

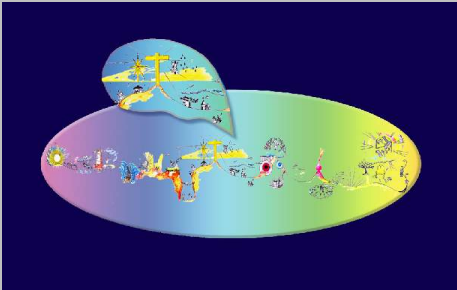
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SEPTEMBER 2005

NO 119



Eternal Fellowship News Bulletin

We believe in one GOD, in three persons; FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. We regard the Bible (both Hebrew Bible and New Testaments) as the only infallible authoritative WORD OF GOD.

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HULDAH MINISTRY

LETTER TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST

[MELCHIZEDEK]

So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." And he says in another place, "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek." During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

HEBREWS5:5~10.

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abram returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abram gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest for ever. Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abram gave him a tenth of the plunder! ...This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abram and blessed him who had the promises. ...In the case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. ...He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no-one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. ...one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. For it is declared: "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek."...a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The

Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest for ever.’” Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. ...Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect for ever. The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. HEBREWS 7:1~8:2.

We have already examined the three warnings given in the first 6 chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews in previous letters. Before continuing to examine the fourth warning it is worth looking at **the ‘solid food,’** i.e., **“the truths concerning the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ”** in more detail, the subject of which the author of the epistle devotes further space in chapter 7.

Under the Levitical priesthood, the high priest was divinely appointed and set apart for the high office to minister to God’s people. However, even centuries before this priesthood, the high priest called **‘Melchizedek’** had already existed as if he were a type or foreshadow of the Lord Jesus Christ. This peculiar figure abruptly appears in Genesis 14 and a thousand years later in Psalm 110 again. In Genesis he is depicted as a priest-king, i.e., a priest of the Most High God and also the king of Salem (peace). **‘Salem’** is God’s dwelling-place in Zion (Ps.76:2), i.e., Jerusalem. Among the Jewish scholars along with Martin Luther, Melchizedek (*Melchi*=my king, *zedek*=righteousness in Hebrew) is regarded as the son of Noah, **‘Shem’** who lived for 586 years and 35years beyond the death of Abram. However, the Scripture does not warrant this view. Besides, though some modern commentators suggests that he was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, the author of the epistle says that his ancestors are unknown and Christ is not implied to *be* Melchizedek but in the order of Melchizedek. Rather, one thing for certain is that Abram, the greatest patriarch of Israel, offered tithes of all the spoils to Melchizedek for his priesthood, and in turn, Melchizedek blessed Abram in the name of the Most High God. This implies that the level of his priesthood was higher than the Levitical priesthood administered by Aaron, Levi and their descendants, in line with the principle that **‘the lesser person is blessed by the greater’**. This also meant that the act of tithing had already been established through Abram, even before his son Levi from whom the clan of Levitical priests originated, was born. The author’s emphasis on this logic is very significant because it virtually declares that long before the Levitical order a non-Levitical, yet far better order through the Davidic clan had already been administered.

Apart from many unknown factors about the figure of Melchizedek, Genesis 14 is the first place in the Scriptures where anyone is clearly called a priest. Whatever he may have been, he was the man who lived for righteousness and peace and who served God. In Abram’s day, surrounded by very worldly, unrighteous, unholy, competitive, aggressive and warlike kings, Melchizedek might have been regarded as unpopular, incompetent and less attractive from a secular point of view, however, Abram even in his very successful triumphant moment, turned to Melchizedek rather than the king of Sodom and revered this servant of God. Melchizedek blessed Abram by recognising his outstanding victory as God’s approval. The participation of God-fearing believers in the war itself is very controversial, raising question of whether or not Christians should ever join a fight or attack of others as Abram did, making a surprise attack by night. While the biblical stance does not necessarily seem to be unconditional pacifism, it is also true that Christians are expected to be peacemakers. The following views by some commentators might give us helpful criteria to discern the situation. Christians should fight in defence of others who are under brutalisation because of a predator’s selfish gain even when they themselves are safe. If the victims are brothers and sisters in the Lord, Christians should do so boldly all the more. Christians cannot be indifferent and unfeeling towards the troubles and sufferings of brothers, our **‘neighbour.’** Indeed, these views appear to be scripturally supported:

- ① God expects man who basically needs others to be a good **‘brother’s keeper.’** (Ge.2:18, 4:9)
- ② **‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’** (Lk.10:27)
- ③ **‘Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.’** (Jn.15:13).

With his case, Abram's only concern was the safety of Lot, a believer and relative, and his action was probably prompted by the Spirit, Abram made a bold move to take action without the slightest hesitation. The result was a God-given miraculous victory.

With consideration of the climate of their day when impurity, unrighteousness and idolatry were rampant, such an encounter by two righteous men should not have been mere coincidence but divine intention. The greatest temptation of pride always comes immediately after triumph, whatever kind it may be and Abram, a godly man, was subjected to exactly that, when the villages, cities, hills and plains of Canaan all fell into his hands. However, Abram wisely refused the offer of wealth that belonged to the king of Sodom, and instead, received Melchizedek's blessing with *'bread and wine,'* at the very highest point of a possible fall shortly after his triumphant return from the war against four powerful Shemite kings. Recognising the spiritual authority of Melchizedek, Abram was well prepared detached himself from any involvement in worldly impurity, here represented by *'Sodom.'* Thus, just as Abram spiritually discerned the authority of Melchizedek as a type of the real One, exactly as a Psalmist heard the LORD say: ***"You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek"*** (Ps.110:4), the Lord Jesus Christ sits at God's right hand as an eternal high priest until God makes the Lord's enemies a footstool for His feet at the battle of Armageddon, and then the Lord will reign over the earth.

Melchizedek was a unique priest whose position was not dependent on his parentage or genealogy (as there is no mention of either in the Scriptures). His priesthood highlighted an eternal dimension, in sharp contrast to the Levitical priests. The author's (of Hebrews) claim that another priest not *'in the order of Aaron'* but *'in the order of Melchizedek'* had to come, suggests that the existing Levitical system was imperfect and needed to be replaced with a better one. Melchizedek's priesthood superseded the strict regulations of the Mosaic law according to which; *'when there is a change of the priesthood (from the Levitical to that of Melchizedek) there must also be a change of the law,'* the Scripture itself interprets; *'he (a new priest like Melchizedek) owes his priesthood not to a system of rules relating to descent but to the power of a life that cannot be destroyed.'* (7:16, quoted from Revised English Bible). Christ's priesthood therefore depended not on the regulations of the Mosaic law, but on His own supreme authority as God's Son, with an indestructible power of life. In other words, Christ's internal and perfect redeeming work completely changed the former order of priesthood which had been physical and external, governed by law. He offered *'a better hope,'* by which we can not only draw near to God but also be saved: Christ is *'able to save completely those who come to God thorough Him.'* Furthermore, in contrast to the existing Levitical priesthood, the new priesthood was established with an oath of God, as expressed in Psalm 110:4, ***"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek"*** (Line added). Thus, this divinely instituted priesthood lasts for ever. Now Jesus Christ has become the High Priest of the new covenant, which is a better covenant guaranteed for us and he is still active as our Mediator to intercede for our complete salvation.

In fact, the epoch-making moment when Christ's priesthood replaced the Levitical one happened twenty centuries ago when Jesus was confronted with the then high priest, Caiaphas before the Sanhedrin in the courtyard of his house shortly before His death on the cross. Matthew records what happened to Jesus and Caiaphas on the night: *Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. ...The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"... 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.'" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: in the future*

*you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witness? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think? “He is worthy of death,” they answered (Matthew 26:57-66, Line added). At this unjust trial, in the midst of intentionally distorted prosecution, Jesus simply remained silent. However, when the high priest edged up to Him, ordering Him to answer ‘*under oath by the living God,*’ Jesus was legally obliged to reply: ‘*I am,*’ affirming His messiah-ship. His claim; ‘*the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One*’ was actually a reverential periphrasis for ‘*God*’ Himself, which caused Caiaphas to become very indignant. Caiaphas impulsively tore his clothes although the high priest was forbidden to do it by law. While Caiaphas justifiably interpreted Jesus’ reply as blasphemy, his breach of the Mosaic law came to symbolically make the Levitical priesthood redundant. Thus, a completely different order in accordance with neither a tribal lineage, nor the former regulation was inaugurated.*

The author of the epistle sums up the important truth of what he explored in chapter 7 in the passage from verse 26 onwards up to the whole of chapter 8. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ is the only One that can meet all our needs because of His holiness. He has been exalted above the heavens, and is now sitting down ‘*at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty*’ and serving ‘*in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord,*’ in the very presence of God in heaven (8:1-2). As what the Jewish priests served according to the order of the Levitical priesthood was a mere copy and shadow of the true heavenly sanctuary, and as there was something incomplete and wrong with the first covenant, God declared: “*The time is coming, ...when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ...I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. ...No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*” (8:8-12).

Christ, offering Himself as High Priest, by His single, complete act fulfilled the copy and shadow of heavenly things. This heavenly achievement made Him the effective Mediator of a new covenant, superior to the old one that depended on man’s ability to carry out its requirements. Christ, having borne all the curse of a broken law upon Himself, is now the Mediator of a new and better covenant, founded on better promises. Because of man’s weakness, deficiency and sinfulness, the first covenant made with Israel failed, and God declared His predestined revelation in the days of Jeremiah far before Christ’s first coming to make a new covenant with everyone in the world so that the separated and consecrated people from the world should be brought into eternal fellowship with Him. The new covenant was characterised by superior benefits as the final form of God’s pledge of salvation:

- 1) It will be the perfect and sole means of the unity of the people of God.
- 2) God’s law will become inner principles for man and His people will spontaneously be prompted to do His will.
- 3) Each individual will have independent access to God and have intimate fellowship with Him in a marriage-relation (Husband –wife) context.
- 4) True knowledge of the Lord will broadly be shared by all.
- 5) Both inner and outer aspects of sin will be fully dealt with by God, and there will be forgiveness of sins for ever.

Accordingly, since the days of Jeremiah when God’s new covenant was prophetically revealed, the first covenant was to be regarded old and obsolete, and was expected to pass away. Now that the new covenant was made with Israel as a reaffirmation of the unconditional covenant made with Abram, which had been pledged far before the Mosaic (Sinaitic) covenant was made, the author of the epistle, by focusing on the basis of the Hebrew Scriptures, exhorts Jewish Christians to understand that the old covenant was temporarily utilised, but was divinely superseded by the new covenant.