heaven having offered the perfect sacrifice, Himself, once and for all. Through Him we have a better hope through a better covenant, for we have salvation, forgiveness of sins and will, as He now is, one day be in the presence of God in heaven. What a contrast to the Levitical priesthood where mortal priests who received their right to the priesthood by pedigree ministered in an earthly tabernacle, continually sacrificing animals who had no power to forgive sins but were only a shadow of things to come.

Melchizedek's identity is still a mystery. He is little mentioned of in Scripture, but what is known is that he was both a king and a priest of God. He is the first priest mentioned in the Bible, this is found in his first appearance in Scripture. His second and third appearance explain the nature of Christ priesthood. His characteristics found in Scripture are unique and typifies Christ. Paul when faced with the task of demonstrating to the Jews that Jesus is the High Priest in heaven whose priesthood is greater than the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, found in Melchizedek a perfect example. In his epistle to the Hebrews Paul uses Melchizedek to show the similarities between his priesthood and Jesus' priesthood. As Melchizedek's priesthood was superior to the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, so Jesus' priesthood is by far superior to the Aaronic priesthood. It is in Hebrews, where Melchizedek is used by Paul to better explain Christ's priesthood, that the only mention of Jesus as our Great High Priest is found in the New Testament. Paul seems to present Melchizedek as a mysterious person with both human and divine nature, a shadow of Christ who has both human and divine nature. Therefore, though little is known about Melchizedek, he was a human king-priest on earth who served to typify Jesus who is the King-Priest in Heaven.

In Genesis Melchizedek was: king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, he brought forth bread and wine for Abraham and the multitude Abraham and saved, blessed Abraham, blessed the Most High God, and received tithes of Abraham, yet his identity is not revealed. In Psalms: God swears with an oath that Jesus would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, that is to say, not of the very order of Melchizedek but rather Jesus' priesthood would be similar to Melchizedek's. In Hebrews: Paul shows how Jesus is similar to Melchizedek and how both are superior to the Aaronic priesthood in receiving tithes, being anointed to the priesthood by God Himself rather than by a priestly line, and having an endless life. Paul also shows Christ superiority over the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood because of the everlasting and unchangeable nature of His priesthood, its better ministry, sacrifice, sanctuary, and covenant as well as Christ being a better Priest who will never be superseded.

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