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**The author of Hebrews' use of Melchizedek from the context of  
Genesis**

**Baylis, Charles Passant, Th.D.**

**Dallas Theological Seminary, 1989**

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THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS' USE OF MELCHIZEDEK  
FROM THE CONTEXT OF GENESIS

Charles P. Baylis, Th.D

The aim of this thesis is to present a view which demonstrates that the author of Hebrews used a normal understanding of Genesis in his presentation of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-3.

The relation of the Book of Hebrews' statements concerning Melchizedek and Moses' presentation in Genesis seem incongruent. Many commentators have tried to show where the author of Hebrews obtained his information. However, they have not been able to demonstrate that he used a normal understanding of the Book of Genesis.

The solution to the problem lies in understanding the message of both Genesis and Hebrews, and Melchizedek's place in that message. In both books Melchizedek is seen to be Abraham's superior, an intermediary between Abraham and God. Melchizedek's function was to mediate blessing between God and Abraham. Thus Genesis anticipates that One will come who will mediate blessing for the future nation Israel "just like" Melchizedek. Hebrews confirms that Jesus is a priest who mediates blessing to the "seed of Abraham."

Both authors understood the importance of the genealogy of Abraham. Toledot, father and mother, birth and death (Hebrews 7:3) are all genealogy motifs regarding the Abrahamic line. Melchizedek's lack of involvement in that genealogy demonstrates that the ultimate Melchizedek would not receive his priestly credential based on inclusion in that line. Hebrews demonstrates that Christ was awarded His priesthood not on the basis of Abrahamic lineage, but on the basis of His election by God in Psalm 110.

A comparison of the message of Genesis and Hebrews concerning Melchizedek demonstrates that the messages are identical. This validates the view that the author of Hebrews used the literal message of Genesis for his commentary on Melchizedek.

**THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS' USE OF MELCHIZEDEK  
FROM THE CONTEXT OF GENESIS**

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**A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the  
Department of Bible Exposition  
Dallas Theological Seminary**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Theology**

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**by  
Charles Passant Baylis**

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Accepted by the Faculty of the Dallas Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Theology.

Grade A-

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**To my mother and father  
who taught me to love the Word**

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

The Need for the Study

The historical figure Melchizedek is mentioned in only three places in the Bible, Genesis 14:18-20, Psalm 110:4, and Hebrews 7:1-3. Both the Psalm and the Hebrews passages refer to the Genesis narrative. At first glance Hebrews 7:2b-3 contains claims about Melchizedek that do not seem to appear in the Genesis text. How is it that this historical Melchizedek did not have a father, mother, genealogy, birth or death? And how could that information be gleaned from the Genesis narrative? Even if the expositor is able to move past those mysterious attributes, he comes to the statement that Melchizedek "abides a priest perpetually" (7:3) and "it is witnessed that he lives on" (7:8). Is Melchizedek alive, eternal? Is he an angel?

The difficulties of Hebrews 7:1-3 have brought forth a multitude of solutions. But there appear to be two directions that have been taken. Either the author of Hebrews obtained his understanding of Melchizedek from the original<sup>1</sup> intended message of Genesis alone or he did

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<sup>1</sup>'Original' here indicates the meaning which lies in the Genesis text alone, interpreted using a normal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic. 'Intended' indicates that this is the intent of the 'words' in the text as written by the author (God and man).

not.<sup>2</sup> The latter solution would include those who advocate a non-normal hermeneutical understanding of Genesis or the use of extra-biblical sources. Additional interpretation methods would include midrash. Extra-biblical sources would include Qumran or rabbinic literature.

Some commentators would desire to demonstrate that the author of Hebrews used the Genesis argument alone. However, most efforts have not been able to demonstrate that Hebrews used the original intended message of Genesis. For instance, efforts thus far have correctly explained Melchizedek's lack of genealogy, father, mother, birth and death as literary absences only. Thus the historical Melchizedek lived and died but left no record in Genesis. But the problem arises as to how this literary technique<sup>3</sup> indicates Melchizedek's seeming eternity ("abides a priest perpetually"). There were many in Genesis whose birth/death records are missing from the text, but no one would claim they were eternal. Thus this understanding of Melchizedek would not be inherent in the original Genesis message and does not support the author of Hebrews' use of Genesis in any normal sense.

The problem is difficult since it is multifaceted. There are really two questions. What does Genesis say about Melchizedek and what does Hebrews say about Melchizedek? If the normal intended message of Genesis was used by the author of Hebrews, then the messages must

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<sup>2</sup>Proponents of either of these solutions do not not necessarily suggest that the author was not inspired. The question is not whether God inspired the author or not, but did Hebrews use the message of Genesis alone, determined in a normal literary sense.

<sup>3</sup>Usually labeled as "argument from silence."

match.<sup>4</sup> It has not been this author's experience to find any in depth exposition of both the original intended argument of Genesis and Hebrews which satisfactorily matches the two messages with regard to Melchizedek.<sup>5</sup>

#### Importance of the Dissertation

A demonstration of the author of Hebrews' use of the original intended message of Genesis and Hebrews with regard to Melchizedek is noticeably absent from commentaries surveying the various views. Thus, this dissertation will develop the messages of both Genesis and Hebrews with regard to that Old Testament character. The compatibility of those messages should demonstrate a strong possibility that the author of Hebrews understood and used Genesis in a normal sense. While no one can say with certainty how the author of any Biblical book obtained his information,<sup>6</sup> by matching the messages of the Old Testament book to the

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<sup>4</sup>If a student of the text cannot match the messages, this still does not mean that the author did not use a literal hermeneutic. It may simply mean that the student has not ascertained the true message of Hebrews or Genesis.

<sup>5</sup>The hermeneutics question is much deeper than is presented here. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to explain all the hermeneutical nuances. It is only the purpose to demonstrate that the author of Hebrews used a normal understanding of the text of Genesis for his exposition found in Hebrews 7:1-3.

<sup>6</sup>Clearly at one extreme he could have received it strictly by the revelation of God alone, as in the book of Revelation. However even if this was the case in Hebrews, it would still be valid to demonstrate that the messages were the same and thus that he argued on a normal basis.

message of the New Testament book a certain parallel is demonstrated, and the likelihood that this was his understanding is increased.

A demonstration of this use of Genesis by the author of Hebrews will contribute to a better understanding of other passages in the book. In addition, a better understanding of Melchizedek in Genesis will add depth to the theological understanding of pre-millennialism and of Israel's literal future.

#### Purpose of the Dissertation

It is the purpose of this dissertation to demonstrate that the statements in Hebrews concerning Melchizedek are indicated in the original intended message of Genesis. Specifically, this dissertation should demonstrate that the context of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-3 is comparable with the meaning in Genesis 14:18-20.

It is solely the purpose of this dissertation to deal only with Hebrews and Genesis. In presenting other views (chapter 2) it is not the purpose to critique these views, but only to demonstrate that none of these views establish that the author of Hebrews used the literal message of Genesis 14:18-20 in Hebrews 7:1-3.

#### Methodology of the Dissertation

The methodology of this dissertation lies primarily in literary analysis. This analysis notes the literary techniques of the author in achieving his desired end. On that basis, the dissertation will develop the messages of both books, focusing on the place of Melchizedek within the argument of each.



Chapter two will review many of the options which have been proposed to explain Hebrews' use of Genesis. These options will be surveyed only for their understanding of how the author of Hebrews used Genesis. It will demonstrate that none advocates a use which requires an original intended meaning for the Old Testament book.

In chapter three the argument of Genesis will be developed. Genesis 12--15 will show that the Abrahamic promise in 12:1-3 controlled the narrative events in those chapters. Abraham is seen as the possessor of the promise of a blessed nation. The text develops Abraham as an actual representative of the future nation. Nations interact with him based on the promise, as they will with his future nation Israel. Genesis 14:18-20 introduces Melchizedek as the channel between God and Abraham. The incident of Melchizedek reveals that there must be a mediator between God and Abraham.

This chapter will also examine mediation motifs in Genesis. Melchizedek is a link or bridge between God and Abraham, or between heaven and earth. Since Melchizedek clearly fits into this literary motif, it adds evidence that the book intended to present him as a mediator between God and Abraham, and the ultimate Melchizedek as a mediator between God and the seed of Abraham.

Chapter four will develop the argument of Hebrews and Melchizedek's place in that book. Hebrews develops the argument concerning the heavenly high priest. The author points out in Hebrews 5--7 that Christ is the required heavenly mediator who would mediate blessing to Israel "after the order of ('just like') Melchizedek." Hebrews 7:1-

10 explains the Genesis basis for the "order of Melchizedek" of Psalm 110:4. Melchizedek was representative of an ultimate mediator to Israel, not on the basis of genealogical credentials, but on the basis of God's election.

Chapter five will then offer a summary and conclusion. It will match the messages of chapter 3 (Genesis) and chapter 4 (Hebrews) with regard to the character Melchizedek. This will demonstrate that the Hebrews statements are totally compatible with the original intended message of Genesis.

CHAPTER II  
HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Purpose of the Chapter

Did the author of Hebrews understand Genesis 14 in its normal sense? Many views attempt to explain the connection between Genesis 14:16-20 and Hebrews 7:1-10. It is the purpose of this chapter to survey the major views which review this connection. It will demonstrate that none of the common interpretations argue that the author of Hebrews derived his message from a normal interpretation of the message of Genesis.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to interact with the views with regard to their validity. To do so would require a study of hermeneutical principles beyond the scope of this dissertation. Further, it would detract from the purpose of this study. This purpose is to demonstrate that the New Testament author used a normal<sup>1</sup> understanding of the Book of Genesis.

Overview

Melchizedek's historicity seems not to be questioned. Josephus says of him,

Now the king of Sodom met him at a certain place, which they called the King's Dale, where Melchisedec, king of the city of

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<sup>1</sup>The word 'normal' as related to the message of the book indicates an understanding of the book in its literal, grammatical, historical sense. It is the message of the text as intended for the original audience.

Salem, received him. That name signifies the righteous king; and such he was without dispute, insomuch that, on this account, he was made the priest of God: however, they afterward called Salem Jerusalem. Now this Melchisedec supplied Abram's army in an hospitable manner, and gave them provisions in abundance; and as they were feasting, he began to praise him, and to bless God for subduing his enemies under him. And when Abram gave him the tenth part of his prey, he accepted of the gift . . .<sup>2</sup>

Judaism had accepted the fact that Abram had submitted to this unknown figure in the Torah, but they needed to explain the problem. Further, the rabbis needed to reply to the Christian writers who saw Melchizedek as a prefigurement of Jesus from the Jews' very own Scriptures. Hughes comments,

But as the rabbinical evidence, far back though its roots may go, belongs in the main to a late period and gives indications of being influenced by the necessity to react to the position assigned to Melchizedek in Christian doctrine . . .<sup>3</sup>

Thus on the basis of his mostly unquestioned place in the Old Testament scripture,<sup>4</sup> Jewish groups were required to explain this curious figure. However, Christian expositors found that the New Testament terminology also proved very difficult. How, for instance, did Melchizedek lack father, mother and genealogy? Or how does he "abide a priest perpetually" (Hebrews 7:3) or "live" (7:8)? Where did the author obtain his information and what was the connection to the Old Testament account in Genesis?

The following overview reflects the various attempts to explain

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<sup>2</sup>Josephus The Antiquities of the Jews 10.2.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 239.

<sup>4</sup>For reference on the various higher and lower critical views of this passage see Fred L. Horton, The Melchizedek Tradition, 12-23.

the connection between the Genesis' character and his exposition in Hebrews 7:1-3. It has been broken down into two areas. The first group (Midrash, Qumran) is a review of two known Jewish interpretations. These interpretations are only included here to illustrate New Testament era Jewish explanations. They do not reflect what would be considered normal interpretations of Genesis. Since these sources do not use the normal message of Genesis, a view which advocates their use does not argue for a normal, literal connection between Genesis and Hebrews.

The second group includes views which reflect that the author used only the Old Testament text as his source. However, these views generally maintain that the author gained 'insight' or used special interpretation tools to understand what was not available to the Old Testament reader. Representative of this group are the 'Angelic', 'Priesthood of the Believer', 'Pre-Incarnate Christ', and the 'Argument from Silence' views. While use of the Jewish material (group one) would not advocate the use of the normal message of Genesis, the second group does attempt to show a theological consistency between the New and Old Testament text. However these views require some subsequent knowledge or revelation available to the author of Hebrews in addition to the message of Genesis. That is, these views demonstrate (intentionally or unintentionally<sup>5</sup>) that Hebrews 7:1-10 could not have come from a

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<sup>5</sup>It is possible (and even likely) that there are some who hold one of these views simply because it is the best explanation available regarding the connection to Genesis. They would not intentionally advocate a non-literal hermeneutic. This is part of the purpose of this dissertation, to provide them with a view which explains the literal relationship to Genesis.

knowledge of the Old Testament text alone. These views are presented so that the reader might understand that the most common interpretations do not advocate that the author of Hebrews 7:1-10 used a normal, literal, grammatical hermeneutic to understand the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup>

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to critique these views or to evaluate them as to their validity. They are presented only to demonstrate that they do not explain a literal use of Genesis. They explicitly or implicitly demonstrate that the author of Hebrews utilized extra-biblical sources, non-literal interpretation methods, or additional revelation. Then in the following chapters this dissertation will provide a view which demonstrates that Hebrews 7:1-3 is a normal, literal use of Genesis.

### Midrashic Interpretation

#### Rabbinic Midrash

*And Melchizedek who is Shem the son of Noah, king of Jerusalem, came out to meet Abram, and brought forth for him bread and wine; and at that time he was ministering before God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, 'Blessed be Abram before God Most High, who for the sake of the righteous established heaven and earth: and blessed be God Most High, which hath made your enemies like a shield which receives a blow'. And he gave him a tenth of all that he had brought back.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>To advocate that the author of Hebrews understood Genesis in a normal, literal fashion is not to say that special enabling was not utilized. It is only stating that his interpretation could be duplicated by others from the message alone.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted from PS. Jonathan on Genesis XIV. 18-20 in John Bowker's, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, 193-94. Italics are by Bowker to show quotations identical to the Hebrew text.

Rabbinic commentaries on Melchizedek reveal considerable variety,<sup>8</sup> and the explanation of his relationship to Abram is at the core of most of them. Horton comments on the rabbinical interpretation given above.

For R. Ishmael, Melchizedek (= Shem) is an impious character who loses the priesthood to Abraham because he dared to bless Abraham before God. In point of fact, God had intended to derive the priesthood from Shem (= Melchizedek) but did not since Melchizedek committed such a great impropriety.<sup>9</sup>

One of the difficulties of the Genesis account is why Abraham, the hero of the narrative, showed respect to Melchizedek? Jerome held this view because it was obvious that Abram would certainly show respect for his ancestor.<sup>10</sup> Luther made an allusion to the fact that this view is held as general opinion.<sup>11</sup> In the identification of Melchizedek with Shem there is even some Rabbinic dialogue concerning his behavior in the ark. Abraham is seen to ask,

He said to Melchizedek, 'How did you come out of the ark?' Melchizedek answered, 'By the charity which we practised there.' Abraham said, 'How could you practise charity in the ark? Were there any poor there? . . .'<sup>12</sup>

Bowker relates this type of argument as coming about through necessity since,

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<sup>8</sup>Horton, The Melchizedek Tradition, 123-24.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>10</sup>Jerome Epistle 73, to Evangelus.

<sup>11</sup>Hughes, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 244.

<sup>12</sup>"Psalm Thirty-Seven," in The Midrash on Psalms, trans. William Braude, Yale Judaica Series, 13, 2 vols., 1:422.

Melchizedek was taken up and used as a strong argument in Christian apologetic against the Jews; in the second place, Melchizedek gave rise to considerable unorthodox speculation as a result of the enigmatic account of Gen. xiv.<sup>13</sup>

The rabbis would not have given credence to the Book of Hebrews since it was clearly focused on Jesus and it appears clear that the Jewish and Christian messages are disparate.<sup>14</sup>

### Non-literal Use of Genesis

Very simply the Genesis text reveals nothing concerning the bloodline of Melchizedek. To determine that he was related to Noah through Shem is apart from the revealed text. Thus it is clear that the rabbi utilized something other than the normal message of Genesis. This particular rabbinical interpretation therefore does not advocate a literal connection between Genesis and Hebrews.

Of course, this particular interpretation cannot be one to which the author of Hebrews alluded since this view, as Hughes and Spicq have noted, "is implausible since the 'genealogy' of Shem is perfectly well known."<sup>15</sup> Since this absence of genealogy is a major point of the argument of the author of Hebrews the views must be incompatible. Hughes goes further,

One may add that it would also invalidate the conception of Levi, as yet unborn but in the loins of Abraham, paying tithes to

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<sup>13</sup>Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, 196

<sup>14</sup>Disparate meanings indicate incompatible meanings. Either one or the other may be true, but not both.

<sup>15</sup>Hughes, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 244. Also see Spicq, L'Épître Aux Hébreux, 60-61.



Melchizedek as though to a priesthood of a different order, because, if Melchizedek is Shem, then Levi was no less in Melchizedek's loins than he was in Abraham's, and the distinction which is proposed falls to the ground.<sup>16</sup>

Thus it appears that the 'non-genealogy' argument of Hebrews is not compatible with this common rabbinical treatment of Melchizedek, for Shem most certainly had a genealogy, a father, and a birth and death, clearly recorded in Genesis. However, the main point of this comparison is that the rabbinic view has not provided a source which would explain the literal use of Genesis by the author of Hebrews.

#### Other Midrashic Interpretations

While the midrash listed in the previous paragraphs appears to be one of the most well known, it is not the only one concerning Melchizedek.

#### Philo

One of the more common references for midrashic thought is that of Philo. Philo followed a rule which stated that if two separate passages of scripture contained the same word, the two texts belonged together and explained each other.

However the similarity between Hebrews and Philo extends only to the interpretation of Melchizedek's name as righteousness and peace. Sowers states concerning that similarity,

But here the similarity ends . . . Melchizedek is allegorized as human reason which rises in divine intoxication to God. Since the etymologies are natural ones we need assume no contact whatever between the two interpretations of Melchizedek. Nor does there seem

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 244.

to be any affinity between the picture of Melchizedek in Heb. and that found in any extant Jewish interpretations.<sup>17</sup>

The point stated here is very important. It appears that the claim that Hebrews is using midrash is yet unsupported by any existing Jewish interpretations.<sup>18</sup> However the thrust of this dissertation is that Philo, not using the literal message of Genesis himself, does not present an argument for the literal use of Genesis 14:18-20 by Hebrews 7:1-3.

### The Qumran Interpretation

#### Melchizedek in Qumran Literature

. . . and from the inheritance of Melchizedek . . . their Melchizedek, who will bring them back to them and he will proclaim liberty for them to set them free and (to?) make atonement for their sins . . . for all the children of light and for the men of the lot of Melchizedek . . . for that is the time of the acceptable year of Melchizedek . . . as it is written concerning him in the hymns of David who says: The heavenly one standeth in the congregation of God; among the heavenly ones he judgeth . . . Its interpretation concerns Belial and the spirits of his lot which . . . God . . . and Melchizedek will avenge with the vengeance of the judgements of God . . . Isaiah the prophet who says: . . . Thy heavenly one is King . . .<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Sidney Sowers, The Hermeneutics of Philo in Hebrews, 123-24. While Sowers does not find any existing interpretation of Melchizedek that matches Hebrews, he does hold that Hebrews uses the midrash 'same word' rule of exposition.

<sup>18</sup>Joseph Fitzmyer, Essays on the Semitic Character of the New Testament, 222, is one of the most vocal advocates of midrash use and attempts to prove its similar character. The reader is referred to his work for further details on the midrash argument.

<sup>19</sup>M. DeJonge and A. S. Van Der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament," New Testament Studies 12 (1965-66):303. This is a translation of the fragment from 11Q discussing Melchizedek. It is shortened here, partly for brevity and partly due to the missing portions of the scroll.

The cave which gave up the scroll concerning Melchizedek was found in 1956. The scroll has been dated by Van der Woude as the first half of the first century A.D., while some date it earlier in the early first century B.C.<sup>20</sup> The scroll was a fragment and thus a great deal cannot be said about the Qumran belief concerning Melchizedek. What can be surmised is that Melchizedek was an eschatological figure, seemingly a heavenly deliverer, priest, judge and warrior. As one can see from the above partial quotation, the application is not unlike that which might be given to Christ. There is also a clear lack of human attributes. This accounts for the belief that he was some form of angelic being. The Qumran Melchizedek seems to be the leader of the spirits of light.

In other texts from Qumran there appears another figure, Melchiresa, who seems to be the antagonist of Melchizedek. Melchiresa, by contrast, is the leader of the spirits of darkness.

#### Qumran and Psalm 110

The similarities between Melchizedek's characteristics in Qumran and those presented about David's Lord in Psalm 110 are interesting. Kobelski comments,

In Ps 110:1, Yahweh exalts someone to a position at his right hand and promises victory over his enemies; 11QMelch portrays Melchizedek as an exalted figure in the assembly of El (11QMelch 2:9-11) and his victory over Belial and the spirits of his lot is assured (11QMelch 2:12-14; 3:7) . . . Verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 110 speak of the destruction of the enemy on the day of judgment. The same situation is presented in 11QMelch, in which Melchizedek is the agent of the enemies' destruction at the end of time (11QMelch 2:12-14; 3:7). Psalm 110:6 introduces the theme of the judgment of the enemies;

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<sup>20</sup>Paul J. Kobelski, Melchizedek and Melchiresa, 3.

11QMelch 2:9-15 treats this topic in detail in relation to Melchizedek and presents him as the agent of God's avenging judgment (11QMelch 2:13).<sup>21</sup>

Qumran then seemed to make Melchizedek the ultimate priestly angel. Kobelski states further,

The priestly status of some of the members of the Essene community, coupled with the association of all the members with the angels who exercise a priestly ministry in heaven, suggests an inheritance that is both 'heavenly' and 'priestly.' In the blessing of the priests in 1QSb 3:22-4:28, the notion of the heavenly possession (1QSb 3:25-27) and the priestly ministry in heaven (1QSb 4:24-26) are stressed.<sup>22</sup>

Thus Psalm 110 had a major influence on Qumran in its description of Melchizedek. Kobelski notes in his overview of Genesis 14:18-20,

In considering the allusion to Gen 14:18-20, the viewpoint of the author of 11QMelch should be distinguished from that displayed in the Genesis text. There is no reason to suspect that Melchizedek was thought to be an angel in the tradition of Gen 14:18-20 . . .<sup>23</sup>

It appears then that most commentators feel that the source used for the Qumran characterization of Melchizedek was Psalm 110.

#### Qumran and Genesis 14

However, Kobelski suggests some connection between other literature and Genesis 14 from which Qumran may have drawn. Further, he suggests a relation between the subjection of the kings in Genesis 14 and the deliverance of Lot, with the deliverance of the saints from the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 52.

hands of Belial in Qumran literature.<sup>24</sup> The image of Melchizedek as King is suggested in Qumran literature by his subjection of the evil forces. This is related by most to both Psalm 110 and Genesis 14. In Genesis 14 this is related to the subjection of the earthly kings by Abraham. But the author of Hebrews does not allude to Melchizedek as a warrior who subjects the kings of the earth. In addition, it is Abraham who subjects the kings of Genesis 14 and not Melchizedek. Thus this connection does not prove any literal use of Genesis by Hebrews.

#### Qumran and the Priesthood of Melchizedek

Qumran, for the most part seems to have elucidated its ideas mainly from the Psalm plus some type of pesher interpretation. The author of Hebrews relates Melchizedek mainly to his priesthood, while in Qumran there seems to be some difficulty in finding that relationship. Kobelski continues,

One of the most vexing problems of 11QMelch is to determine whether there is ever an allusion to the priesthood of Melchizedek. No commentator on this scroll has successfully located any explicit reference to his priesthood.<sup>25</sup>

This is not to say that these men have not found a connection. Most relate the operation of angelic deliverers as a priestly function.

Horton, who researched a connection between the relationship of Qumran to Hebrews 7:3, stated,

It is not impossible to see how a Christian writer, privy to Qumranite speculation about Melchizedek, might pattern Christ's priesthood upon that supra-mundane model. In doing so, however, it would

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 64.

be difficult to escape a subordination of Christ to Melchizedek similar to the subordination found in some of the Melchizedekian heresies. This subordination would conflict seriously with the view of the author of Hebrews in chapters 1 and 11 that Christ is superior to the heavenly beings, and that in putting all things in subjection to Christ, God exempted nothing, including a heavenly Melchizedek (cf. Heb. 11, 8).<sup>26</sup>

Even Fitzmyer agrees concerning the Qumran influence in Hebrews,

Even though it is not possible to say that the presentation of Melchizedek which is found in it directly influenced the midrash on him in Heb 7 (because the latter is developed almost exclusively in terms of the classic OT loci, Gn 14 and Ps 110) . . .<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusions

While both writers (Hebrews and Qumran) wrote concerning Melchizedek, there is no clear similarity, other than what can be explained by use of identical sources (Genesis 14 and Psalm 110). The messages are totally different. Hebrews presents Melchizedek as a blessing and intermediary for Abraham's people with God. Qumran presents him as an eschatological warrior performing some sacrificial attendant duties. Hebrews presents him as the link to God, Qumran as God's last day vindicator of good. The messages are clearly different. There seems to be no similarity in their character. The major emphasis that Hebrews places on his priestly function, seems neglected in Qumran. It appears that the use of the same source is the only similarity between Qumran and Hebrews 7. Thus it might be stated that the Qumran literature does not argue for a literal connection between Hebrews and Genesis.

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<sup>26</sup>Horton, 69.

<sup>27</sup>J. A. Fitzmyer. "The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament," New Testament Studies 7 (1960-61): 297-333.

Qumran would advocate that Melchizedek was an angel. This can not be derived from the text of Genesis alone, since there is no evidence that the Old Testament text presents Melchizedek as being an angel. There is no explicit (or implicit) statement anywhere in Genesis, Psalm 110, or Hebrews 7 that he qualifies as such. Further, there is no hint anywhere in the text that an angel qualifies as a priest in any official sense. Thus to use Qumran as a source for Hebrews would not argue for the literal use of the Genesis text.

### The Angelic Being Interpretation

#### The View

Group two (the following interpretations) includes those who would attempt to link the Hebrews' message and that of Genesis in some fashion. Many of the following views are held by conservative scholars, who hold for Biblical inspiration, reject the inspiration of other documents, yet do not deny their contribution to an understanding of early Christian theology.

Hodges, a primary spokesman for the 'angelic being' view, does not negate a parallel<sup>28</sup> between Qumran and the author of Hebrews.

There is indeed evidence that, at Qumran, Melchizedek was regarded as an angelic personage. If this is the case in Hebrews, then the Son of God is the High Priest in an order in which Melchizedek is simply a priest.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>The word 'parallel' here is chosen carefully. It does not indicate that Hodges held for Qumran influence, but that it was not uncommon during the pre-Christian era for this belief to be held. He seems to indicate it as a possible valid Jewish interpretation, perhaps through oral tradition.

<sup>29</sup>Zane Hodges, "Hebrews," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament edition, 798.

It is clear that Hodges shares the view that Melchizedek was an angel with those who hold that Hebrews was influenced by Qumran. Hodges' primary argument for Melchizedek being angelic is not founded from his interpretation of any Old Testament text.<sup>30</sup> For he states regarding the use of the word *διηλεκτός* ("perpetually") in 7:3 regarding Melchizedek's continuous priesthood,

It seems more natural that the author meant that Melchizedek belonged to an order in which there was no end to the priesthood of those engaged in it. (He later said in 7:8 that Melchizedek "is declared to be living.") If this is correct, Melchizedek may have been an angelic being who reigned for a time at Salem (i.e., Jerusalem). If so, the statement that he was "without beginning of days" would not mean that he was eternal, but simply that he had a pretemporal origin. Nor would this concept of Melchizedek as an angel elevate him to the same level as God's Son, since the author painstakingly asserted the Son's superiority to the angels (1:5-14).<sup>31</sup>

#### Relation to the Genesis Text

It is quite clear that Hodges is advocating that the additional information of Melchizedek's angelic personage was gleaned apart from the text of Genesis or Psalms. Hodges must be suggesting that it was either revealed to the author by the Holy Spirit through inspiration, or that he simply obtained it from some other cultural view (like oral tradition) and under the doctrine of inspiration it was included in the text.

Thus, if one holds this view, he cannot hold that the author of Hebrews obtained his information solely from the Old Testament text.

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<sup>30</sup>At least he does not seem to indicate thus.

<sup>31</sup>Hodges, 798.



The Book of Genesis and  
an Angelic Melchizedek

The Old Testament text nowhere reveals anything about Melchizedek being an angel. Those who hold this view make no attempt to reason from the text itself. The text nowhere makes it possible for an angel to be a formal priest. In all cases of the Old and New Testament, the priest was always a man. Hodges, himself, seems to admit this in his commentary on 5:1,

If it be asked what a high priest really is, the answer is easily drawn from the Old Testament institution with which the readers were familiar. Such a person is one of mankind's own number: he is selected from among men and he is their representative in matters related to God.<sup>32</sup>

Also the text seems to imply that the very High Priesthood that Christ filled required Him to be a man as in Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:14-15. Thus if Melchizedek was an angelic being, it would be new revelation, clearly apart from any textual indication. It would appear that what Hodges is trying to accomplish is to explain Melchizedek's seeming eternity. He finds it in a systematic theology which will fit both the Genesis' and Hebrews' text. However, this clearly would have to be new revelation since neither Psalm 110 nor Genesis 14 indicate the angelic personality of Melchizedek.

#### Conclusion

It seems that Hodges is working from systematic theology in an effort to be fair with the phrases, "he abides a priest perpetually"

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<sup>32</sup>Hodges, 791. Some may argue that Hebrews 5:1 relates only to the Aaronic line. This will be discussed in Chapter IV.

(7:3) and "it is witnessed that he lives on" (7:8). For Hodges states, ". . . the statement that he was 'without beginning of days' would not mean that he was eternal, but simply that he had a pre-temporal origin."<sup>33</sup> This solution then makes systematic theological sense. It appears within the scope of these phrases, yet keeps Melchizedek's eternity clearly short of that given to Christ.

These are the most difficult statements of the seventh chapter. And Hodges has made a theological attempt to deal with these phrases in their normal use without changing their basic meaning. But it is clear that this solution requires that additional revelation be added to the Old Testament text. The argument of Hebrews would thus be on the basis of the Old Testament *and* additional information.<sup>34</sup>

### The Priesthood of the Believer View

#### The View

This view is quite interesting, and has much to commend it. It was espoused by Auberlen in 1857 and is held in a similar form by others such as Demarest.

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<sup>33</sup>Hodges, 798.

<sup>34</sup>Paul Ellingworth has discussed the major problems with the angelic view. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to discuss the problems, or to critique them, but only to demonstrate that they are not advocating the literal use of Genesis as a basis for his argument. Ellingworth has noted, "Attempts to assimilate Melchizedek in Hebrews to the angelic figure of 11QMelch create more problems than they solve; if the author of Hebrews had thought of Melchizedek in this way, it would have been necessary for him either to contrast Melchizedek with Christ, or destroy the whole argument of chapter 1" (Paul Ellingsworth, "Like the Son of God - Form and Content in Hebrews 7:1-10." Biblica 64:2 (1983): 259.) The reader is referred to his article.

### The Believer Priest

The view basically holds that Melchizedek was his own priest, as was Abel, Adam, Noah and Abraham. Auberlen states,

The king of righteousness and his city of peace represent, thus, the primitive religion, and the original close relation of God and man, before it was spoiled by heathenism. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Shem represent the same. They were instances of the original child relation of man to God, which bears, in itself, security of eternal life. And he who is priest in this condition of union with God, is priest forever.<sup>35</sup>

The Levitical Priesthood separated men from that contact with God, as the Old Covenant put a wall in the way of the believer and God. Christ eliminated that wall and He as well as all believers became priests after the order of Melchizedek.

### Basis

The basis of this belief is that the author of Hebrews is contrasting the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant a Levitical priest was required. In the New Covenant, one was not required. Melchizedek was the priest, as was Christ, as all New Covenant believers would be. Auberlen states,

Levitical priests rested on descent from Levi as a legal ordinance, while that of Melchizedek was had in virtue of his inner, personal worth, his true priestly appearance in himself, without any legal advantage whatever. In the latter case, the right is grounded in the free, living, spiritual nature.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Carl August Auberlen, "The Eternal Life and the Priesthood of Melchizedek," Bibliotheca Sacra 16 (1859): 547.

<sup>36</sup>Auberlen, 539.

He continues,

The Levitical priests are appointed only in accordance with the prescription of a carnal commandment, which does not reach beyond the region of temporal death. . . He stood in the living, filial relation to God, similar to believers under the new covenant.<sup>37</sup>

Auberlen argues by reference to passages such as 9:14, 10:19, 12:28 and 13:15 that the author of Hebrews is seeing believers as priests and thus fulfilling Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:9. Demarest expresses a similar view,

. . . a priest in whom the fulness of divine grace is operative, endowing him with its eternal character, of necessity 'continues for ever' . . . the Melchizedekian order was a wholly interiorized priesthood of *grace* which death could not destroy. In short, Melchizedek is superior to Levi because the latter's priesthood lies in the sphere of law and nature, whereas the priesthood of Melchizedek is rooted in the realm of supernatural grace.<sup>38</sup>

Auberlen must be complimented for his work in the context. It is clear that the author of Hebrews is working with the contrast between death and life, the Old Covenant and the New. In fact, regardless of the view one holds in this matter, Auberlen's contextual work is impressive by contrast to the other views, in that very few regard the contextual argument of Hebrews when considering the person of Melchizedek.

#### Relationship to the Genesis Text

While Auberlen comes closer than many in using the text to demonstrate the author of Hebrews' use of Genesis, he also must read

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 551

<sup>38</sup>Bruce Demarest, A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7:1-10 from the Reformation to the Present, 97.

back into the text of Genesis some theological ideas which do not coordinate with the original intent.

Auberlen makes Abel, Noah, Abraham all believer priests on an equivalent scale with the New Testament believer. Thus it seems that the Genesis text then would be indicating that the Mosaic Covenant was a step backward. However the Book of Genesis is not indicating that believers from Abel to Abraham were superior priests to those of the Old Covenant, or equal to the New Covenant priests. God has progressively worked through history, and the New Covenant priesthood was superior due to the death of Christ on the cross. The author of Hebrews is emphatic that this ability to enter the Holy Place only came about following Christ's death (6:19, 9:11ff., 10:19-21). Thus this interpretation does not utilize the message of Genesis as a basis for Hebrews, but theologially adds emphasis beyond, and different from, the original text.

#### The Prefiguration in Genesis 14

Auberlen presents Abraham as being a representative of the Old Covenant against the contrast of Melchizedek as the representative of the New Covenant. But clearly from Abraham's loins would come both those who enjoyed the New Covenant (Ezekiel 36:22-38) as well as those under the Old Covenant. And if one follows Auberlen's reasoning, he has Melchizedek, the New Covenant, blessing Abraham, the Old Covenant. The symbolism seems to break down. It would seem that with Auberlen the Old Covenant begins with Abraham in Genesis 12 and it clearly does not. Auberlen's view does not advocate the literal intent of Genesis as a basis for the Hebrews' argument.

### Conclusions

While Auberlen's view presents a theological possibility it does not suggest that the author of Hebrews derived his information from the text of Genesis alone. It requires that one read back his New Testament theology to the Old Testament, altering the original meaning of the text. Primarily, Genesis did not intend to show Abel, Enoch and Melchizedek as believer-priests in the same sense as the New Covenant believer, since that potential was only realized following the death of Christ.

### The Pre-Incarnate Christ Interpretation

This view is not widely held today, but was held by A.T. Hanson.<sup>39</sup> It was also held by J. B. McCaul who felt this was another appearance by the Angel of the Lord, whom he equates with Christ.<sup>40</sup> G. Campbell Morgan also held this view.<sup>41</sup> It will be dealt with briefly here.

### Basics

This view stated that it was actually Jesus Himself who met Abraham in Genesis 14. He was in His pre-incarnate form, took the body of a man, went out and blessed Abraham. Thus the phrase "abides a

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<sup>39</sup>For further reference see A. T. Hanson's reasoning in Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, 65-72. Hanson states that at the time of his writing no commentator had actually made the identification that Melchizedek was identical with Christ. Refer to p. 70.

<sup>40</sup>J. B. McCaul, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 75,80.

<sup>41</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, God's Last Word to Man, 84-85.

priest continually" is explained in the eternality of the second person of the Trinity. Hanson states, ". . . one who is described as having no beginning of days can hardly be reckoned as less ancient than Christ . . ."<sup>42</sup> Hanson further reasons, "The phrase 'without father and mother' suggests the attributes of deity . . ."<sup>43</sup> G. Campbell Morgan speaks of Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham as "the appearing and ministry of none other than the Son of God."<sup>44</sup>

#### Relation to the Genesis Text

First of all there is no indication in the book of Genesis that Melchizedek was anything other than an actual living breathing man. Only his actions lead one to believe that it must have been the pre-incarnate Christ. Yet the seeming sense of the text that it was an actual man who blessed Abraham seems to preclude the possibility that it was the pre-incarnate Christ.

To have a real living human as a priest in Genesis 14 would require a real living Jesus incarnate. This would have made Jesus incarnate before his incarnation. While there are appearances of God in the form of a man (Genesis 18), there are none that require a full-fledged living/dying, tempted man as would an appearance as a priest (Hebrews 5:1-2).

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<sup>42</sup>Hanson, 66.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Morgan, 84-85.

Thus it appears that any conclusion that Melchizedek was Jesus Himself in pre-incarnate form requires conclusions beyond the indication in Genesis alone. This view then has clearly not demonstrated a literal understanding of the text of Genesis as a basis for Hebrews.

#### Argument from Silence Interpretation

This heading encompasses what most refer today as a typological interpretation. That is, Melchizedek prefigures Christ in the appearance in Genesis 14.<sup>45</sup> Of course, this much seems to be clear from the author of Hebrews' use of Melchizedek. This view is an attempt to show literarily *how* Genesis demonstrated the attributes given Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:3.

#### The View

Many commentators correctly recognize that the author is speaking literarily when he refers to the absence of Melchizedek's credentials in 7:3 (lack of genealogy, father, mother, birth, death). Further, they rightly understand Melchizedek as simply a man, who lived and died. However, presented with a difficult contradiction (his seeming eternity in the phrase "he abides a priest perpetually"), they argue that the literary (only) implication is that Melchizedek was not born or did not die. Therefore he literarily (not historically) symbolized the eternity of the Son of God. Calvin was a supporter of this view.

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<sup>45</sup>The 'prefigure' terminology simply means that the presentation of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 was representative of Christ. That is, the attributes presented there are the same attributes that will appear in the future figure.



For since the Scripture, by assigning no end to his life, leaves him as if he were to survive through all ages; it certainly represents or shadows forth to us, in his person, a figure, not of a temporal, but of an eternal throne.<sup>46</sup>

This view is likely the most prevailing 'typological' view.<sup>47</sup>

It is presented in detail by Hughes.<sup>48</sup>

The explanation of the typological significance of Melchizedek now turns, unhesitatingly, to what is *not* said about him in the Genesis narrative. It is a form of argument from silence which has parallels in Philo and also in later rabbinical literature, where generally, it is of a fanciful nature.<sup>49</sup>

Bruce holds this view almost identically as he states, "The words which follow present an outstanding example of the argument from silence in a typological setting."<sup>50</sup> Bruce then gives an explanation of his understanding of an argument from silence as he continues,

The argument from silence plays an important part in rabbinical interpretation of Scripture where (for exegetical purposes) nothing must be regarded as having existed before the time of its first

<sup>46</sup>John Calvin, A Commentary on Genesis," 389.

<sup>47</sup>This is the more general use of the word 'typological'.

<sup>48</sup>Another who reflects this view in his commentary is Moffatt, who sides with Philonic interpretation in this instance (I.C.C., "Hebrews," 92). Others are difficult to place in categories as often they do not delineate the 'how' relationship of Hebrews 7:1-3.

<sup>49</sup>Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 248. Italics are by Hughes. Underlining is by this author to emphasize the admitted similarity between Hughes and rabbinics. Donald Guthrie, The Letter to the Hebrews, 156-57; James Moffatt, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 92; and Simon Kistemaker, "Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews" in New Testament Commentary, 189; also feel that this passage is explained by Jewish exegesis, particularly that paralleling Philo.

<sup>50</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 136.

biblical mention. . . The argument is used extensively by Philo for allegorical purposes . . .<sup>51</sup>

The view is widely advocated and generally taught. Warren Wiersbe in his popular lay commentary series states,

Since there is no account of Melchizedek's death, as far as the record is concerned it seems that Melchizedek is still serving as a priest and king. *But as far as the record is concerned*, he was not born, nor did he die. In this way, he is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.<sup>52</sup>

#### Specifics of the Literary 'Argument from Silence'

##### Without Father, without Mother

Normally this is taken to mean that the author of Hebrews was indicating that as Melchizedek had no indication of father and mother, thus Christ had also no father and mother. Of course, they recognize that Christ clearly had an earthly mother, so this is typically taken to mean Jesus Christ in His post-resurrection body.

However, a normal reading of Genesis reveals no indication that men who lack a listing of their mother or father will enjoy a future in a parentless resurrection body. Thus this particular reasoning would imply more than the Old Testament reveals.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 136. Underlined words are by this author to emphasize the admitted similarity of interpretation to rabbinics.

<sup>52</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Confident, 74.

<sup>53</sup>This line of reasoning is held by George Wesley Buchanan, "To the Hebrews," in The Anchor Bible, 119-21.

Without Genealogy

This is also taken, as the previous phrase, to mean that Melchizedek's lack of listed genealogy indicated a future Melchizedek who would not be born of human parents. Again, it is difficult to find that indication in the words of Genesis. Again, this is taken to indicate Jesus becomes Melchizedek only in His post-resurrection body.

Having neither Beginning of Days, nor End of Life

It is here that the most emphatic 'argument from silence' takes place. This is normally taken to mean that the literary absence of Melchizedek's birth or death has prefigured Christ's eternal life.<sup>54</sup> F. B. Meyer has stated, "What is allegorically true of Melchizedek was literally true of Jesus, who had neither beginning of days nor end of life."<sup>55</sup> Many men in Genesis had no birth or death recorded. And just as clearly the reader would not imply that the king of Sodom, for example, would have eternal life. Thus to hold this belief, the writer of Hebrews must use a special hermeneutic, applicable to Melchizedek alone.

The particular use of this parallel is not without apparent evidence in Hebrews. Almost immediately following "having neither beginning of days nor end of life" is the phrase, "he abides a priest perpetually." The two thus are related by these commentators. If one

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<sup>54</sup>This is held by A. B. Davidson, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 132-34 and Franz Delitzsch, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 335.

<sup>55</sup>F. B. Meyer, The Way into the Holiest, 109.

takes the latter phrase to indicate Melchizedek's eternal life, it seems easily related to his lack of recorded birth or death.<sup>56</sup>

Further in Hebrews 7:8 the author states, "of whom it is witnessed that he lives on." Here is the use of the same word "lives" as in verse 3, ". . . nor end of *life*." Thus "lack of birth and death" is commonly taken to mean eternal life in the 'argument from silence'.<sup>57</sup>

Summary: Argument from Silence

If one advocates any of the above uses, then to be consistent he must advocate a non-normal use of Genesis by the author of Hebrews, whether it be through a different interpretation technique or additional revelation.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Thomas Hewitt in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," 116; Arthur W. Pink, An Exposition of Hebrews, 367; and Robert Milligan, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 249; put forth the view that the phrase "without beginning of days nor end of life" only indicated the range of his priesthood. That is, in contrast to the Levitical priesthood, which forced men to retire at a particular age, Melchizedek's priesthood existed for the span of his life. The typological significance of this would be that Christ's priesthood would also span His lifetime, thus for eternity. The Genesis literature does not indicate anything concerning Melchizedek's span of office and thus the author of Hebrews becomes privy to additional information not included in the Genesis record. This is clear as Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, also had no recorded birth, yet no one would claim that was evidence that Jethro held his office from birth to death.

<sup>57</sup>This reasoning is held by Albert Barnes, Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 158. He holds this to be Jewish reasoning.

<sup>58</sup>Beside those mentioned previously, others who hold this view, broadly or in part, are William Gouge, Hebrews, 2:98-99; John Owen, An Exposition of Hebrews, 3:378; Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 173; and John Peter Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Hebrews, 126.

Summary

At this point it should be clear that there is no broadly published view which represents the literal use of Genesis in Hebrews 7:1-3. The following chapters will show that indeed there is a literal understanding of Genesis 14 which will duplicate the thinking displayed in Hebrews 7:1-3.

### CHAPTER III

#### MELCHIZEDEK AND HIS PLACE IN THE CONTEXT OF GENESIS

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine;  
Now he was a priest of EI Elyon.  
And he blessed him and said,  
    "Blessed be  
    Abram of EI Elyon,  
    Possessor of heaven and earth;  
    And blessed be EI Elyon,  
    Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."  
And he gave him a tenth of all.

Genesis 14:18-20

#### Introduction and Overview of the Chapter

##### The Problem in Genesis

This quotation is all that appears in Genesis concerning the life of the mysterious figure, Melchizedek. It seems that the author of Hebrews 7:1-3 utilized more information than is contained in Genesis 14:18-20. It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate that the author of Hebrews explained Melchizedek with context of Genesis as his only source.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This excludes Psalm 110:4 which, in the view of this dissertation, does not add any knowledge to the Genesis character, Melchizedek. This also assumes use of a normal, literal hermeneutic to determine the message of Genesis.

## The Approach

### Section 1: A Contextual Study-- Abraham<sup>2</sup> and Melchizedek

In analyzing Melchizedek's place in the literary context, his role is not easily determined. The difficulty comes about because the hero, Abraham, submitted to another man. Ross recognizes this,

Melchizedek is the only person whom Abram recognized as his spiritual superior. Abram accepted blessing from him (v. 19), and Abram paid him a 10th (a tithe) of all he had (v. 20). Abram did this deliberately, in full awareness of what he was doing.<sup>3</sup>

Since literarily, Melchizedek interacted only with Abraham, the reader must first understand the place of Abraham in the narrative. Genesis 12--14 will be examined to determine the purpose of Abraham. Melchizedek then will be compared to Abraham to determine the part he plays.

The study's conclusions will show that Abraham's function was to be the mediator<sup>4</sup> of blessing (or cursing) to those who come in contact with him. The place that Melchizedek holds in that scheme is that he is the mediator<sup>5</sup> to Abraham. The scheme is shown here.

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<sup>2</sup>The name 'Abraham' is used consistently in place of 'Abram' for the purpose of clarity and consistency. However, it should be recognized that the name 'Abraham' does not occur until Genesis 17.

<sup>3</sup>Allen Ross, "Genesis" in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament edition, ed. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, 54.

<sup>4</sup>The word 'mediator' used with respect to Abraham means that Abraham was the 'go-between' for men in their dealings with God. People in Genesis were 'blessed' or 'cursed' based on their dealings with Abraham. Thus he is their mediator based on Genesis 12:3a.

<sup>5</sup>The word 'mediator' used with respect to Melchizedek means that he was the communicator between God and Abraham. He would represent God to Abraham, and would represent Abraham to God. This will be dealt with later in the discussion on Genesis 14:18-20.



### Section 2: A Study of the 'Bridge' Motif

A second study related to the context of Genesis will be the 'bridge' motif in Genesis. There are continual attempts to 'bridge' or 'link' man to God in the Genesis literature. These are the Tower of Babel, Melchizedek, and Jacob's Ladder. A confirmation of Melchizedek's place in this motif will validate that Genesis intended to show that he was an intermediary between God and Abraham.

### Section 3: Representation of the Future Melchizedek

This section will demonstrate that in Genesis 14 Abraham was a representative, a picture, of the future nation, Israel. The purpose will be to demonstrate that as Abraham represents future Israel in these chapters, Melchizedek represents a future, ultimate, Melchizedek.

### Section 4: The 'Genealogy', 'Mother-Father', and 'Birth-Death' Motifs

The fourth section deals with the three motifs found in Hebrews 7:3a, taken from Genesis. Abraham and the patriarchs had particular genealogical 'credentials'. All these credentials were those of a future redemptive nation and a Messiah. Yet Melchizedek could not claim his priesthood on that basis.



This section will elaborate on these motifs in the book of Genesis, to show their validity and their significance. The fact that Melchizedek was without these credentials will show that the ultimate Melchizedek, like his predecessor, will claim his mediatory, priestly, position apart from the genealogical authority of the Abrahamic line.

### Overview Summary

The discussion of these four areas provides the background from which the New Testament author could view the ultimate Melchizedek in Jesus. Melchizedek was the mediator to Abraham, thus his ultimate will be a mediator to the fulfillment of Abraham, the nation Israel.

### Section 1: Contextual Study--Abraham and Melchizedek (Genesis 11:27--14:24)

#### Abraham the Mediator of Blessing or Cursing

The narrative of Genesis 12--26 is concerned with the hero, Abraham. Abraham's influence, based on the relationship in Genesis that he maintained with God, endures to the end of the New Testament canon. But if Abraham was so great, then why does Genesis present Melchizedek as greater? The literary stability that the reader finds in Abraham seems disturbed by the appearance of Melchizedek in chapter 14.

Most commentators agree that Melchizedek is superior to Abraham.<sup>6</sup> Melchizedek's impact can be known only through his interac-

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<sup>6</sup>Most commentators recognize the cultic tithe clearly makes Melchizedek the superior. Further, it is generally agreed that the tithe indicated submission to the authority of a god who had granted good things (Henry Lansdell, The Sacred Tenth, 47). One who opposes that view is R. H. Smith in "Abram and Melchizedek," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 77 (1965): 129-53. However he is in a

tion with Abraham in Genesis 14. Thus the reader must know what Abraham represents to know what Melchizedek represents.

It is the purpose of this section to determine the meaning of Genesis 14:18-20 within the context of chapters 12--14. Abraham is given a promise in Genesis 12:1-3. In the following chapters, Abraham moves through the narrative interacting with individuals and nations. These chapters focus on the "blessing" and "cursing" of Genesis 12:3a. This analysis will first find that Abraham is the hero of the narrative, and second, that Melchizedek's place is that of a necessary intermediary between God and Abraham.

#### Genesis 11:27--14:24 as a Literary Message

Since 11:27 follows the primeval period, and begins the patriarchal narratives, most commentators view this as the beginning of a major message section. It establishes the promise which will form the nation Israel. The conclusion of the toledot of Terah occurs in 11:27, one of the eleven such subdivisions in the book of Genesis.<sup>7</sup>

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distinct minority. For further study of the tithes and its use in Genesis, see George Castillo, "The Nature and Purpose of Tithing in the Old Testament" (ThM Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1982) 26-29.

<sup>7</sup>Toledot (genealogy) is considered to be the structural basis around which the book of Genesis is laid out. It sets the beginning point for a 'this is what happened to the line of . . .'. This motif will be discussed more fully in a later subdivision under the toledot heading.

The Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:1-3 is a revelation of God. The accounts which follow this disclosure by God reflect Abraham's action on the basis of the revelation.<sup>8</sup> The study thus begins in 11:27.

This division (11:27--14:24) contains four narrative events. The first event, the Abrahamic promise (11:27--12:9), is the foundation on which the following three chronicles are developed; travel to Egypt (12:10--13:4), separation from Lot (13:5-18), and the battle of the kings (14:1-24).<sup>9</sup>

If the last three episodes of this section were to be related to the first event (the promise) with respect to purpose, they would be; the fear of death (12:10--13:4), the promise of land ensured (13:5-18), and the relationship to the nations defined (14:1-24).

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<sup>8</sup>A prime example of this literary pattern in Genesis (God's revelation--Abraham's reaction) is the Hagar event in chapter 16. It directly follows the Abrahamic Covenant in chapter 15. God had pointed out that the heir would be one from his loins, not an adopted son (15:3-4). So Abraham and Sarah find a natural way to fulfill God's promise through Hagar.

<sup>9</sup>This arrangement and the arguments are based on the tension/resolution principle as related to the promise. It is discussed in detail, particularly as applied to the Abraham cycle, by Dixon Sutherland, "The Organization of the Abraham Promise Narratives," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 95 (1983): 337-43. In brief 'tension/resolution' is a narrative principle which begins with an underlying foundation (The Abrahamic promise). The following narratives are a cycle of tension and then resolution. A tension arises, "How will Abraham become a great nation if he dies by Pharaoh's hand?" A resolution arises from his own mind, that of giving his wife to Pharaoh. However, the ultimate resolution is God's as He delivers Abraham out of Egypt. Then a second tension arises in chapter 13, that of the conflict of land between Lot and Abraham. The third tension is the capture of Lot and the spoil in chapter 14. These are all followed by resolutions. It is in the resolution that the reader learns of God's way.

**The Abrahamic Promise:  
Genesis 11:27--12:9**

The Abrahamic promise is the basis for the three narratives which follow it in chapters 12--14. This fundamental promise is found in 12:1-3. It is followed by Abraham's reaction in faith as he proceeded to Canaan. It is at that point that God confirmed the land (12:7) completing the inference of 12:1.

The promise presented several critical points. It first affirmed blessings which were particular for Abraham and his future nation. Secondly, it avouched blessings for others through Abraham and his nation.

**The Blessings to Abraham  
and His Nation**

First the promise spoke of a land ("To a land which I will show you"),<sup>10</sup> completed in 12:7 ("To your descendants I will give this land"). It guaranteed that from Abraham would come Israel ("I will make you a great nation"). Abraham would be blessed by God ("I will bless you") as well as being revered ("make your name great").

**The Blessings to Others through  
Abraham and His Nation**

Following the blessings to Abraham, God then progressed to the influence Abraham would have on others. Abraham was to be a mediator to those whom he influenced. He was the avenue of God's gracious restora-

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<sup>10</sup>At this time this is not strictly a promise. Leupold calls them only "indirectly a blessing" (H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, 411).

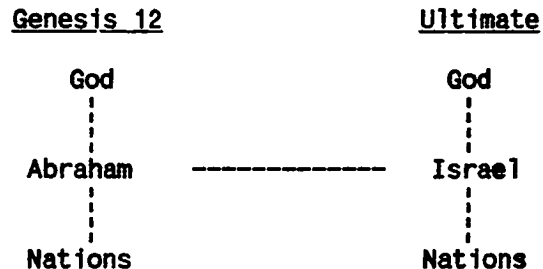
tion, so that those who blessed Abraham (recognized him as the avenue of blessing and submitted) would be blessed ("I will bless those who bless you"). Those who refused that gracious avenue would be cursed ("the one who curses you I will curse").<sup>11</sup>

#### Summary: The Abrahamic Promise

Westermann picks up the meaning and structure of the Abrahamic promise section when he states,

The significance of the promise associated with this command also goes far beyond Abraham. It has three parts, each of which elaborates the blessing promised Abraham, which will extend from Abraham (v. 3) to the circle of those among whom he lives (v. 3a) and finally to "all the families of the earth" (v. 3b).<sup>12</sup>

In essence the promise has delineated the avenue of blessing for God through Abraham. The structure is shown here.



#### Faith: Abraham Leaves Haran

Verse 4 delineates the narrator's understanding of Abraham's movements to Canaan, "So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to

<sup>11</sup>The promise of 12:3b includes blessing through Abraham to all the families of the earth. Since this portion of the promise to Abraham is not a central focus of chapters 12--14, nor of Hebrews 7, it will not be discussed in detail in this dissertation.

<sup>12</sup>Claus Westermann, Genesis, 98.

him . . ." Abraham's first movement was one of obedience based on the promise which God had given him in 12:1, "Go forth from your country . . ." Abraham then repaired to the east of Bethel, built an altar and identified with the Name of YHWH (12:8).

#### Descendants: Genesis 12:10--13:4

Abraham's failure to trust God for the provision of the 'Great Nation' (12:2) is illustrated immediately in his journey to Egypt.

#### The Tension: Continuance of the Line

Sutherland relates this account to the stated Abrahamic promise,

The arrangement of the material is oriented around a tension between promise and obstacle to promise. The movement of the whole unit is from promise to resolution, but within that movement also exists the tension of non-resolution of the promise. . . . By placing the rather common story of the endangered wife in Genesis 12:11-20 the compilers personify the threat to future posterity promised to Abraham. Ultimately the promise-obstacle tension centers on offspring, which is personified in Isaac.<sup>13</sup>

The tension is first noticed in Genesis 12:10, "Now there was a famine in the land . . ." Abraham's primary basis for the move was that of sustenance. He could not have descendants if he starved. The stay in Egypt increased the tension. Pharaoh was a threat to his ability to live and have posterity.

#### Resolution: Abraham

In reaction to the famine Abraham left Canaan in order to secure his continuance. He then lied to Pharaoh when he arrived in

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<sup>13</sup>Sutherland, 341.

Egypt so that he might further preserve himself.<sup>14</sup> Abraham was attempting through his own abilities to save himself. To lose his life would seemingly nullify the promise of 12:2 ("I will make you a great nation"). Alford notes,

We may observe, and ought not to conceal, the entirely selfish nature of the arrangement. It is not made to save Sarai but to save Abram by the more easily sacrificing her. If she were known as his wife, she could be had only by destroying him; if as his sister, the end might be accomplished without affecting his safety, nay with probable good results for his worldly prosperity.<sup>15</sup>

Resolution: God

God's response to Abraham was based on the words of His pledge. Pharoah was cursed for his treatment of Sarah,<sup>16</sup> the wife of the man with the promise. Abraham's blessing and Pharoah's cursing recalled the words of the promise, "I will bless those who bless thee and curse those

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<sup>14</sup>At minimum, Abraham was trying to simply save his life. The reader is aware of the close connection between Abraham's life and the ability to have a great nation from his loins. He seems to be ready to give up Sarah to Pharoah for the cause. But beside the fact that God would preserve Abraham through His care, God had designed Sarah to be the mother and was not about to endanger her. Sarah was revealed as God's choice as mother in 17:15-21.

<sup>15</sup>Henry Alford, The Book of Genesis and Part of the Book of Exodus, 61.

<sup>16</sup>God demonstrated that He will keep His promise to Abraham unconditionally. It is Abraham who had deceived Pharoah. Pharoah was an innocent curser of Abraham. That is, Pharoah could not have known that he had to treat Sarah well in order to avoid a curse. Yet he was still judged. The promise would be kept independent of excuse. Abimilech found himself in a similar naive situation in Genesis 20. However Abimilech's response was a contrast to Pharoah's. Abimilech responded by blessing Abraham (20:15) and received blessing (21:22-23). All of this, of course, was in strict accordance with the pronouncement God had made in Genesis 12:3a.

who curse thee." Abraham was frustrated, Pharaoh was cursed, and nothing was accomplished because the characters of this chapter had ignored the fact that God would ensure the promise.

#### The Land: Genesis 13:5-18

This narrative is also related to the promise, particularly to 12:1,7. The story concerned the promised property. Lot was blessed due to his relationship with Abraham.<sup>17</sup> However, a tension developed between them. Lot chose the land based on his own natural sight. Abraham chose based on faith in the promise.

#### Tension: The Provision of Sustenance

The tension is apparent in the concern of Abraham and Lot for the basic necessities of life. Brueggemann notes the importance of this narrative event.

We are concerned not with a romantic religious idea, but with a changed perception of social and economic reality. In the first narrative, Abraham is concerned for survival in the face of imperial power. In the second the crisis is about real flocks and water. In the first, Abraham is intimidated, but he does not finally capitulate to the power of Pharaoh. In the second, Abraham rejects the ideology of scarcity and acts on a different perception because he does not doubt God's promise.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Lot had linked himself with Abraham, and thus with his promise. Lot derived much blessing because of his relationship to Abraham. He was materially blessed (13:5), saved from exile (14:16) and saved from destruction (19:29) simply on the basis of his relationship with Abraham.

<sup>18</sup>Walter Brueggemann, Genesis, 133.



Resolution: Abraham's Sustenance in the Land

God rectified this problem, further specifying the promise outlined to Abraham in 12:1,7. Lot had looked through his natural eyes. "And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere . . ." (Genesis 13:10a).<sup>19</sup> By comparison Abraham trusted God in giving Lot the choice. Then in contrast to Lot's overview, God told Abraham to scan what he would possess, "And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are. . .'" (Genesis 13:14).

Then, in addition to reconfirming the land promise (13:15), God related the land possession to Abraham's descendants, thus corroborating His promise of a "great nation."

Summary: God to Provide Abraham a Land

On the basis of the Abrahamic promise in 12:1-3,7 God would provide a land for Abraham and his descendants. While Lot chose to select independently of God, Abraham chose to allow God to provide his sustenance by giving him a land.

Mediator to Nations: Genesis 14

Genesis 14 has always been difficult. Robert Davidson comments, "This chapter is something of an erratic boulder in the Genesis landscape."<sup>20</sup> The narrative now moves to the chapter which contains the

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<sup>19</sup>In 13:13 the narrator inserts a comment concerning the spiritual depravity of the land which Lot had chosen. Lot's natural vision did not see the spiritual problem.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Davidson, Genesis 12--50, 32.

story of Melchizedek. The chapter relates back particularly to Genesis 12:3a.

And I will bless those who bless you,  
And the one who curses you I will curse.

It is here that Abraham moves to the national scene. He is pictured for the first time as a potential nation, interacting with other nations. The portion of the promise in 12:3a in chapter 14 finds particular emphasis to the non-Hebrew.<sup>21</sup> This chapter shows Abraham's function as mediator of blessing nations based on the Abrahamic promise.

#### Abraham and the Nations

The movement of Abraham onto the international battle scene is somewhat unexpected. Ryken states, "It is worthy of note that military heroism, so prominent elsewhere in ancient literature, is virtually absent from the image of the hero that emerges from the story of Abraham."<sup>22</sup>

Ross relates the chapter back to 12:3a, "The record of the battle of the four kings against the five is an interesting section for the development of the promise to make Abram great and to bless those who bless him and curse any who curse him."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Within this section, Abraham is named the Hebrew. This is the first time that this national designation occurs. It occurs here to set off Abraham in this national context. Since Abraham has no children as yet, all the characters in this chapter are non-Hebrew.

<sup>22</sup>Leland Ryken, The Literature of the Bible, 47. Also refer to Nahum M. Sarna (Understanding Genesis, 111) and Gerhard Von Rad (Genesis, 175) for similar comments.

<sup>23</sup>Ross, Creation and Blessing, 291.

The five kings for whom Abraham fought had their goods restored (14:17). The four kings whom Abraham opposed (because of the capture of Lot) were smitten (14:17). Abraham's confederates, Aner, Eschol and Mamre became partakers in the victory due to their covenant relationship with Abraham. More specifically, it narrates in microcosm the relationship of Abraham as mediator of blessing (and cursing) to these nations.

The Literary Connection of  
the Events in the Chapter

The chapter is divided into three events; five kings against four (14:1-12); return of the people and the goods by Abraham (14:13-16); and interaction between Abraham, Melchizedek and the king of Sodom (14:17-24).

The booty which was taken from Sodom and Gomorrah is the thread which connects the events of the chapter. This booty was taken by the four kings (verses 1-12), recaptured by Abraham (verses 13-16), tithed to Melchizedek (verse 20) and returned to the king of Sodom (verses 17-26). This 'booty' will provide the object around which the characters of the chapter will establish their position.

The Tension: Capture of the  
Spoil: Genesis 14:1-12

The function of the first 16 verses of chapter 14 is to show Abraham's relationship to the nations, as mediator of blessing (or cursing). The opening verses present the reader with no theological truths, no apparent connection to the previous section, and seemingly no

basis for its inclusion in the text. Westermann notices this difficulty,

The rebel kings drew up in battle order against them, with mention of the place (v. 8). There should follow here a report that the kings of the east defeated the rebels; it is missing, but is presupposed in the continuation in v. 10 which gives an account of the flight of the (defeated) vassal kings. The report concludes in v. 11, noting that after their victory the kings of the east took booty and departed. The report is extremely brief and concise; it says only what is necessary and is completely self-contained.<sup>24</sup>

Concerning verse 11 at the conclusion of the battle report, Westermann continues to point out the mystery of the lack of ending.

Verse 11 is the conclusion of the report. The subject of the sentence is mentioned neither in the preceding sentence nor before it. It can only refer back to the sentence which has dropped out and which reported the victory of the kings of the east. As the whole episode is concerned with a punitive expedition against vassals in revolt, there must have been a report that the vassal relationship was re-established. V. 11 merely concludes by saying that the kings of the east took booty and went away. But this is not a satisfactory ending . . .<sup>25</sup>

Westermann identifies exactly the literary reason for the lack of information concerning the outcome of the participants of the battle, "The reason the ending was cut off lies obviously in the binding of vv. 1-11 with the narrative beginning in v. 12, for which it was not necessary."<sup>26</sup>

The purpose for the inclusion of this international skirmish into the text is simply to provide background for the capture of Lot and the spoil. It is only because of Lot that Abraham becomes connected to

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<sup>24</sup>Claus Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 193.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

these kings. It is not until verses 11 and 12 that the observer begins to get a hint of that connection to Abraham. The capture of Lot and the booty is the only purpose of the battle story.

Hence the theological meaning of the chapter becomes clearer in the connection to Abraham and his promise. This begins in 14:13-16.

The Resolution--Part 1: Abraham Recaptures  
the Spoil: Genesis 14:13-16

Abraham moved into the conflict between these nations. The results are given in 14:16-17.

. . . and he smote them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people.

Those against whom Abraham had fought were smitten.<sup>27</sup> Those for whom Abraham had fought had their goods and people recovered. Abraham had truly blessed those who blessed him and cursed those who cursed him.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>An outstanding literary note to this chapter is the fact that Abraham conquered these four kings with only 318 men (14:14). While there are no precise indications in the passage as to the number of men whom Abraham was fighting, it appears likely that they exceeded the number of Abraham's forces. Also, there may have been more than the 318 men, since Aner, Eschol and Mamre, the Amorites whom had made covenant with Abraham, went with him (14:24). However, this does not change the point of the text, that God gave Abraham the victory over the pagan kings (14:20). He thus curses those who were opposed to him in fulfillment of Genesis 12:3a.

<sup>28</sup>Pharaoh had unknowingly aligned himself against Abraham and was cursed because of 12:3a. These kings had also aligned against Abraham unknowingly, since it was only their capture of Lot that connected them with him. Thus they were cursed as well. The kings who sided with Abraham were blessed due to their positive, though ignorant, association with him. Even the king of Sodom, ruler of a wicked city (13:13), became blessed through association with Abraham.

Literary connection with  
the following section

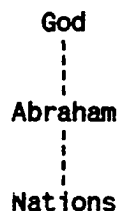
This division (verses 12-16) delivers the reader to the next section (verses 17-24), that of the disposal of the booty. Westermann continues his comments referring to verse 16 at the end of this section,

In verse 16 the narrative descends from its high point. The conqueror comes back from the pursuit of the foe together with his liberated brother and the other captives, laden with the booty recovered. The goal of the undertaking is achieved; but there remains something further to tell: what happens to the booty? Vv. 17, 21-24 deal with this.<sup>29</sup>

Summary: Genesis 14:13-16

As previously mentioned the booty is the subject about which the characters display their relative position to the Abrahamic promise. In this chapter Abraham shows himself to be superior to nations opposing him as he captures the plunder. In Abraham's capture of the booty, the nations aligned with him find themselves blessed.

If the chapter had closed at this point (verse 16), the literary meaning of this chapter would have been simple. The mediation of Abraham to the nations is shown in this diagram.




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<sup>29</sup>Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 201. Westermann has missed one verse in his analysis of what happened to the booty, for verse 20 tells what happened to one-tenth of it.

But there is more detail to this pathway of blessing between God, Abraham and the nations. This is the function of the following verses; to reveal the mediator to Abraham.

The Resolution--Part 2: The Allocation  
of the Spoil: Genesis 14:17-24

Abraham moved to a new arena in verse 17. A debate would take place over the spoils. Abraham, possessor of the goods, stood between two characters, one old and one new. The king of Sodom was introduced earlier in 14:1-12 as one of the kings of the nations blessed through the deliverance which Abraham offered. Melchizedek is a new character, previously unidentified as to background or other attributes.

The point of this segment is to establish the rank of the participants relative to Abraham under the Abrahamic promise of 12:1-3. The reader will be able to judge the relative status of the participants by the reaction of Abraham to their actions. This will reveal Melchizedek as superior to Abraham, an intermediary between Abraham and God.

The unity of the passage

The unity of the passage is shown in a chiasm,<sup>30</sup>

- A - the king of Sodom went out to meet him
- B - the king of Salem brought out
- B'- the king of Salem blessing
- A'- the king of Sodom attempting to bless

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<sup>30</sup>Ross has noted that the verb used for the king of Sodom in verse 17 ("went out") parallels that used for the king of Salem ("brought out"), tying the verses together and therefore the whole section of verses 17-24 as a unity. Ross, Creation and Blessing, 294-95.

### The contrast of two kings

In this section two kings and Abraham<sup>31</sup> meet in the Valley of Shaveh, called the Valley of Kings.<sup>32</sup> The narrator has painted a picture. Melchizedek is on one side, the king of Sodom on the other, and Abraham in the middle. The interaction between the kings and Abraham will determine their rank.

Melchizedek. Two things are attributed to Melchizedek. First as a human<sup>33</sup> king, like the king of Sodom he reigned over an earthly

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<sup>31</sup>Ross recognizes Abraham's potential as king, stating that he is a "powerful tribal leader on the international scene" (Ross, Creation and Blessing, 294). It appears to this author that this is part of the motif of delay. Abraham was potentially a nation and a king. But as Abraham was not Israel (but it would yet come from him), so he was not a king (but one would yet come from him).

<sup>32</sup>There is some question as to why the author would emphasize this title. Westermann feels that it is to identify it as being near Jerusalem, due to the identification of Salem in the next verses (Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 202). However, the picture painted here stresses the fact that there is one who is not a king, Abraham (14:17-18).

In these two verses alone there are five occurrences of the word מלך. Von Rad makes note of this literary repetition as he states, "Abraham bows only to Melchizedek, in a story so full of kings" (Von Rad, 181). This lack of kingship in Abraham, when he had just been promised superiority to the people of the earth (12:3), implies that there was to be a more ultimate stage of Abraham, indeed, an Abrahamic nation with a King. As Abraham stands for a future king and kingdom, so Melchizedek's influence in this story is beyond that to Abraham. This will be detailed in a later section.

<sup>33</sup>While some commentators solve the problem of Melchizedek's superiority by believing he was an angel, there is no indication in this text that he was other than a man. In fact, the presence of human kings in this chapter, and the contrasts brought out in this section seem to require that he be a man. Further there is no record of an angel ever functioning or being referred to as a priest. Thus, to believe that this is an angel is much more than the text allows.



city.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, in addition to being a human king, Melchizedek was a priest of EI Elyon. This priesthood will be the significant difference between the king of Salem and the king of Sodom. In addition the name, EI Elyon points out God's realm, and His movement to reconcile heaven and earth through Melchizedek and Abraham.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>There is some debate over the actual location of the city of Salem. There are essentially two views. The first is that it is identified with a city near Jerusalem, and the second is that it is an earlier name of the city of Jerusalem.

<sup>35</sup>While there are many theories of the use of this name, for the purpose of this dissertation, it will only be necessary to say that YHWH was the name which was identified with the nation Israel, and their covenant under Abraham and Moses (Exodus 3:13, 6:3). Since Abraham includes the title EI Elyon with YHWH in verse 22, there is no reason not to believe that EI Elyon and YHWH are one and the same God. (It should be noted that the LXX does not combine the two titles in Abraham's address, and thus provides some evidence for a later addition.)

Westermann claims that it is the God of a Canaanite shrine. "The purpose is to designate the god of a Canaanite shrine, but at the same time to speak of him in such a way that Abraham can acknowledge him." Essentially Westermann feels this was YHWH, worshipped by Canaanites under a different name, in their Canaanite manner (Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 207). If there was another revelation of God apart from YHWH to Abraham, then men would have an opportunity to come to God without going through Abraham's mediatorship. This is contradictory to 12:3a which indicates that all men are judged on the basis of their relationship with Abraham. Thus, in the view of this author, redemption apart from the revelation to Abraham would be not be Biblical.

While the Canaanites used EI to refer to one of their gods, the Biblical record gives no hint that EI Elyon is not YHWH by another name. Since Abraham shows Him respect, there should be no question. Daniel uses a similar title (4:2,32) with Nebuchadnezzar to indicate that God is the ruler over all mankind. Thus while the name YHWH would signal God's relationship to and through the nation Israel, EI Elyon would signify His rule over all creation, thus the "Possessor of heaven and earth" is called EI Elyon, while the God of the Abrahamic Covenant would be referred to as YHWH. Note that Melchizedek says "EI Elyon, Possessor of heaven and earth. This appears to be in apposition, thus "Possessor of heaven and earth" defines EI Elyon, giving the attribute associated with Him. Heaven is the realm of God, while earth is the realm of man. It is through Israel and Melchizedek that God is reconciling the two. (Refer to the section on 'The Bridge Motif' later in this chapter for an explanation of the reconciliation of 'heaven and earth' in Genesis.)

The king of Sodom. While there are not many things known about the king of Sodom, he is much less mysterious. He is a king of a wicked nation (13:13), a king of one of the nations that served Chedorlaomer (14:4), and a king who enjoyed deliverance of his goods by association with Abraham (14:16). He had tried to position himself as one who would take some credit for Abraham's success. However, that was not allowed by Abraham, as Abraham desired that only God would take credit for his victory.

#### The Actions of the two kings

There are specific actions taken by each of the kings toward Abraham. They have to do with the distribution of the spoils recovered by Abraham.

Melchizedek. Melchizedek interacted with Abraham in two ways; first, he offered bread and wine (sustenance); and second, he blessed him.

The first action of bringing bread and wine, the basic necessities of life,<sup>36</sup> indicated Melchizedek was providing sustenance to Abraham. Abraham received it willingly, establishing his submission to Melchizedek. (Compare his dogmatic refusal of sustenance from the king of Sodom later in 14:23.) Abraham accepted submission due to Melchizedek's position as priest of El Elyon.

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<sup>36</sup>Westermann refers to the meaning of these elements, "Melchizedek brings refreshment to the exhausted liberator" (Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 205). Psalm 104:15 utilizes the same phrase to designate sustenance and joy.

The second interaction was the blessing. The blessing was the blessing of a mediator, a priest.<sup>37</sup> Melchizedek's function as priest was to provide communication between God and Abraham. The actual blessing is narrated by an introductory בָּרַךְ ("And he *blessed* him . . ."). This introductory בָּרַךְ indicates a benediction or congratulatory type of blessing.<sup>38</sup> Melchizedek is basically confirming the relationship established in 12:3a. Essentially he is about to confirm the relationship, and the past and continuing benefits of that relationship.<sup>39</sup> This introductory בָּרַךְ in 14:19 indicated that the following blessing was based on the relationship Abraham had with God.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>The definition here of 'priest' is its basic meaning, that is, "The one who stands before God to minister" (Merrill C. Tenney, ed. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia, s.v. "Priests and Levites," by C. L. Feinberg). The priest is taken as a mediator between God and man. Hebrews 5:1 defines, "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God . . ." Thus a priest is an intermediary between God and man regarding spiritual things. (Refer to Chapter IV on Hebrews.)

<sup>38</sup>This בָּרַךְ is a Piel preterite. In this particular instance the Piel indicates the utterance of praise and congratulations (Christopher Wright Mitchell, The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament, 116).

<sup>39</sup>Mitchell, 116.

<sup>40</sup>When used in relation to the patriarchs, it indicates the confirmation of the promise (Christopher Wright Mitchell, The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament, 116).

Then in 14:19-20 Melchizedek uttered his blessing.

And he blessed him and said,

- a "Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
- b Possessor<sup>41</sup> of heaven and earth;
  
- a' And blessed be God Most High,
- b' Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."<sup>42</sup>

Melchizedek stood in the middle of the two, Abraham and God, to give a blessing to each. There are two parallel uses of the word בֵּרַךְ in Melchizedek's speech. Concerning this use Westermann writes,

"It is stamped by the brk at the beginning of each of the two lines, but with an expressly different sense in each case. In v. 19b. "Blessed be Abraham . . .," the movement is from God . . . to the man who receives the blessing of this God; in v. 20a, it is the praise that goes up from man to this God."<sup>43</sup>

He addressed two personalities, that of Abraham first, and then God. Using the same terms (lines a and a') "Blessed be . . ." without any difference in structure or form, places Melchizedek as one who functioned between God and Abraham, an intermediary.<sup>44</sup> He took the form of

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<sup>41</sup>The word is קנה and is usually taken as 'possess' or 'acquire'. In some places it can mean 'create,' but this is the less frequent use according to Westermann (Genesis 12-36, 206). The word used as 'create' would connect Melchizedek to Abraham as a worshiper of the common Creator. Jacob states, ". . . his 'God Most High' is the Lord of heaven and earth, yet not their creator as in chapter 1, merely their owner." (B. Jacob, The First Book of the Bible: Genesis, 97). The word used as 'acquire' would imply something of the process of the restoration of God's rule through redemption, and so its meaning in Exodus 15:16, and Isaiah 11:11. Thus this implies that God, as possessor of both His residence and the residence of man, is working to unify them through Melchizedek and His covenant with Abraham.

<sup>42</sup>The deliverance of enemies is a direct result of the curse of 12:3a on those who curse Abraham.

<sup>43</sup>Westermann, Genesis 12-36, 205.

<sup>44</sup>See the section on the 'bridge' motif, which will demonstrate the significance of this particular issue.

an official communicator for both God and Abraham. The word בָּרַךְ ('bless') is used here in a "double בָּרַךְ-formula." This essentially means that Melchizedek, in one incident, imparted two blessings.

The first blessing was to Abraham. This blessing is communication from God to Abraham indicating Abraham's relationship to EI Elyon, the Possessor of heaven and earth. "Abram of EI Elyon" indicates Abraham was an agent of God.<sup>45</sup> This is a reference to Genesis 12:3a where Abraham is under covenant as a mediator for God to the nations. The attribute given EI Elyon indicates that God, as the owner of both His residence and man's, is uniting them together through this covenant. And Melchizedek offered God's confirmation that Abraham was related to Him by this covenant.<sup>46</sup>

Then, Melchizedek imparted a second blessing. This was offered to God on behalf of Abraham. This blessing from man to God normally indicates gratitude for something accomplished.<sup>47</sup> The physical blessing normally implied the gift of fertility, wealth or respect. However the reason for the blessing is deduced from the context. Thus, the second

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<sup>45</sup>Abraham's relationship to God is indicated by the use of the Qal passive form. This indicates agency (Ross, "Biblical Hebrew Handbook," 440).

<sup>46</sup>The Qal passive normally is attributive in some sense (See Allen Ross, "Biblical Hebrew Handbook," 198), it indicates something about the subject. Here, it is indicating Abraham's attribute, that of a relationship with EI Elyon.

<sup>47</sup>Harbin indicates that the majority of uses of בָּרַךְ in the Qal Passive Participle have God as object. These uses are overwhelmingly praise or joy for something accomplished in the past (Michael A. Harbin, "Blessing and Oracle: A Study of the Use of BRK in Prophetic Formulae," 49).

statement of the blessing should be translated, "Blessed (Praised) is EI Elyon, (He is the One) who has delivered your enemies into your hand."<sup>48</sup> Thus Melchizedek offers a mediator's praise to God on behalf of Abraham. The focus of this praise is to relate the action taken on behalf of Abraham to the promise of 12:3a.

The reader judges Melchizedek's actions by the response of Abraham. Melchizedek brought Abraham the sustenance of bread and wine. Abraham received it. Melchizedek then positioned himself as an intermediary between God and Abraham. Abraham showed his agreement to Melchizedek's rank as he gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the spoils.<sup>49</sup>

Following the pronouncement of the Abrahamic promise, Abraham was the mediator of blessing or cursing to those with whom he interacted. This was clear in the battle of the kings (14:1-16) and will be emphasized in the attitude toward the king of Sodom (14:21-24). But now new revelation points out that there was one who was superior to Abraham, spiritually between him and God, a required mediator of blessing.

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<sup>48</sup>The "Blessed" here is also a Qal passive participle. This indicates an attributive adjective, predicate adjective, or even substantival usage. (See Allen Ross, "Biblical Hebrew Handbook," 198). Either of these uses indicates that the blessing is related to an attribute or state of the object. Therefore EI Elyon is given praise for who He is, the One who delivers Abraham.

<sup>49</sup>It should be noted that on the basis of the Abrahamic promise in 12:1-3, it was God who would bless Abraham. This seems to be the crux of the passage. No one, not even a wealthy pagan was allowed to bless Abraham, only God. Thus when Abraham takes sustenance from Melchizedek, the conclusion that Melchizedek was acting on behalf of God is validated. It is further validated by the action of the tithe.

The king of Sodom. The king of Sodom, the original owner of the goods, was about to regain his original possessions. In his offer of the goods, Abraham envisioned that he wished to place himself above Abraham, as his blesser.<sup>50</sup> Westermann states that the goods clearly belonged to Sodom and his people. Thus the donation was a choice to enrich Abraham from his possessions.

The oath says quite simply: I take nothing of what belongs to you . . . The king of Sodom is of the opinion that the victorious leader has a claim to the booty, the charismatic leader from an Israelite tribe is of another opinion. The king of Sodom was not the enemy whom Abraham conquered, and so Sodom's property is not his. This is what the second reason suggests: the liberator will not enrich himself on the property of another; some sort of obligation would follow from this, which he rejects.<sup>51</sup>

Consequently, the king of Sodom owned the goods and the disposal of the portion belonging to him was the issue. Further there also seems to be an issue of sustenance. This is implied in the statement regarding Abraham's confederates (14:26).

I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, let them take their share.

So the king of Sodom seeks to take some credit for Abraham's victory, by way of an offer of booty and of sustenance, thus placing himself superior to Abraham.

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<sup>50</sup>This may have been that the king of Sodom looked down on Abraham due to his lack of kingship. The granting of goods would have been considered a magnanimous gesture by a king.

<sup>51</sup>Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 202.

The response of Abraham to the two kings

Melchizedek. The first reaction, toward Melchizedek,<sup>52</sup> was that of giving a tithe of the spoils. The meaning of the tithe here is of great importance. Von Rad states, "But Abraham submits to this benediction and gives Melchizedek a tenth, which implies the recognition of a proprietary claim, a sovereign right."<sup>53</sup> A tenth of the spoils was given to Melchizedek demonstrating a clear sovereign position with respect to Abraham.<sup>54</sup>

The king of Sodom. Abraham refused any implication that the king of Sodom was superior to him. He did this by a total rejection of benefit from the king of Sodom's hand. This is in correspondence to the promise of 12:1-3a.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>There has been some question brought up as to whether it is Melchizedek or Abraham that gives the tithe. Westermann explains it well, ". . . he acknowledges the priestly dignity of Melchizedek the king by giving him the tithe. The question whether the subject . . . is Melchizedek or Abraham . . . is answered from the structure of the whole, which is a cultic exchange" (Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 203).

<sup>53</sup>Von Rad, 180.

<sup>54</sup>The tithe (or tenth part) was always given in the Old Testament as an indication of submission to a sovereign, whether king or priest, who received it on behalf of God. The tithe is mentioned only twice in Genesis, here and following the Jacob's ladder narrative in Genesis 28:22. That Melchizedek is named by the narrator as a priest of El Elyon, to whom Abraham is submissive, makes it clear that this was a cultic tithe from Abraham to Melchizedek.

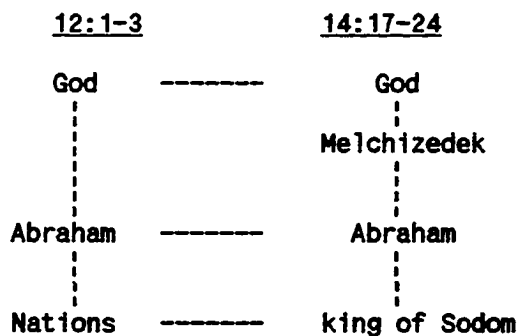
<sup>55</sup>Abraham's vow here did not refer to some vow in his past. In the phrase "I have lifted up my hand," the verb is a Hiphil perfect, and should likely be translated as simultaneous with the speaker's words, "I lift up my hand" (I swear). Abraham emphasized 'source' in his statement to the king of Sodom as noted by the emphatic position of "I." It would read, "lest you say, it is *I* who have made you rich." See Ross, "Biblical Hebrew Handbook," 441. The vow was an emphatic negation of anything that the king of Sodom offered.



The contrast between the 'tithes' by Abraham to Melchizedek and the rejection of the offer of the king of Sodom is quite sharp. Von Rad states, "But when he gives the overbearing king what he asks, this proud nobility is quite the opposite of his humble tithing."<sup>56</sup>

#### The meaning of the contrasting kings

In 12:1-3a it was clear that Abraham would be a mediator of blessing to the nations. This was played out in Genesis 14 as the kings aligned themselves for or against Abraham and were blessed or cursed on that basis. In the Melchizedek incident the king of Sodom attempts to position himself as a superior to Abraham and fails. Melchizedek, however is established as a superior to Abraham. The path of blessing to nations through Abraham is now detailed further. Melchizedek is revealed as a necessary mediator between God and Abraham.




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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 181.

Section 2: The 'Bridge' Motif--Melchizedek,  
the Bridge between God and Abraham

The Purpose of the Section

Since the fall in Genesis 3, God has been reconciling heaven and earth. Man tried to bridge the gap through human means in the tower of Babel incident. But God forecast His ultimate bridging of the gap on two occasions in Genesis, Melchizedek and Jacob's ladder. The validation of this motif in Genesis will establish that Melchizedek was included in the Genesis text to indicate that there was to be an intermediary between God and Abraham (Israel). This validation is the purpose of this section.

The Motif Described

In Genesis 1--2, God was in harmony with man. Following the first sin, God sent Adam from the garden, implying that his relationship with paradise (and God) had been broken. Coats discusses the broken intimacy between God and man,

The second stage of intimacy, broken in the narrative of ch 3, is the intimacy between the human pair and God. The point is at the center of the whole chapter, since here the pair disobey God's direct prohibition. But the images of the broken intimacy are poignant. In vs 8, the commerce between the human beings and God appears to develop in normal fashion. God walks in the Garden in the cool of the day. That anthropomorphism does more to catch the intimacy of the human-divine relationship than all abstractions in subsequent theology. God lives together with the humans, occupying the same sacred space. But now the pair no longer trusts the relationship. Rather, they avoid the intimacy. They hide. To hide from the presence of God is to sink already into the consequences of disobedience. But the image progresses. God calls the man: "Where are you?" The necessity to ask, even if we shall have to defend God and affirm that of course God really knows where the man is, documents the broken intimacy. The contact between man and God is no longer immediate. But the man's answer also carries the intensification. "I heard your voice in the Garden, and I was afraid" Trust is gone. Openness is gone. The relationship is now destruc-

tive. Moreover, the reason is explicitly a rejection of intimacy. "I am naked, so I hid myself." The man cannot show his nudity to God.<sup>57</sup>

Coats continues showing how the immediately following context confirms this motif.

. . . So, Adam and Eve are driven from the Garden. And their future reveals only their death. The judgment is confirmed by the cherubim who guard access to the tree of life. Cain slays Abel. And his future offers only a life as a fugitive and a wanderer. To be sure there is some sign of God's grace. The first human pair have garments of skins made for their nudity by God.<sup>58</sup>

From this point there is a major motif to bridge the gap between God and man.<sup>59</sup> This theme embraces the concepts of reconciliation and restoration. It is enjoyed in a symbolic sense by the nation Israel as the Glory of God dwelt with them in Exodus 40:34. It is totally fulfilled in Revelation 21:3.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.

Following the fall, man attempted to reach God. Man was earthbound. God resided in the heavens. How was man to reach God, to share with Him, even to be like Him? In Genesis there are two means proposed for that question. The first proposal is by the nation Babel; that man will reach to God. The second proposal is by God Himself; that

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<sup>57</sup>George W. Coats, "Strife and Reconciliation: Themes of a Biblical Theology in the Book of Genesis," Horizons in Biblical Theology 2 (1980): 20-21. George Coats was one who recognized this attempt to bring man and God back together and has detailed it in this article.

<sup>58</sup>Coats, 24. Coats then goes on to name Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Joseph as being major participants in bringing God and man back together to restored intimacy.

<sup>59</sup>'Death' implies separation from God. Thus man did, in some immediate sense, die when he sinned in the garden.

God will reach to man. This is the 'bridge,' God's pathway of blessing to man. It is seen both in Melchizedek and in Jacob's ladder. These will be detailed in the following sections.

First, God will require a nation through whom He will impart blessing or cursing to nations. In addition, God will require a pathway, a 'bridge', through whom He will manifest this blessing to and through His nation. This great nation is Israel. That national mediatorial role reaches its fulfillment in the words of Zechariah 8:23,

Thus says the LORD of hosts, "In those days ten men from the nations of every language will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

The link from Israel to God is represented by Melchizedek and Jacob's ladder. The Tower of Babel represents, by contrast, man's dismal failure to accomplish communication with God by himself. If Melchizedek can be shown to be literarily parallel with Jacob's ladder, but contrasted to the tower of Babel, then this will establish literary validation that Genesis intended Melchizedek to be a mediator between God and Abraham.

#### The Tower of Babel: Man's Bridge to God<sup>60</sup>

Reviewing the table of nations in Genesis 10,<sup>61</sup> one sees that Babel had emerged as a great nation. Their great attempt was a negative reaction to God's command, and in that rebellion they built a tower to

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<sup>60</sup>For a further discussion of Babel and its place in Genesis refer to J. P. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 11-45.

<sup>61</sup>The chronological order of chapters 10 and 11 appear reversed. Chapter 10 is a record of nations following the narrative of 11:2-9.

bridge the gap between man and the gods.<sup>62</sup> The narrative is found in Genesis 11:2-9.

The Action: Disobedience

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them,  
"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1).

"And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;  
Swarm in the earth abundantly and multiply in it" (Genesis 9:7)

And they said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4)

So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth . . . and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11:9).

The first two quotations state the command of God to Noah as he left the ark, embarking on the establishment of a new world. The words used by God are clearly propitious terms, aligned with God's original command of Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth . . ."

The third quotation is the reaction of Babel to God's command. They utilized a term "scattered" which carried a judgment connotation.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>The building of this tower is not set off as their great sin. Their great sin was that of pride and arrogance in the rebellion against the command of God. This tower was their expression that they would do all things, including make a way into the heavens. It is the passage in Genesis 28:10-17 which literarily confirms this purpose of the Tower of Babel. This will be reviewed later in this section.

<sup>63</sup>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. 1980 ed., s.v. "פּוּץ," 807, by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. Usually this term is used of the scattering of an army in defeat, or of the dispersion of a nation, as Israel, in the judgment of God.

These people were clearly disobedient to the word of God given to their forefather Noah.

In the fourth quotation God gave them the very judgment that they had feared. They were dispersed. Since they would not fill the earth, and swarm in it, they were dispersed in judgment.

Effort: Human

Within the narrative itself it becomes apparent that their human efforts were not God's way. Fokkelman states,

"Come, let us . . . !" (v. 3)

"Come, let us . . . !" (v. 4)

Twice the clear haba rings out, followed by an exhortative. Quickly and strikingly the narrator introduces the people from Sinear: look at their energy, their enthusiasm and their ambitious plans! For one moment we might fancy that the narrator approves of these intentions and activities, to which he dedicates the first half (esp. vss. 2-4). But then he surprises us when he dedicates the second half to God's activity, with:

"Come, let us . . . !" (v. 7)

What humour to have the tune which people started with 'haba . . . -a' completed with the same 'haba . . . -a', but also, what a blow, what disillusion for man and his plans, which are, as it were, ridiculed from within by God's singing *with* the people and working *against* them. In fact, the humour is subtle, corroding irony.<sup>64</sup>

Man's efforts to bridge the gap are mocked by God as He uses their own terms in their judgment.

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<sup>64</sup>Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 14.

### The Nature of the Tower

'Babel' means 'gate of god'.<sup>65</sup> This bridge to the heavens was the attempt to breach the gap between God and man. Kidner comments concerning the nature of the tower and the 'link' to heaven,

One of its glories was its huge *ziggurat*, a temple-crowned artificial mountain whose name, Etemenanki, suggested the linking of heaven and earth. But it was her sins that 'reached . . . unto heaven' (Rev. 18:5). In Revelation she is contrasted with the holy city which comes 'down out of heaven', whose open gates unite the nations (Rev. 21:10, 24-27).<sup>66</sup>

The tower was not simply a statement of greatness, but of reaching to God's domain. The tower existed as an archaeological reality, but the literary presentation reveals much in the similarity of terms. Fokkelman reviews some of the most significant words to show that the purpose was to form a bridge from the earth (the dwelling of man) to the heavens (the dwelling of God).

Then there is the question of "its top in the heavens". some will contend that this *bassamayim* needn't mean much more than "in the sky". Indeed, a bold statement, to say that a tower has its top in the sky. Others think that *roso bassamayim* "only" (again that reducing term!) means that its top sticks up high in the sky. There may be some truth in this but this reading minimizes *samayim*, for fear of saying scientifically too much. I deliberately choose a maximizing reading, for here the heavens must be retained for the sake of contrast to "the earth, the whole earth", which is definitely relevant in a narrative containing a short but fierce struggle for power between man and God. And apart from the fact that a narrator, if he should want to make the statement that a tower is high, simply has the word *gbh* at his command, the word *samayim* must sound in its full range as "heavens" because the very

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<sup>65</sup>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. 1980 ed., s.v. "בבל," 93, by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. For further reading on how "Babel" is a play on words implying 'confusion' see Allen Ross, Creation and Blessing, 235.

<sup>66</sup>Derek Kidner, Genesis, 111.

function of this word is to reveal the action and intentions of the people as *hubris*.<sup>67</sup>

The view that this tower was a link has historical support as well. This was a ziggurat similar to those of fourth millennium people of Mesopotamia.<sup>68</sup> Herodotus visited Babylon in 460 B.C. and described the ziggurat Etemenanki.<sup>69</sup>

In the midst of the temple a solid tower was constructed, one stadium in length and one stadium in width. Upon this tower stood another, and again upon this another, and so on, making eight towers in all, one upon another. All eight towers can be climbed by means of a spiral staircase which runs around the outside. About half way up there are seats where those who make the ascent can sit and rest. In the topmost tower there is a temple, and in the temple is a great bed richly appointed, and beside it a golden table. No idol stands there . . .<sup>70</sup>

The absence of the required idol indicated that the god himself would visit and thus commune with the earthbound human. The ziggurat has been described as the mountain of the god, a giant step-ladder where man might approach the god, but the god might descend to the people if desired.<sup>71</sup> The Tower of Babel then appears to be an effort to bridge the gap between heaven, the dwelling place of God, and the earth's great nation, Babel.

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<sup>67</sup>Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 19-20.

<sup>68</sup>For a fuller discussion of the historical background of the ziggurat as it relates to the narrative of 11:2-9, refer to Ross, Creation and Blessing, p 238-42.

<sup>69</sup>This is the ziggurat that many propose to be the rebuilt Tower of Babel. Among them is U. Cassuto, Genesis II, 242. The meaning of Etemenanki is 'House of the foundation of heaven and earth'.

<sup>70</sup>Andre Parrot, The Tower of Babel, 22-23.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 64.



### The Failure

Its failure is well documented. While man had desired to reach the residence of the gods, his attempt was unsuccessful. The text states ironically, "And the LORD *came down* to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built (11:5). And God speaks, "Come, let Us *go down* . . . . (11:7).<sup>72</sup> Obviously they had not built their tower high enough since the God had to descend from His heavenly residence in order to observe their feeble attempt.

### A Great Name

The narrator is about to present another contrast with the soon to be elected Abraham. This contrast is seen in the desire for "a name." God will tell Abraham that He will "make His name great." But Babel has stated, "let us make for ourselves a name . . ." (Genesis 11:4). Concerning this issue Fokkelman shows the importance of their 'name' and how the irony of the name given them emphasizes their folly.

The words indicating most clearly the motive for man's building passion are these: "Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad . . ." Besides the important factor of fear ("lest we be . . .") the point at issue is a kind of superhuman fame which they want to attain. People want a name? Well, they can have it, but how different it will be from the name they had dreamt of: ". . . therefore its name was called Babel," 'Muddle'! This unexpected turn is like a judgement, so biting its sarcasm."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>See Cassuto (244-5) for further details on this literary irony.

<sup>73</sup>Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 14.

### A Great Nation

Babel was a great nation, established by a great man. That is established in Genesis 10:9-10. "' . . . Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.' And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel . . ." Babel's attempt to be a great nation is recorded in 11:2-9 (previously discussed).

### Conclusion

Babel was founded by a great man, Nimrod, as a great kingdom (Genesis 10:9-10). In 11:2-9 the city rebelled against God's command to fill the earth. Their strategy was to accomplish all things independent of God. They were indeed building a nation in their own efforts.

In addition they built a tower. The tower was the nation's attempt to bridge the gap to the gods. It was a failure, as God destroyed it and the city.

The man-made nation came to an end. The link to the gods came to an end. The failure is a low spot in man's attempt at reconciliation.

Melchizedek: God's Bridge to Abraham

### Abraham the Great Nation

Abraham was promised a great nation in Genesis 12:1-3. Melchizedek will be revealed as the bridge between God and Abraham in Genesis 14:27-34.

There is significant contrast between Babel, the nation from Nimrod (Genesis 11) and Abraham, the beginning of a great nation

(Genesis 12). One is joined together out of rebellion to God, the other from pure election and responsive obedience to God (Genesis 18:19). One is man's attempt to be a great nation and provide a humanly provided bridge for the gap between man and God, the other is through God's election and His own provision. Brueggemann agrees with the basis of this contrast as he states, "The (Abrahamic) promise provides exactly what the people of Babel (11:4) tried to form for themselves and could not."<sup>74</sup> Lange agrees, "Abraham forms the contrast to the heathen tower-building."<sup>75</sup> Abraham, the nation, was the means of restoring intimacy with God. Similarly Coats states,

So 12:3 avers: "I shall bless those who bless you. And those who curse you I will curse. And *in you*, all the families of the 'ground' . . . will be blessed." Reconciliation within the human community depends on reconciliation with Abraham, or at least on avoiding strife with Abraham. . . . Thus reconciliation with Abraham, the source of blessing, is the catalytic action that enables reconciliation with God to occur. And separation from Abraham or from his family makes reconciliation with God impossible. Intimacy with God occurs only as intimacy with Abraham is established.<sup>76</sup>

#### Effort; Divine

The command of God to Abraham was bringing life out of the ashes. When God says, "I will make you a great nation" to a man with a barren wife, the reader must gasp. Brueggemann captures this feeling concerning the contrast between the end of chapter 11 and the beginning

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<sup>74</sup>Brueggemann, 119, parenthesis mine.

<sup>75</sup>John Peter Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Genesis, 360.

<sup>76</sup>Coats, 25.

of chapter 12. He explains the impossible void from which God proposes to form His nation.

Here we stand before the most incredible announcement in the tradition of Israel. The family of Abraham has derived naturally from historic antecedents, as indicated in the genealogies of Gen. 10--11. But that natural derivation now results in nothing. It ends in barrenness (11:30). The reference is cryptic and seems to be only descriptive. There is no reflection on the cause. There is no suggestion of punishment or curse. It is simply reported that this family (and with it the whole family of Gen. 1--11) has played out its future and has nowhere else to go. Barrenness is the way of human history. It is an effective metaphor for hopelessness. There is no foreseeable future. There is no human power to invent a future.<sup>77</sup>

Then comes 12:1. If it had been our task to begin a new history, we would have done so in a more hopeful context. But not this God. Inexplicably, this God speaks his powerful word directly into a situation of barrenness. That is the ground of the good news . . . It is a word about the future spoken to this family without any hope of a future . . . What did not exist and now does exist is Israel, a people formed by God's word to bear his promise and do his purposes.<sup>78</sup>

#### The Instigation: Obedience

While Babel formed their nation based on disobedience to God's command, Abraham's nation was to be based on obedience. The narrator conveys this concept with certainty as he states in Genesis 12:4, "So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him . . ."

#### A Great Name

In an almost direct contrast to Babel's desire to make a great name for themselves, God said to Abraham in 12:2, "And I will make your name great." The name of Abraham and his part in history indeed has eternal ramifications. Lange says of this blessing,

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<sup>77</sup>Brueggemann, 116.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 117.

That is, as the divinely blessed ancestor and father of a renowned people . . . The name of the father of believers should shed its light and wield its influence through the world's history.<sup>79</sup>

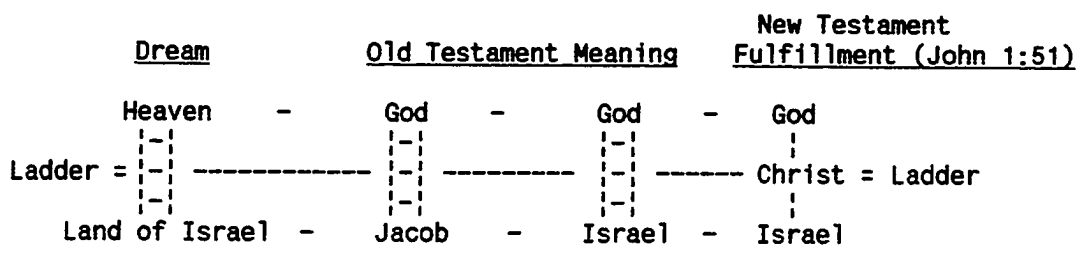
The Mediator Between God and Abraham,  
Melchizedek: Genesis 14:17-20

At the point of Genesis 12:1-3 it appeared that the link between God and Abraham was direct. However, as has been shown previously, the text introduces a necessary 'bridge' to provide blessing to Abraham, Melchizedek.

The interpretation of this passage has been discussed earlier and the reader is referred to that section. In summary, Melchizedek establishes himself in the narrative as the one who provides blessing to Abraham, and represents Abraham to God.

**Jacob's Ladder: God's Bridge to Jacob**

Genesis 28:10-17 describes both Jacob and the ladder to heaven. Jacob is the father of the nation Israel (Genesis 35:9-12) and the ladder is the pathway of blessing between God and Jacob. The ladder extended from heaven (God) to the land (Jacob). Jacob and his descendants were to be blessed through the function of the ladder. This scheme is represented in the whole of the Biblical text as is shown here.




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<sup>79</sup>Lange, 291.

### A Great Nation

The development of the nation passed from Abraham to Jacob. The promise that had been made to Abraham was repeated. Jacob was blessed by his father in Genesis 27:29.

May peoples serve you  
 And nations bow down to you;  
 Be master of your brothers,  
 And may your mother's sons bow down to you.  
 Cursed be those who curse you,  
 And blessed be those who bless you.

But more importantly at Jacob's return to Bethel in 35:10-12, he is blessed by God.

And God said to him,  
 "Your name is Jacob;  
 You shall no longer be called Jacob,  
 But Israel shall be your name."  
 Thus He called him Israel. God also said to him,  
 "I am El Shaddai;  
 Be fruitful and multiply;  
 A nation and a company of nations shall come from you,  
 And kings shall come forth from you.  
 And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac,  
 I will give it to you,  
 And I will give the land to your descendants after you."

The function which was promised to Abraham (especially in Genesis 17) is now completely passed to Jacob. Therefore, Abraham's function as mediator to nations has become the role of Jacob's life. Von Rad describes this comparison effectively,

. . . what is promised to Jacob is word for word the elements of the promise to Abraham, and therefore the exposition of ch. 17 must be referred to here . . . Apparently a primary concern of our text is to show that the promise to Abraham was renewed completely to Jacob.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Von Rad, 339.

Through the genealogy of Abraham had come one to carry on the promise. He was the one who would be the great nation, the mediator of blessing or cursing to the nations.

### A Great Name

The verse (35:10) reflecting the change of Jacob's name to Israel confirms the promise made in 32:28. Whenever a man states the name of that nation, the patriarch's name is repeated.

### The 'Bridge' from God to Man, Jacob's Ladder: Genesis 28:10-17

In Genesis 28 is another point where the 'bridge' emerges. The Abrahamic Covenant had been reconfirmed to Isaac (Genesis 26), and Jacob had deceptively inherited the right of the first-born. As he fled from Esau, his offended brother, in search of the elect woman who was to be the mother of the great nation, he entered the area around Bethel (Genesis 28).

The ladder itself is very significant as it provided the avenue of blessing to Jacob. Fokkelman has perceived the literary interpretation of this narrative. He sees YHWH intimately involved, not only with the appearance at the top of the ladder, but also with the ladder.

The appearance of YHWH himself is not unexpected. It has been announced in many ways:

- by the ladder, because its top reaches to heaven.
- by the ladder, because it is *mussab*; Yhwh is *nissab*! The repetition of the radix makes the reader connect the two. The presence of this root is the key to the interpretation of these verses, particularly of the function of the ladder: the erection of the ladder is the prefiguration, the preliminary symbol of God's raising himself. Later the text will underline this twice again.
- by the angels, which here (and often elsewhere) are mere representatives, so much so that from this passage we can certainly not build up an angelology. They are the servants, whose presence at

once reminds one of their boss--and indeed, there is the master himself!<sup>81</sup>

#### Literary Connection between Jacob's Ladder and the Tower of Babel

Difference in Effort. Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:11-17) contains direct literary contrasts with the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). Fokkelman points out that while both were to have their top reach the heavens, Babel's effort was human, the ladder was from God.

The Jacob's ladder against the background of all of Genesis; Gen. 1-11 offers a history of the world (in the form of primeval history) which contrasts sharply with the particular history of Abraham and his descendants in 12-50. Things went wrong for mankind as a whole precisely when, in Genesis, people tried to build a bridge from the earth to the heavens, 11.1-9. The point of man's building-scheme was a 'tower with its top in the heavens', and this tower provoked God to intervene quickly and to render such work of humans altogether impossible. Opposed to the various human initiatives of primeval history in general comes, from Gen. 12 onwards, God's initiative, he inaugurates the particular tribal history. The patriarch of Israel beholds how God himself provides a connection: heaven and earth are now really connected, but not from below! For this ladder has been let down from heaven.<sup>82</sup>

Similarity of structure. Both Babel's tower and Jacob's ladder used the same literary terminology to express their purpose.

. . . a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven (28:12).

. . . a tower whose top will reach into heaven (11:4).

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<sup>81</sup>Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, 54.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 53.



It is easy to see the similarity of wording which links the two passages together. Both peoples were looking for a link to God (or gods in the case of Babel). Babel was to build it by their own means, while in Jacob's case it would be provided by God.<sup>83</sup>

Similarity of name. Both the Babel narrative and the ladder narrative used similar terminology to identify their locale.

And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (28:17).

. . . Therefore its name was called Babel . . . (11:9)

Both places are referred to in similar terminology. The phrase "gate of heaven" seems similar to Babel (בבל), which means "the gate of God."<sup>84</sup> It is easy to see the comparison between the efforts in both cases, both were entrances and pathways to meet with the heavenly occupant.

Difference in success. The narrator contrasts God's relationship to the tower in both episodes.

And the LORD stood above it . . . (28:13)

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. (11:5)

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<sup>83</sup>Jesus notes in John 1:51 that He is the ladder, the channel of blessing from God to Israel.

<sup>84</sup>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1980 ed., 93, by Brown, Driver and Briggs. It should be noted that the word used for "gate" in "gate of heaven" (שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם) is a different word from 'gate of god' (בבל). However the concept is the same.

In the Tower of Babel narrative they were not successful in reaching God (He had to descend to them). In the case of Jacob's ladder, the LORD *is* at the top of the structure. This indicated the surety of the connection to God.

Literary connection between  
Jacob's ladder and Melchizedek

Westermann has identified a parallel between the Melchizedek event and the Jacob's Ladder event. He describes Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek as being parallel to the Jacob's promised tithe in Gen. 28:22.<sup>85</sup>

The parallel in Genesis 28:22 is the action of Jacob toward God for the blessing he had given.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. And this stone which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to thee.

This was the same promise of deliverance that had been emphasized in Genesis 14:20, to which Abraham paid tithes.

". . . And blessed be God Most High,  
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."  
And he gave him a tenth of all.

There is similar action here on the part of both patriarchs in response to the mediatorship of deliverance and blessing. In both cases

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<sup>85</sup>Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 206.

the patriarch gave the tithe voluntarily.<sup>86</sup> While there are only two revelations of this 'bridge' to Israel (Genesis 14 and 28) there are also only two occurrences of a tithe and these are in the *very same* passages. The tithe response of the patriarch seems closely related to the revelation of the 'bridge' of blessing to the patriarch.

#### New Testament fulfillment

In John 1:51 Christ stated to Nathaniel. "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Jesus stated that He was Jacob's ladder, the avenue of blessing to the nation Israel. Bruce states,

But here the imagery is taken from the account of Jacob's vision at Bethel, when he saw 'a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and, behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it' (Gen. 28:12). In this application of Jacob's vision, however, the union between earth and heaven is effected by the Son of Man; he is the mediator between God and the human race.<sup>87</sup>

While Bruce recognizes that Jesus here claimed to be the mediator to the earth, it may be narrowed to the nation Israel in the context. Nathaniel had stated in John 1:49, "Rabbi, You are the Son of

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<sup>86</sup>The tithe occurs only in these two places in Genesis. There appears to be no previous obligation on the part of the patriarchs requiring this offering, since Jacob obviously initiates the tithe. Refer to Castillo, "The Purpose and Nature of Tithing in the Old Testament" (ThM Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1982), 26-29.

<sup>87</sup>F.F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, 62.

God; You are the King of Israel."<sup>88</sup> Jesus was responding to this identification.<sup>89</sup> Thus the point of the passage in John was that the ladder (Jesus) is to provide a connection between God and *Israel*. His reaction to Nathaniel's recognition of Him as King, was that He was more than King, He was the priestly Mediator of blessing to the nation *Israel*.

#### Conclusion: The 'Bridge' Motif

In Genesis 11, the narrative of the Tower of Babel was an attempt to accomplish two great things; one was that the nation of Babel was to be great, and the second was that the man-made tower was to be a bridge of blessing from the gods. Neither of these man-made items was meant to be God's means of grace.

In Genesis 12, God elected Abraham to be the great nation and a mediator of favor to the nations. However, at that point in the text there is no indication of any mediator between God and Abraham. By Genesis 14:18-20, Melchizedek is introduced as a necessary mediator of blessing between God and Abraham.

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<sup>88</sup>These titles are both Jewish and Messianic. They both go back to Psalm 2:6-7, where the king is declared to be God's Son. Further, the whole of chapters 1--8 in the Gospel of John are focused around Jesus as the ultimate prophet, as compared to Moses as the Old Covenant prophet. The comparison is within a Jewish context. He would be the mediator to the human race only in the sense that the human race was to be blessed through *Israel*.

<sup>89</sup>Philip was also included in the response. Not the plural "you" in the passage.

This scene is paralleled in Jacob's life as he was reassured of being the blessing to the nations that his grandfather was. As Jacob lay on the ground God showed him a dream of a ladder between the earth and heaven. Jacob was to be the earthly mediator of blessing for the nations (28:14), but there was to be a ladder between Him and God. This ladder in its fullest sense was revealed to be Jesus, the Mediator of blessing to Israel. Thus the bridge motif literarily confirms that Genesis intended Melchizedek to be a mediator, a communicator of blessing, between God and Abraham (Israel).

### Section 3: Melchizedek: Representative of an Ultimate Melchizedek

In Genesis 12--14, Abraham is literarily a representative of the human nation that will come from his loins. In interacting with Abraham, Melchizedek also prefigures One who will perform a future identical role to that future nation.

While it is taken for granted by many that the presence of Abraham in the text indicates the future Israel, this section will review a basic understanding of that representation.

Ross is typical of those who understand the representative nature of Abraham in the text. "In Genesis, the ancestors all represent the tribes that came from them, so that when one reads about Jacob, called Israel, that story represents more than an original event in the life of the patriarch."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ross, Creation and Blessing, 41.

### Abraham Representative of Future Israel

Westermann points out that the full value of Abraham's blessing comes in the future nation. "Abraham is not blessed, but blessing is promised to him and his generation."<sup>91</sup> His point is that Abraham is not blessed in the full sense promised in Genesis 12:1-3. He is acting out a part which to be seen fully when Israel is blessed in the kingdom.

### Abraham a Great Nation

In the promise of 12:1-3 a great nation is to come from Abraham's loins, thereby indicating a future Abraham in the form of a nation. Those who blessed that nation would be blessed, and those who cursed it would be cursed. But the text clearly says "you" (Genesis 12:3a). Thus we have intensification<sup>92</sup> present in the language. It is of Abraham that the text speaks, but only in microcosm. In its fullest future sense it will be Israel.

### Abraham in a Land

In the following chapters, the promise of 12:1-3 is played out in Abraham. He was promised a land (13:15), but only lived in a tent.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 205.

<sup>92</sup>Intensification here signifies that Abraham was only one. As time went on the meaning of that promise and that name would intensify until it reached its fullest meaning in the ultimate nation. In addition it is metonymy, that is, the name of the parent or ancestor is given for their posterity (E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech used in the Bible, 544).

<sup>93</sup>The phrase in 13:15 continues to include descendants, sometimes explicitly as in this verse. Also, this seems to be the point of Hebrews 11:9. Abraham clearly understood that the promise would not be fulfilled in his day.

He clearly had no major rule over the land. Yet he was blessed in a local sense. Israel (Abraham in his fullest sense) will enjoy the total occupation of the land of Canaan (Genesis 15:18).

#### Abraham as a King over a Nation

The occurrence of מלך five times in Genesis 14:17-18 emphasizes a ruler theme. This is present throughout this whole chapter. However, with all those kings, the one in control of the situation is Abraham, the only non-king.<sup>94</sup>

This implies delay.<sup>95</sup> Abraham was indeed a kingdom. He had conquered kings. He had the King of Sodom at his feet. Yet he was not yet a kingdom. In 17:6, the delay is re-emphasized as God tells Abraham, "Kings will come from your body." The whole picture is one of a man who was representative of a king, and of a nation.<sup>96</sup> The only thing separating him and that fulfillment was God's movement in time and genealogy.

#### Abraham as a Mediator of Blessing and Cursing

Thus it becomes clear that the promises are for Israel. In 14:17-24, when Abraham blessed the king of Sodom, it showed a relation-

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<sup>94</sup>Abraham, in conquering these kings, had only 318 men in his household and not one of these was a descendant. Thus Abraham conquered without the hint of national fulfillment.

<sup>95</sup>Again it could be stated that this is intensification. Abraham started as one man, but will some day produce a king and a kingdom.

<sup>96</sup>It is in 14:13 he is first referred to as a Hebrew. It is this name that will only later be significant as the nation from his loins.

ship, representative of the ultimate relationship Israel would have with kings of the world.

#### Abraham as the Ultimate Nation Israel

While the physical nation Israel saw itself in the struggles of Abraham, it would only be the believing nation that experienced the promises in their fullness. It would only be an ultimate nation that would gain the land promised in 15:18. It would only be in that ultimate day that they would become fully a blessing or cursing to nations. Abraham was Abraham, yet he was, at the same time, representing ultimate Israel.

#### Melchizedek Representative of Future Melchizedek

Melchizedek's function in the text of Genesis is clearly that of indicating a future priest, a mediator to Israel. Von Rad agrees that the inclusion of this incident in the text was not primarily for historical interest, but to indicate a future priest.

The Melchizedek incident . . . appears simply as an event, but one must nevertheless assume that it is spoken with special purpose for future readers. If it were really an ancient tradition, one would have to consider it an explanation and legitimation of some ancient contractual relationship existing between Israel and a Canaanite city-king. . . . In the insistence of our narrative that Abraham gave him a tithe we see Abraham bowing before the one who is holding the place for the future anointed one.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Von Rad feels however that this purpose is to connect the Abrahamitic with the Davidic throne, with Melchizedek precursor of the Davidic dynasty (Von Rad, 180-1). Though his statement is not consistent with this dissertation his statement is correct concerning the future implications of the Melchizedek incident.

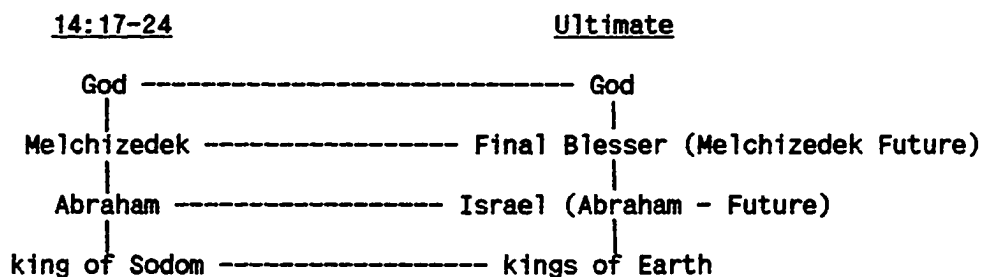
There are many who relate Melchizedek to the priesthood at Jerusalem in various ways. Walther Zimmerli relates the future priest Zadok to Melchizedek. He states, "*Es fällt auf, daß, nachdem David*



Melchizedek is thus an indicator, a historical literary placeholder for an ultimate one who will function in exactly the same way as the historical character.

**Summary: Melchizedek as Representative**

It is against the literary presentation of Abraham as the nation Israel that Melchizedek is to be understood. He simply appears in the narrative in a similar representative fashion as Abraham. As Abraham only represents limited blessing or cursing to nations, so also this historical Melchizedek only mediates blessing to Abraham, not to all of the nation Israel. Thus the whole structure becomes representative of an ultimate day, that day when Israel is in her land, functioning as mediator of blessing. It is in that day that Israel recognizes her Melchizedek. The 'past-future' scheme is shown here.




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*Jerusalem erobert hat, neben dem Priester Abjathar, der nach 1.Sam.22,20-23 aus dem von Saul ausgemordeten Hause der (elidischen?) Priester von Nob stammt und der David schon in der Zeit seiner Flucht vor Saul zur Seite stand, ein zweiter mit dem Namen Zadok auftaucht (2.Sam.8,17). Unter Salomo, der Abjathar nach Anathoth hinaus verbannt (1.Kön.2,26f.) wird dann Zadok der eigentliche Priester im Jerusalemer Tempel. Ez.44,15f. deklariert mit großer Bestimmtheit, das nur die <<Söhne Zadoks>> daB Recht zum vollen Priesterdienst haben. Nun ist der Name Zadok wiederum ein hypokoristischer Name. Seine vollere Form könnte Melchisedek (= Malki-Zedek), Adoni-Zedek oder ähnlich gelautet haben" (Walther Zimmerli, 1. Mose 12--25: Abraham, 45).*

Section 4: The Toledot, Mother/Father  
and Birth/Death Motifs

Hebrews 7:3 declares, ". . . without father, without mother, without pedigree, having neither beginning of days nor end of life . . ." These three motifs are used by the author of the New Testament book as he describes the Genesis Melchizedek.

Toledot is the tracing of the outworking of successive generations. Mother/father designates a physical requirement of those who will be in the toledot. Birth/death signifies the means by which the toledot proceeds.

Interestingly, the words of the motifs are interrelated. Fokkelman discusses the etymological basis,

The characteristic contribution of Genesis to the Torah and to subsequent books is indicated by its own key word toledot, literally, 'begettings,' from the root yld, which is used for mothers (yaldah, 'she gave birth'), fathers (holid, 'he begot'), and children (no'ad, 'he was born').<sup>98</sup>

The presence of these genealogical characteristics in Genesis indicates that the patriarch is an essential part of the human process to bring forth a nation, a Messiah. The absence of these literary credentials simply indicates that the person's office is not obtained due to a relationship to Abraham, since it is Abraham's genealogy that is recorded. The ultimate Melchizedek will be appointed on a basis other than genealogy.

The meaning of these motifs within the book of Genesis becomes essential if the reader is to determine what the lack of them also means. This is the function of this section. First, it will examine

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<sup>98</sup>Fokkelman, "Genesis," 43.

each motif in Genesis. Secondly, it will relate Melchizedek to the motifs, determining the meaning of their absence in relation to his person.

### Toledot

#### Literary Significance

Toledot<sup>99</sup> is defined as "genealogies = account of man and his descendants."<sup>100</sup> Fokkelman emphasizes the literary formation of the Book of Genesis based on this concept of toledot.

. . . . The begettings provide a solid framework that supports and meticulously articulates the various sections of Genesis. The distribution of this key word is of great structural importance.<sup>101</sup>

Also the purpose of toledot is to demonstrate the result of the genealogical movement.<sup>102</sup> These are not random stories, but they are placed together to reveal God's purpose of form in a nation through

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<sup>99</sup>The question concerning the basis and history of toledot and that relation to the text has garnered great research. This is not within the purpose of this dissertation. The reader is referred to well done discussions in other works, such as Allen Ross, Creation and Blessing, 69-88 or Derek Kidner, Genesis, 23-25.

<sup>100</sup>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1980 ed., toledot, 410, by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs.

<sup>101</sup>J. P. Fokkelman, "Genesis" in the The Literary Guide to the Bible, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, 41.

<sup>102</sup>M. H. Woudstra, "The Toledot of the Book of Genesis and their Redemptive-Historical Significance," Calvin Theological Journal 5:2 (Nov. 1970): 187.

toledot.<sup>103</sup> Toledot is used as a heading for what follows. Ross states it thus,

The toledot heading announces the historical development from the ancestor (or beginning point) and could be translated paraphrastically 'this is what became of \_\_\_\_\_,' . . . (with reference to the following subject).<sup>104</sup>

### Toledot in the Book of Genesis

There are eleven<sup>105</sup> incidents of toledot in the Book of Genesis. They are,

Creation (no toledot)	1:1-2:3
Heavens and earth	2:4-4:26
Adam	5:1-6:8
Noah	6:9-9:29
Shem, Ham and Japheth	10:1-11:9
Shem	11:10-11:26
Terah	11:27-25:11
Ishmael	25:12-25:18
Isaac	25:19-35:29
Esau	36
Jacob	37:2-50:26

### The toledot of the nation Israel

The function of toledot within the Book of Genesis is a major theme running through the book. It ties the book together. It is clear to see that with only two exceptions, the toledot of Genesis is the

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<sup>103</sup>Woudstra (p. 188) has commented appropriately that these stories are woven together for more than just examples of good men. They are to draw lines from a beginning to an end point.

<sup>104</sup>Ross, Creation and Blessing, 72. Ross is using Woudstra and Kidner as his basis.

<sup>105</sup>Actually there are only ten 'named' toledot since the first section is without a 'what happened to . . .' It is the state from which all things developed.

toledot of the line from Adam through Abraham and Jacob and his twelve sons.<sup>106</sup>

Ross describes the use of toledot with respect to the patriarchal narratives very well. He emphasizes the required spiritual growth as well as physical growth of the nation. .

The central focus of this material is certainly the establishment and development of God's promises to Abraham, but the way it is presented also indicates that the narrator intended to develop the character of the family. It is the story of the family's struggle to gain the promised blessings, but that struggle was made difficult by strife within the family and by threats from outside. The reader might wonder how the promised blessings from God could have derived from such tentative beginnings. The narrative takes up this very point, tracing how the promises were carried forward and confirmed with each successive strengthening of the faith of the patriarch.<sup>107</sup>

The purpose of the literary 'weaving' around the toledot statements is to develop the progression from the first woman, through the patriarchs, to the nation Israel in the twelve sons of Jacob. Having

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<sup>106</sup>The two exceptions confirm the function of toledot by their deviation. They actually confirm the thesis that the importance of toledot in Genesis is the relationship it bears to the nation Israel. The two exceptions are Ishmael and Esau, the non-elect seed. Thus, in dealing with the toledot as a 'what happened to' it becomes clear that Genesis is showing what happened to the non-elect line of Ishmael and Esau. It is pointed out so that the reader can see that they came to naught. The promised line of Isaac and Jacob is heightened in importance since it is elect. Baldwin picks up the significance of chapter 36, the toledot of Esau, "A chapter like this, consisting almost entirely of otherwise unknown names, may seem at first sight to be an interruption of the story . . . . By this method Esau's future could be summarized and dismissed before Genesis resumed the account of Jacob's son Joseph, around whose story the events of the whole family turned. By comparison the history of Esau's family was uneventful" (Joyce Baldwin, The Message of Genesis 12-50, 153).

Clearly these deviations show that only those in God's plan will be part of the formation of the nation.

<sup>107</sup>Ross, Creation and Blessing, 254.

genealogy in Genesis means having a part in the founding of the nation Israel. Merrill states,

The purpose of Genesis is to document the fact that the God of Israel is Creator of all things and to trace the history of the human race from creation to the time of Israel's development as a special people.<sup>108</sup>

It is the line to the nation through whom God would provide blessing to the world.

#### Election into toledot

Kidner relates election as being essential to God's plan of bringing forth the blessing through the genealogy.

Election, in Genesis, concerns a man's place in or outside the line of succession leading to Christ, the 'seed' for the blessing of the nations (Rom. 9:5; Gal. 3:16).<sup>109</sup>

Election was manifested in the case of Jacob and Esau. God's words to Rebekah in 25:23 expressed that choice.

Two nations are in your womb;  
And two peoples shall be separated from your body;  
And one people shall be stronger than the other;  
And the older shall serve the younger.

Jacob had been chosen by God to perpetuate the elect seed from which would come the nation Israel. Romans 9:6-13 points out clearly that Jacob was clearly elect, independent of anything inherent in his person.

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<sup>108</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, Kingdom of Priests, 23.

<sup>109</sup>Kidner, 39.

### Conclusion

For the purpose of this study, toledot in Genesis indicates a movement or succession from Eve to the nation Israel in the culmination of the twelve sons. The purpose of the toledot is to develop God's purpose in time, providing a national mediator for His blessing to the nations. To be part of the toledot was to be elect of God and participate in His great plan of forming His nation.

### Significance

#### Presence of toledot

The significance of toledot with regard to the patriarchs is overwhelming. Who would Jacob be if he did not carry the credential of his seed heritage? He would have been simply one deceiver of many who were spread throughout the earth. The fact that he held a promise of a great mediatorial nation was his credential in Genesis. Because of toledot Abraham and Jacob were (would become) Israel.

#### Absence of toledot

Now that a determination of the importance of toledot has been made, it becomes necessary to determine what the absence of such means. What does it mean that the king of Sodom (Genesis 14) has no listed genealogy? Very simply it means that he is not in the succession from Adam to the formation of the nation Israel, through whom the world would be blessed. His position (as king) was not derived from a genealogical link to Abraham.

### Melchizedek

But what is to be made of Melchizedek? The line of restoration is through Abraham, and his future nation Israel. Melchizedek is not in the succession from Adam to the formation of the nation Israel, through whom the world would be blessed. Melchizedek has no personal human credential from the national genealogy of Genesis. Thus the ultimate Melchizedek will not be named to the ultimate priesthood based on genealogy.

### Mother/Father

The Mother/Father motif is a subset of toledot. Toledot is the main motif of the book. It details the succession. But within that succession is a physical requirement. It is the means of becoming part of the national redemption toledot. If one did not have the correct mother and father, he had no ability to become part of the redemption succession.

### Mother

The only mothers in Genesis deserving of any narrative whatsoever are those who are married to the patriarchs. In fact in the case of the Isaac and Jacob narratives a whole chapter is given to each search for the proper mother.

### Matriarchs and fertility

Mothers are unique in Genesis. Each is utilized particularly by God for fertility. Fokkelman notes this literary peculiarity as he states,



All three matriarchs, Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, are barren - an insurmountable obstacle to continuity. . . In the stories themselves, the births of Isaac, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, and Benjamin are never described in terms of a begetting (*holid*) by the father; only afterward is such paternity indicated in the concluding *toledot* lists. The conception is always represented by God's opening the womb of the barren woman, after which she can give birth (*yaldah*).<sup>110</sup>

It is clear Genesis considers these matriarchs as unique and essential in the mortal struggle to create a nation.

Eve. Eve is the initial contact as the reader is told "Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the *mother* of all the living." (Genesis 3:20). Her function as mother is immediately emphasized as she bore a son in 4:1, ". . . and she conceived and gave birth to Cain and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD.'" Eve is only heard from again as she performs another matronly function, that of commenting on the birth of Seth (4:25).

Sarah. Genesis details Sarah's struggles to have a son. The narrative progresses to the ridiculous as she laughs at the prospect of bearing children at 91 years of age (Genesis 18:12). The sound of Sarah's voice is not heard following the 'birth of Isaac' narrative.

Rebekah. Other than in the details of Rebekah's election (Genesis 24), the author records Rebekah's voice only twice. These are when she is acting in her matronly function regarding the birth of her sons, and with regard to her deception in the choice of Jacob over Esau.

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<sup>110</sup>Fokkelman, "Genesis," 43.

Rachel and Leah. Again, as in the case of Isaac's wife, there is a narrative of 35 verses detailing the selection of Rachel, followed by 24 verses of interaction between Leah and Rachel regarding their gifts of motherhood and sons. Other than that interaction, the reader hears either mother's voice only once.<sup>111</sup>

#### Matriarchs elected by God

Sarah. The scheme by Sarai and Abraham to install Hagar as the mother of promise (Genesis 16) is well known. But Hagar is not the chosen mother (17:15-21), and thus Ishmael has no hope to participate in the Genesis toledot.

Rebekah. The account of Genesis 24 contains 67 verses to show the reader of God's election of Rebekah through God's guidance of Abraham's servant. The reader is taken on a journey with the doubtful servant in order to see that God works out all the confirming details.

Rachel. The documentation of the journey of Jacob to find his wife (Genesis 29) bears the same sovereign guidance of God as the choice of Rebekah (Genesis 24).

#### Father

The significance of the word 'father' in Genesis is beyond question. For here lies Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Election is an integral part of fatherhood within the book. From the elect fathers will come each patriarch. From the patriarchs will come the nation.

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<sup>111</sup>This is in 32:35 where she has hidden the household idols from Laban.

### Fathers elected by God

Abraham is chosen from a pagan background (Joshua 24:2). Isaac was the promised son who would become father instead of Ishmael. There could be no better example of election than the story of Jacob and Esau (Romans 9:6-13). Jacob was chosen to become the father of a great nation; not because of human choice, but because of election by God alone.

### Significance: Father/Mother

To not have the proper mother or father in Genesis is to lack the physical requirement necessary to be part of the elect line of the nation. Isaac and Jacob both had to have the proper mother and father in order to be in that line of blessing, the human redemption line.

### Melchizedek

Since Melchizedek's father and mother are not listed as patriarchs or matriarchs, his priesthood was not gained from them. He thus received his priestly office as mediator of blessing to Abraham independent of a relationship to the patriarchs. The ultimate Melchizedek will not receive the office because of a toledot relationship through an elect father or mother.

A parallel is to be noted in the requirements for Levitical priesthood. One could not be a priest unless he had a Levite for a father and an Israelite for a mother. Even in the Levitical priesthood, the proper mother and father were necessary to take part in the sacerdotal functions. The coming Melchizedek, by contrast to the Levitical

priesthood, would not become priest based on any human physical requirement.

### Birth/Death

The birth/death motif is again one which is influential throughout Genesis. This is also related to toledot. It is the process by which successive generations are brought into being. It is the method by which Israel comes from Abraham and Adam. Westermann notices this cycle of birth/death as he states,

These people among whom the patriarchal stories arose found their own self-understanding in the regular occurrence of the temporal passing of the generations, that is, in the constantly occurring succession of generations: the birth of a child and its growing up, marriage and begetting a child, old age and death. This came to linguistic expression in the genealogies.<sup>112</sup>

Ross has identified very precisely the struggle of the hope of birth (continuance of the promise), yet the curse of death (fear of cessation of continuance).

Connected with the idea of the Abrahamic covenant are the themes of birth and death. If the promises included progeny, then the birth of an heir, of descendants, would be of chief concern. The narratives are accordingly concerned with marriage, birth, inheritance right, and transmission of the blessing. Conversely, the motifs of death and burial are present throughout the narratives, slowing the pace of the fulfillment of the promises. These troubling themes remind the reader of the presence of the curse. The promises of God and the faith of the covenanter must struggle against great obstacles.<sup>113</sup>

Birth was the process through which hope was given for continuation of the genealogy, for extension of the promise of the nation. But the curse of death hung over man. Because of death he would never

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<sup>112</sup>Westermann, Genesis 12--36, 54.

<sup>113</sup>Ross, Creation and Blessing, 254.

see what was promised in his physical body. He needed a birth to continue the hope. And God ensured that he had one. Thus birth ("beginning of days") and death ("end of life") was the pattern which brought about the fulfillment of toledot.<sup>114</sup>

### Birth

Abraham struggled through chapters of hoping that he might bear a child in his old age. If that birth did not occur there would be no promise. God's word had failed. Thus birth was the positive, the way in which the genealogy was brought about.

### The initial command

Genesis 1:28 contained the command which involved the means of operating under the rule of God, "Be fruitful and multiply." Thus birth became one of the great blessings given to man throughout time.<sup>115</sup>

This was the beginning of the potential for human birth. Though Adam and Eve had as yet no children the potential and the excitement of beginning a race from one's own body was presented. Genesis presents 'birth' as being the most important of functions. Fokkelman comments regarding the desire of birth.

. . . Time and again, fertility in diverse and vivid variety and survival through offspring are an urgent concern in the strictly

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<sup>114</sup>The birth/death motif is never so prominent as in the genealogies of chapter 5. The phrase "and \_\_\_\_\_ became the father of \_\_\_\_\_ . . . and he died . . ." repeats itself again and again. But through all the births and deaths it is obvious that God has provided a line from Seth to Noah. In the hope and curse of mankind God is working to bring forth a redemptive nation.

<sup>115</sup>Refer to Von Rad, 58.

narrative material. This concern is first signaled in the choice of the name hawah, Eve, "mother of all living" (3:20), for the first woman at the end of a story in which the freshness, innocence, and harmony of man-and-wife-together have been destroyed. . . . The possibilities, limits, and precarious aspects of sexuality are expressly explored in . . . stories in which women struggle with each other for motherhood, such as 16 and 29:31-30:24 . . . Tamar, who tricks her father-in-law into lying with her, is dramatically vindicated at the end of chapter 38 . . .<sup>116</sup>

The desire for birth is of prime necessity, for without it the human redemption line would have failed.

#### Birth in Genesis.

The birth motif then becomes very strong in Genesis. From Eve to Rachel, literarily they seem to live only to give birth.

Eve. Eve is the single best example of birth. She is the mother of all. It is interesting that immediately following the great pronouncement of the curse of death, that Adam proclaims life in the name of his wife (Genesis 3:19-20).

". . . Till you return to the ground,  
Because from it you were taken;  
For you are dust,  
And to dust you shall return."

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living."

The reader is struck immediately by the hope of birth in the face of death. Eve's name is changed immediately following these curses. Was this change of name made related to the "Seed of the Woman"

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<sup>116</sup>Fokkelman, "Genesis," 42.

in 3:15? Adam changed his wife's name to indicate her meaningful and hopeful role. Bush catches the import of this as he states,

It is remarkable that Adam had before given his wife another name, viz. Isha, when she was first created and brought to him; but now, that on the occasion of the fall, and what God had said upon it, he changes her name and gives her a new name, viz. Life, because she was to be the mother of every one that has life; which would be exceeding strange and unaccountable if all that was meant was, that she was to be the mother of mankind. If that was all that he intended, it would have been much more likely to be given her at first, when God gave them that blessing, viz. 'Be fruitful and multiply,' by virtue of which she became the mother of mankind, and when mankind was hitherto in a state of life, and death had not yet entered into the world. . . Since he changed her name from regard to her honour; but that was the most honourable of any thing that ever happened, or that ever would happen concerning her - that God said that she should be the mother of that SEED, that should bruise the Serpent's head. That was the greatest honour that God had conferred on her: and we find persons names changed elsewhere to signify something that is their peculiar honour, as the new names of Abraham, Sarah, and Israel.<sup>117</sup>

And the hope of birth continues strong in Eve's exclamation in 4:26,

And Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to . . . son, and named him Seth, for "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him."

Noah. Lamech, the father of Noah, exclaims (5:29) that his hope is in the birth of this son, whom he feels will take away the curse.

"This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed."

Sarah and Abraham. Now the narrator moves to the first of the patriarchs' wives. Of Sarah he states, "And Sarai was barren, she had

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<sup>117</sup>George Bush, Notes on Genesis, 88.

no child" (Genesis 11:30). This fertility problem continues as both Abraham and Sarai fret over the impossibility of conception.<sup>118</sup>

Abraham moves to fulfill this hope with the adopted son Eliezer of Damascus (15:3), but God reassures him in 15:4, ". . . one who shall come forth from your own body shall be your heir."

Sarah, trying to bypass the barrier of her barren womb, sends Hagar into Abraham. She states, ". . . perhaps I shall obtain children through her" (Genesis 16:2).

The reader senses Abraham and Sarah's frustration as the Lord promises that their natural child would be born within the year. Both Abraham and Sarah find it ridiculous that they should continue to have the hope of birth at their age.

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old. And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Genesis 17:17).

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Genesis 18:12).

But God reassures them that the hope of birth is real and that he indeed shall continue the toledot through birth.

After nine chapters of wondering how an old couple should have seed numbering as the sand of the sea, Isaac is born (Genesis 21). The excitement of hope fulfilled in birth is reflected in Sarah's comment,

And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age" (Genesis 21:6-7).

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<sup>118</sup>See Westermann (Genesis 12--36, 141) for a fuller description of this motif and its implications in 1 Samuel and Luke.



Rebekah. Rebekah likewise was barren and in Genesis 25:21 both she and Isaac sample the frustration of dealing with the hope of birth.

And Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Rebekah parallels Sarah, and through the birth of Jacob the generations continue.

Rachel. In Genesis 29:31--30:24 Rachel and Leah compete for superiority based on the gift of birth. Not only do Rachel and Leah enjoy the gift but Rachel's maid, Bilhah, and Leah's maid, Zilpah, both share the hope of birth. It is these births that determine the extent of the twelve tribes of Israel.

#### Conclusion

In Genesis 1--11, birth is the continuance of God's human toledot from Adam to Abraham. In 12--50, toledot is the continuance, but particularly the means, by which the promise of a nation is continued. Birth is, very simply, the hope of continuation of life. In Genesis this life is the continuation of the human redemption toledot. Without birth there is no promise, no Israel. Murphy sums this up well when he states concerning the curse on the woman in Genesis 3:16,

The promise of children is implicitly given in these two clauses. . . . The first man was potentially the race, and, so long as he stands alone, actually the whole race for the time. His acts, then, are those not merely of the individual but of the race. If a single angel fall, he falls alone. If the last of a race were to fall, he would in like manner involve no other in his descent. But if the first of a race fall, before he has any offspring, the race is fallen.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Murphy, Genesis, 126.

## Death

The curse of death had a major effect on this hope of birth. Death would keep men from seeing the promise in their lifetime. In fact death would be an obstacle to the fulfillment of the promise.

### The initial judgment

Every student of the Bible knows the threat of judgment made in the garden of Eden,

" . . . but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you shall eat from it *you shall surely die*" (Genesis 2:17).

Adam and Eve debated the truth of that curse with the serpent,

And the woman said to the serpent, ". . . You shall not eat from it or touch it, *lest you die.*"

And the serpent said to the woman, "*You surely shall not die!*"

God was required to judge them, and the truth of that threat came true as God said,

". . . till you return to the ground,  
Because from it you were taken;  
For you are dust,  
And to dust you shall return."

### The meaning of the judgment of death

Scholars have debated the theological implications of death for centuries, but most all agree on the physical implications of the sentence. Man would not live forever in the physical body to which he had become accustomed, it would return to dust.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Von Rad (p. 95) objects to the argument that death took place, but was delayed. He feels that the sentence of death may have been stopped in order for grace to prevail. He argues that return to the dust was always expected in view of 2:7. "But that did not happen

But the fact that death was part of God's redemption plan was realized during their eviction from the garden.

"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever' - therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken."

Had God not evicted man from the garden and given him the sentence of death, he could have lived on forever in a sin-cursed body. Yet in God's sovereign plan, He mercifully allowed sin to have its way with man, and the ground would reclaim him. Ryken agrees,

A final act of God's provision is His preventing man from eating of the tree of life (vss. 22-23), lest man doom himself to a life of endless misery in a fallen world.<sup>121</sup>

#### The effect of death on life

Now the hope of birth (and thus the continuation of life) becomes more important for it has been threatened by death. No longer might man count on seeing his children raised, or his grandchildren.<sup>122</sup>

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at all. And one of the narrator's concerns may have been to show that God did not make good his terrible threat but had allowed grace to prevail."

The view of this dissertation is that the sentence of death was, at minimum, that man's physical body would no longer have continuity forever. The sentence of physical death, while not immediate, was inevitable, separated only by time, so that birth could occur and thus a movement to redemption.

<sup>121</sup>Ryken, 41. Also see Von Rad, 97.

<sup>122</sup>It is significant that Eve names her second child הבל meaning vapor or breath. This is the same word that Solomon used in Ecclesiastes when he stated "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Death was now upon them and life was not guaranteed. This righteous one was named 'vapor', and like a breath, was there--and was gone.

No longer might man be assured of enjoying his accomplishments. No longer would a man (Abraham) be assured of seeing the fulfillment of a promise before his demise. Thus the importance of a birth, a life to carry on, was now of tantamount importance. For in the delay of the promise, one now needed a birth, for he himself was sure to face death.

Coats has identified the problem of death and life in Genesis well. Death had become a foreboding restriction of Adam's potential.

Nevertheless, the limitation is crucial. The potential for Adam's life is now marked by death. Whatever delay in the sentence of death we may see in the text, the expulsion from the garden means loss of access to the tree of life; and that means death. . . . The point is that God responds to disobedience with a death sentence, and that sentence dramatically curtails the realization of potential that was previously open to Adam.<sup>123</sup>

#### Conclusion: Birth/Death

Due to the original sin, man must die. God was to keep His promises as He worked through the successive generations, utilizing birth as the continuance, and death as man's frustration. Man would not be able to ensure the promise in his own lifetime, God would have to provide a birth.

Thus through the hope of birth the toledot of the promised nation was extended. In the history of Israel in Genesis, each death was meticulously recorded, showing that the curse still existed. But along with each death was the demonstration, even the excitement, of another birth. The toledot of God's human nation of blessing was carried on.

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<sup>123</sup>George W. Coats, "The God of Death." Interpretation, 29 (July 1975): 231-2.

Melchizedek

Abraham's promise of a nation was carried on through the birth/death struggle, recorded meticulously in Genesis. Melchizedek was not part of the proper genealogy. There would be no recorded hope that Melchizedek would have a son. Nor would anyone mourn over the loss of hope if he died without children. His genealogy is not the genealogy of Abraham and Israel. His genealogy is not theologically important.

The book of Genesis records the birth/death process for the purpose of demonstrating the means of perpetuating the toledot of Israel. Melchizedek is clearly not a necessary part of that human national process. The birth continuance of the Abrahamic line was not of significance to the perpetuity of his priesthood.

Summary: Chapter IIISection 1: The Contextual  
View of MelchizedekAbraham

Abraham was viewed as receiving the promise of a nation in Genesis 12. That nation would bless or curse those interacting with them. In chapter 14 Abraham interacted with international kings. Abraham blessed those with whom he united and he cursed those against whom he fought. It was clear that he was fulfilling his mission as mediator of blessing or cursing.

Melchizedek

Melchizedek was contrasted to the king of Sodom. Abraham refused to acknowledge or receive any material blessing from the king of

Sodom. But he clearly accepted willingly sustenance from Melchizedek, the king of Salem. This indicated that Melchizedek, the priest, was an emissary or mediator from God to Abraham. In his blessing he also represented Abraham to God. His blessing confirmed the Abrahamic covenant's blessings to Abraham, and gave Abraham's praise to God.

### Section 2: The 'Bridge' Motif

The link between God and man was a repetitive motif within the book of Genesis which established Melchizedek as a bridge of blessing to Abraham.

#### The Tower of Babel

In the story of the tower of Babel there was a nation (Babel) and an attempt to provide a link to the gods (the tower). It was a human effort to rebel against God's plan and instruction.

#### Abraham and Melchizedek

In an immediate contrast to Babel of chapter 11, chapter 12 describes the election of Abraham as the great nation. Melchizedek is manifested in chapter 14 as the bridge of blessing from God to Abraham.

#### Jacob and the Ladder

As the toledot moves from Abraham to Jacob, the father of the nation Israel, Jacob is revealed as the continuation of the national promises to Abraham. This becomes evident in the repetition of the blessing to Jacob by God (Genesis 28:14). Jacob is the nation, Israel.

In Jacob's dream, God revealed the avenue of blessing to him. The ladder is the link of blessing between himself and God.

### Section 3: Abraham and Melchizedek as Literary Representatives

This section presented Abraham as representative of Israel. So also the Genesis Melchizedek was representative of an ultimate Melchizedek. As Israel would be like Abraham, so the ultimate Melchizedek would be "just like" Melchizedek.<sup>124</sup> He would have his attributes, and would mediate blessing to Israel (Abraham).

### Section 4: The Motifs of Toledot, Mother/Father and Birth/Death

Genesis, using these motifs, followed the genealogical history of the nation. The nation was an integral part in the plan of God to provide blessing to the world. Thus the record of the *genealogy* of the patriarchs demonstrated the credentials required to be involved in that line. One was qualified to be in that line if they had the proper elect *father and mother*. The line itself was perpetuated from Abraham to the nation through the process of *birth and death*. All those involved in God's national human redemption plan possess these records.

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<sup>124</sup>Perhaps the best analogy is a 'picture'. Melchizedek is the picture, while Jesus Christ is the reality. One sees more detail in the reality. But the picture, though of less detail, presents an exact representation of the reality. Thus one would not be able to tell the difference between Melchizedek and Christ literarily. The only difference is in their effect. Melchizedek blessed only one man, while Christ blesses a nation.

By contrast Melchizedek, a necessary mediator in this redemption plan, that of being the blesser of Israel, had none of the national *genealogical* credentials. He was unmistakably not part of that line for he did not have the elect *mother and father*. He and his fulfillment were not perpetuated through the *birth/death* process of the genealogy of Israel. Thus his priesthood would be awarded by God on a basis other than human genealogical credentials.

#### Conclusion: Chapter III

The Old Testament waited for the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, that is, for the Israel of promise to emerge from the ashes of the Old Covenant. The Old Testament also waited for One who would mediate blessing to that nation. There are certain things known about that One. But primarily his credentials for achieving that priestly office would not be the human genealogical credentials of the national toledot.



## CHAPTER IV

### MELCHIZEDEK IN HEBREWS 7:1-3

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all *the spoils*, was first of all, by the translation of *his name*, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Purpose of the Chapter<sup>2</sup>

The previous chapter explained why Melchizedek was included in the Genesis narrative. The function of this chapter is to explain the use of Melchizedek in the Book of Hebrews. By the end of this chapter the reader should be aware of the similar sense of both Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7:1-3. This similarity of message demonstrates that the author of Hebrews used Genesis in a normal, literal fashion.<sup>3</sup> However, the

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<sup>1</sup>Hebrews 7:1-3. Italics are by the New American Standard Version editors to indicate additions not found in the Greek text.

<sup>2</sup>Author's Note: The Book of Hebrews is extremely detailed and precise in the selection of each word. Its interpretation relies heavily on an accurate translation of the original Greek text. All English translations rely on interpretation in order to provide a smooth translation. However, this provides a difficulty if the translator does not understand the sense of the passage. Therefore it is strongly suggested that the reader of this chapter follow along in his Bible while reading this chapter. He should necessarily include the reading of footnotes as they will provide explanations of the translation as they relate to the message.

<sup>3</sup>Refer to (dissertation) chapter II for the definitions of 'normal' and 'literal' as used in this dissertation.

following dissertation chapter (Chapter V) will provide a formal comparison. The purpose of this chapter is only to understand the meaning of the sections in Hebrews which contain references to Genesis 14:18-20.

There will be four major sections to this chapter. The first will determine the function of the high priest in Hebrews. The second section will deal with Hebrews 1--4. Since the main Genesis passage is Hebrews 7:1-3, the third section will develop the preceding context of Hebrews 5--6. The final section will then determine the meaning of Hebrews 7:1-10. These sections will demonstrate that the author of Hebrews has the same concept as the Book of Genesis with regard to Melchizedek.

The first section will determine the function of the high priest in Hebrews from specific passages in the book. In the discussion on Genesis 14 an understanding of the priestly function was of primary importance. In Genesis this priest was a mediator between God and Abraham (Israel). Here in Hebrews it is also important to understand how the function of the high priest is envisioned. It will be seen that the author of Hebrews also sees this ultimate high priest as a mediator<sup>4</sup> between God and Israel (Abraham).

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<sup>4</sup>This mediator's primary function to those readers appears to be communication. Due to His action in the heavenly tabernacle He had made the way clear for them to communicate their needs and praises to God. And God had communicated through this High Priest in the revelation through Jesus Himself. This revelation, however, is not presented only as past tense. In the author's view of scriptural revelation, he sees it as continuing. Not in the sense that Jesus is still revealing, but that His past revelation still is effective in speaking to men (Hebrews 4:12). This is not to say that our heavenly High Priest does not bring us more than communication to and from God. It is only stating that this is the author's prime point concerning the function of this High Priest.

The second division of the chapter views Hebrews 1--4. These chapters reveal the high priest as a complete and final representative of God to the seed of Abraham, and of the seed of Abraham to God.<sup>5</sup> This was exactly the office which Melchizedek held in Genesis, that of representing God to Abraham (Israel), and Abraham (Israel) to God.

The third division of the chapter is for the purpose of determining the context preceding Hebrews 7:1-10 (the Genesis passages about Melchizedek). Hebrews 5--7 explains how Christ is a priest "forever after the order of Melchizedek." In Hebrews 5:1-10 the Melchizedekian priesthood is similar to the Aaronic priesthood in two areas. They both required membership in the human race and they must be chosen by God for this office.

The author then points out the special importance of the Melchizedekian priesthood which was not a function of the Aaronic. The benefactors of the Abrahamic Covenant (6:13-16) would be insured blessing by the Melchizedekian priest as a real mediator (6:17-20).

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<sup>5</sup>Commentators (Charles F. Pfeiffer, The Epistle to the Hebrews; 11, and Philip Edgecombe Hughes, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 3-4) will not agree on the fact that the whole book is primarily concerned with the high priestly mediatorship of Christ and will separate it into different functions. The most frequent is: Christ greater than angels with regard to revelation (1-2), than Moses in salvation or leadership (3-4), than Aaron in the office of high priest (5-10), and practical exhortations (11-13). But some (as Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary: Epistle to the Hebrews, 18-19) purport that it is clear that all these functions are high priestly mediatorship roles. Further, the author makes that clear at the end of each section. He summarizes each section with an exhortation to the readers based on their "heavenly" high priest's role (Chapters 1-2 in 2:17-18, chapters 3-4 in 4:14-16, chapters 5-10 in 10:21, chapters 11-13 in 12:24).

The fourth section examines 7:1-10, which details what "like Melchizedek" means from the Book of Genesis. Melchizedek mediated blessing for Abraham (7:1-8). Thus this is the contextual meaning of "after the order of ('just like') Melchizedek." Christ will have all the attributes of Melchizedek, and will perform the same function. The discussion of Hebrews 7:1-10 will complete the fourth section.

Thus, understanding the Book of Hebrews concept of the 'real' high priest should make it apparent how the author uses Melchizedek. This concept includes the real priest's function of representing God fully to man, as well as representing man fully to God (Hebrews 1-4). It also includes the blessing of the nation Israel "just like Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5-6 and 7:1-8). This is the same concept that was derived from Genesis.

#### Section 1: Hebrews Understanding of the 'Real' High Priest<sup>6</sup>

This first section will demonstrate that the author of Hebrews understood that an ultimate high priest was to come who would operate as a mediator between God and the seed of Abraham. This section will look at several passages which best illustrate the heavenly high priest in Hebrews.

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<sup>6</sup>The definition of priest seen by the author of Hebrews is simply that of a mediator between man and God. The Old Covenant priest symbolized many of these functions through his itinerary. Christ, who is the perfect representative of God and man (chapters 1-4) is the ultimate high priest. The Israelites were to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6), and that did not involve sacrifice, but involved mediation of God's revelation to the world through the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. Thus the priesthood is mediation.

A mediator greater than the Aaronic priest was a totally new thing to the early New Testament reader. The only high priest that the Israelite had ever known was the one elected from the family of Aaron. This priest had functioned in the physical tabernacle or temple. He never had any ability to speak with God about man in any real sense. Only through prescribed physical representations did the high priest function. To speak of a high priest who functioned in the spiritual realm, in intimate contact with *both* man *and* God, was unheard of, let alone understood.<sup>7</sup> The Israelite felt that another, greater priest was not needed.

But the Aaronic and Levitical priesthood was only a partial representation<sup>8</sup> of the spiritual. This becomes one of the main issues which the author of Hebrews sets out to prove, that is, they needed a priest superior to that of the Levitical order. The following section will present an overview from the clearest passages to explain the author's concept.

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<sup>7</sup>This is the function of the use of the word "heavenly" by the author of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews does not eliminate the earthly for the heavenly, for he sees that both are needed. The Israelite always had an earthly priest to represent him, it was in the realm of the heavenly that he lacked. Thus what Christ brought was *real* reconciliation, for He represented man at the very throne of God. "Heavenly" in Hebrews indicates the unification of "heaven" to the earth. Thus the 'heavenly city' (11:10,16) which Abraham looked for was not one located in heaven, but a city which included full participation of the Resident of the heavens (11:10). In Exodus 40:34, the dwelling of God in the tabernacle was only partial, but in Revelation 21:1-3 the dwelling is full and final.

<sup>8</sup>This does not indicate that the Old Covenant mediation was not without value. In some sense it reflected things associated with God. But New Covenant revelation was from a Son. It was full and real.

The Heavenly High Priesthood: Hebrews 8:1-5a . . .

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things . . .

This passage ends the Melchizedek section in chapter 7. The purpose of the passage is to show that the Old Covenant sacerdotal items were only pictures and earthly shadows of the heavenly spiritual realities. However, with relationship to this dissertation, the point that needs to be made is that the Aaronic priest was not spiritual reality, but a partial representation. The author of Hebrews considers this point to be of major importance. He must convince his readers that Jesus Christ offers *real* mediation, not simply a partial representation.

A Real Sacrifice: Hebrews 10:1-18

For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. . . .

. . . And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God . . . (10:1-12).

The Old Covenant believers had known of a high priest and a sacrifice which was only a shadow of reality. The author of Hebrews had introduced something to them that they had missed in their theology. There was to be a real, a heavenly, functioning high priest, who would offer a 'real' sacrifice, and Jesus had fulfilled that office.

Real Mediation: Hebrews 7:25-28

Hebrews is very specific concerning what the high priest is to accomplish. His purpose is to provide aid and communication to and from God. Thus Jesus, in His high priestly function, is a direct mediator of grace to the audience of the author. But it is in 7:25-28 that the author explains specifically the purpose of Jesus as mediator.

Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them . . .

It is clear then that the author of Hebrews understands Jesus' present theological position as that of a *real* high priest, whose function is that of providing *actual* mediation in the heavens to those who have become the sons of God.

To the Seed of Abraham: Hebrews 2:16, 6:17

It was not the author's end purpose in chapter one to simply focus on the divine status of Jesus. His desire was to focus on the purpose of that status, to provide 'real' representation for God. So also the purpose of the establishment of Jesus as the 'real' High Priest is to show how He is able to aid his audience, the "seed of Abraham."

There are several ways that the author makes it clear that the recipients of this mediation are the believing remnant of Israel. Of course, the traditional title, "To the Hebrews" is not without basis. It is quite clear that the readers were concerned about their involvement with the nation Israel and its sacrifices. However, the author identifies them even more specifically in two instances. The first instance is in 2:16 and the second is in 6:17. In both cases the readers are identified as the seed of Abraham.<sup>9</sup>

#### Hebrews 2:16

For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the seed of Abraham.

It is without question that the particular audience who is the object of the mediation is the "seed of Abraham". Thus the author of Hebrews has paralleled the picture that Moses had given in Genesis 14. God would mediate blessing through a real high priest to Abraham and his descendants.

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<sup>9</sup>The author is speaking, at minimum, to Hebrew believers as the true seed of Abraham (Romans 9:6). However many commentators expand this to *all* believers of this age, who are considered to be the "seed of Abraham" by faith (Galatians 3:29). Believers of this age never become Abraham's physical offspring. Since the historical context and immediate textual application are to Hebrew believers, it seems best to examine the text primarily in that relationship. There is no indication that other than Jewish readers were in view, and in order to determine the narrowest, most precise, historical message of the passages, this dissertation will only deal with the historical audience. Lange recognizes the problem of broadening the audience in 6:18, "Ver. 18 shows that the 'heirs of the promise' cannot be *merely* the pious of the Old Testament . . . while neither are we authorized . . . to restrict the language entirely to Christians. This latter restriction would annihilate the *historical* basis for the entire *passage*; while, in fact, the historical illustration forms the starting-point for a more expanded statement" (Lange, 123).



Hebrews 6:17<sup>10</sup>

In the same way God, desiring even more to show the *heirs of the promise* the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath . . .<sup>11</sup>

The "heirs of the promise" in this verse is a direct reference to 6:14, where the author has quoted Genesis 22:17 in reference to the "seed of Abraham." Again it appears that the direct historical focus of the author was the believing physical remnant of the promise to Abraham.

Section 2: The High Priest as a Representative  
of God and Man: Hebrews 1--4

The second section of this chapter overviews Hebrews 1--4. One of the major purposes of the author of Hebrews is to demonstrate that the things which Jesus did and the qualifications which only He possessed made Him the perfect One to become the actual High priest. He was the perfect representative of God, being a Son, yet the perfect representative of man, having suffered in the flesh.

The Real Representative of God

Hebrews 1:1--2:18 speaks of the superior nature of Christ to the angels. Angels were representatives of God in delivering the revelation of the Old Covenant, while Jesus was the mediator of the ultimate New Covenant revelation. His purpose is to demonstrate that Jesus was a perfect representative of God in mediating the manifestation of God to man.

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<sup>10</sup>The message of this section will be developed in detail later.

<sup>11</sup>Italics mine.

God, after He *spoke* long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has *spoken* to us in a Son . . . and He is . . . the exact representation of His nature . . . (1:1-3).

. . . For if the word *spoken* through angels proved unalterable and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first *spoken* through the Lord . . . (2:2-3).

The contrast between Jesus and the angels in chapters 1--2 concerns mediation of God's revelation of the covenants. Lange assesses chapter one, "The final *revelation* of God has been made in the Son, the perfect Mediator, elevated above all, and exalted over all . . ." <sup>12</sup> Moffatt agrees, "The final *disclosure* of God's mind and purpose has been made in his Son, who is far superior to the angels . . ." <sup>13</sup>

The point of chapter one, and the identification of Jesus with God, is to identify Him as fully qualified to represent God. For while angels could not qualify, Jesus as a Son could. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>John Peter Lange, Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Hebrews, 23. (Italics mine).

<sup>13</sup>James Moffatt, "Hebrews," The International Critical Commentary, 1. (Italics mine).

<sup>14</sup>To clarify the need for this section (chapters 1--4), some commentators (Charles F. Pfeiffer, The Epistle to the Hebrews; 11, and Philip Edgecombe Hughes, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 3-4) take the purpose of the book to be for doctrinal clarification. They would make the outline 'Christ greater than the angels' (chapter 1-2), 'greater than Moses' (3-4), 'greater than Aaron' (5-10), and so on. However Kistemaker (New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Hebrews, 18-19) and others point out clearly that it is not the point of the author to make these claims for doctrinal purpose only, but to show the function of these Old Covenant characters. The angels mediated the revelation of the Old Covenant revelation on behalf of God (chapters 1--2), Moses mediated the Old Covenant as a man (chapters 3--4), and Aaron mediated it as high priest (chapters 5-10). Thus Christ is superior to all these in that His mediation is superior. It is not the purpose of the author

### The Real Representative of Man

That Jesus needed to be a man in order to be the perfect representative is of special interest to the author. It was necessary so that he could perform the real function of the high priest, that of bringing many sons to glory. This statement indicated, not only that there would be a heavenly place for the believer at his death, but that presently he had access to God in His heavenly residence. There was now help for him in his human state (2:9-17).

But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for every one . . .

. . . Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil . . .

. . . Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people . . .

Thus the author shows that Jesus, the ultimate representative of God, passed through the heavens to become the ultimate representative of man, so that He might become a "merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." The fact that the real high priest had to be a man is clearly and simply stated here. He had to be human in order to make effective His action on behalf of man, that of reconciling man to God.

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to simply convince these people of His superiority, but having already spoken of Christ's superiority he convinces them of Christ's mediatorship of a superior covenant.

Purpose: To Provide Aid to Man

At the end of his discourse in Hebrews 1--2 ('Jesus, the ultimate representative of both man and God'), the author of Hebrews lays out the purpose of this high priest (2:12),

For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Chapters 3--4 move from 'Jesus and the mediation of angels' (1--2) to 'Jesus and the mediation of Moses.' Moses was the *man* through whom the Old Covenant was given. The author then exhorts the readers to heed the human Mediator (revealer) of the New Covenant, Jesus, and enter into the rest.<sup>15</sup>

It is in 4:14-16 that the author sums up the point of chapters 1--4. He reviews the benefits of a high priest who represents fully both God and man. Man can now step into the very presence of God through his real High Priest.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a *high priest* who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

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<sup>15</sup>The passage in chapter 3 details the mediatorship of Moses with regard to the Old Covenant, and the failure of the people to listen to that revelation. He then implores those who are under the New Covenant to heed the mediatorship of Christ with respect to the New Covenant. This exhortation comes in light of the nation Israel's historical rejection of Moses as mediator.

Section 3: "The Order of Melchizedek":  
Hebrews 5--6

This section will begin the discourse on Melchizedek. It is these chapters that lead to the Genesis reference about Melchizedek (7:1-10). He states that Jesus would be a priest "after the order of Melchizedek." This was a quotation from Psalm 110. This Psalm stated that the King, David's ultimate Son,<sup>16</sup> would also be a priest, "after the order of ('just like') Melchizedek."<sup>17</sup> The Psalm was written in the midst of the Old Covenant era, an era when the Levitical priesthood was

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<sup>16</sup>The term "David's Son" is taken from Christ's comments on Psalm 110 in Matthew 22:42-45. While this author holds that David was the author of Psalm 110, this view is not held by all. However, authorship of this Psalm is not essential to the argument of this dissertation and thus will not be included here.

<sup>17</sup>The view of this dissertation is that Psalm 110 is prophetic only. That is, the author of the Psalm only spoke of the Messiah who would be both a king and priest. This priest would be after the pattern of Melchizedek, that is, his priesthood would be awarded on a non-genealogical basis, and he would be a mediator between God and Israel. However, there are other views concerning this Psalm and the relationship of the order of Melchizedek to the king. For further reading on the view that Psalm 110 is Messianic only, see M. J. Paul, "The Order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4 and Heb. 7:3)," Westminster Theological Journal (1987), 195-204. (Note: His view on Hebrews 7, though not disparate from the view of this dissertation, does not reflect the same focus). For a review of other views see John H. Eaton, Kingship and the Psalms, 172, Leopold Sabourin, The Psalms, 357-58, and Bernard W. Anderson, Out of the Depths, 189-92. Since the view of this dissertation is that the Psalm was not adding to an understanding of Melchizedek in Genesis, further details of Psalm 110 are not necessary to understand the contribution of Genesis to Hebrews.

at its zenith.<sup>18</sup> Yet the Psalmist attested the declaration of a great priest "after the order of Melchizedek" surpassing the Aaronic.

Hebrews 5:1-10 describes the similarities between the two orders, humanity and election. He introduces Psalm 110:4 as recording the fact of Christ's election by God as high priest. Then following the parenthetical warning (5:11-6:12), the author tells the readers that the Abrahamic Covenant, in which they had placed so much faith (6:13-16), would be enabled only through the mediation of Christ as a priest "like Melchizedek" (6:17-20). As Melchizedek had mediated for Abraham (7:1-10), so Christ would mediate for Israel (7:11-28).

#### True Priest Requirements: Hebrews 5:1-10

##### One from Humanities Own Number

The high priest had to be fully human. It was only as a human, with the temptations and limitations, that one could cry out to God as a representative. The author recalls Christ's sufferings as presented in the gospels (5:7) to show that he meets that qualification as a real high priest.

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<sup>18</sup>The author regularly turns to the Psalms to present an Old Testament basis for his arguments. One of his objectives in doing this is that the Psalmist wrote in the midst of the Old Covenant time period. If the Psalmist then looked forward to another era, it would be clear that the Old Covenant did not present the ultimate situation. An example of this is the case in 4:7-8 where the author of Hebrews argues that the ultimate rest was not obtained under Joshua. He quotes David in Psalm 97:7-8 to show that David (in the land) expected another rest. Thus the Old Covenant rest was not the ultimate.

## Elect

Along with the humanity of this Priest, the author stresses the similarity to the Aaronic Priesthood in the area of election. This is a particular focus of Psalm 110, as it verifies the election of Christ to the position of high priest.<sup>19</sup> It is here that the author first introduces the phrase "after the order of Melchizedek." Following the parenthesis (5:11-6:12) the author will deal totally with that phrase, and continue until the end of chapter 7. The question which he answers is the nature of the "order of Melchizedek" to the Abrahamic Covenant.

### The Relationship of the "Order of Melchizedek" to the Abrahamic Promise:" Hebrews 6:13-20

#### The Abrahamic Promise: 6:13-17

The last thing that the author had spoken about before the parenthetical warning<sup>20</sup> was the 'designation' of Christ as priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). This section focuses on the

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<sup>19</sup>The word in 5:10 for 'designated' (NASV) here is a reference to Psalm 110:4.

<sup>20</sup>The author had left his introduction to Melchizedek in 5:1-11, concerned about the dullness of his listeners. He continued with a warning through 6:12. This parenthetical exhortation stops at verse 12, using the word *νωθροί* ("sluggish") which forms an *inclusio* with the same word (translated "dull") in 5:11. Thus in 6:13 the author turns back to his 'Melchizedek' argument that he began in 5:1-10. The author's concern for the audience was that they were not appropriating Old Testament truths, such as the truth which he was trying to give them concerning the heavenly high priest. His offer of strong meat is not a problem of spiritual maturity, but a problem with appropriating the reality of this New Covenant priesthood. For additional reference to this particular problem see Paul Ellingworth's article, "'Like the Son of God': Form and Content in Hebrews 7,1-10," *Biblica* 64 (1983): 257.

relationship of the mediatorial role of the priest like Melchizedek (Christ) to Abraham (the seed). He will build on the well established principle of the Abrahamic promise in Genesis 22 (6:13-16). Then in verses 17-20 the author will show that a priest like Melchizedek was needed to mediate that promise and its benefits. This was the function of the Psalm 110 oath to Christ. It ensured that the first oath (Genesis 22) would come to its fulness.<sup>21</sup>

#### The promise to Abraham

The author now introduces Abraham into the Melchizedek argument.<sup>22</sup> He is about to remind the readers of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 22, that of blessing them ("the seed"). He wants to show the relationship of a priestly mediator "like Melchizedek" (6:17-20) to the Abrahamic Covenant (6:13-16), and thus to them as the seed of Abraham.

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, he swore by Himself, saying, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you." And thus having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

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<sup>21</sup>Westcott, (The Epistle to the Hebrews, 160), sees this relationship between the oaths as he states, "The latter oath shows how the first oath was to attain fulfillment."

<sup>22</sup>It is important to remember that the section beginning in 5:1 is not about Abraham, it is about Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4). Thus the Abraham reference is only to show the importance of Melchizedek in relationship to the Abrahamic Promise. If the Abrahamic Promise is made the subject of this section, the thrust of what the author is saying in verses 17-20 is greatly diminished. The author is simply showing that the oath to Christ (Psalm 110) insures the promise to Abraham, because the oath to Christ provided mediation for fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. The readers were already familiar with, and counting on, the oath to Abraham. This is precisely why they wanted to go back to the nation Israel; for the assured blessing based on that promise. Thus verses 13-16 are only there as a basis for verses 17-20.



The author here refers to *one* event found in Genesis 22:16-18. He is speaking of God's promise to Abraham in the form of an oath.<sup>23</sup> The promise is recited with *Abraham* as the receiver of the promise. But clearly the fulfillment would be to *his seed*.<sup>24</sup> This nation would be

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<sup>23</sup>The question that first occurs to the reader is, "when did this occur?" Many commentators (Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 160-1) see here a difference between the 'promise' event (Genesis 12:1-3) and the 'oath' (Genesis 22:1-19, especially verse 16) event. Others (W. Robertson Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, 302; and Archibald Robertson, The Fourth Gospel - The Epistle to the Hebrews, 377), along with this author, see that he is referring to only one event. First, the two verbal statements ("promised" and "swore") are both aorist. Kistemaker agrees that "The aorist tense of the participle may be understood to be contemporaneous with the aorist of the main verb . . . (he swore)" (Hebrews, 172). Further, an analysis of the sentence structure demonstrates that the phrase beginning "since" (so the N.A.S.V., K.J.V.; "because" in the N.I.V.) is related to the previous adverbial phrase ("For when . . .") in a causative (not a chronological) sense. Thus it appears grammatically that the author is relating this as one narrative event, and that event is Genesis 22:16-19. The passage in Genesis 12:1-3 is not in view here. He is essentially saying that when God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 22, He used an oath. It was Abraham's patient waiting for a son, and his patient endurance concerning the sacrifice incident that resulted in God giving him a promise in the form of an oath. Therefore it is clear in 6:15 that the promise here referenced was the one given after the testing found in Genesis 22, for he received it only *after* patiently waiting (See Alford, The Greek Testament, 119-20). To state that the promise here is Genesis 12:1-3 is to insert chronological and grammatical problems into verse 15.

<sup>24</sup>The purpose is to relate the name of the patriarch to the nation from his loins. The quotation here is almost identical to that of the LXX of Genesis 22:17, except for the substitution of "multiply you" in Hebrews from "multiply your seed" in Genesis. He uses metonymy to replace the reference to 'Abraham's seed' with 'Abraham'. The meaning is not changed, since Abraham was the representative of the nation Israel. This will become meaningful in chapter seven as Melchizedek likewise becomes a historical literary representative of his successor, the true high priest. George Wesley Buchanan (To the Hebrews, 115) agrees, "That which Abraham 'received' . . . was the 'promise' -- not its fulfillment, which the author claimed was still pending in his day." Abraham's name had meaning as the 'father of many nations' (Genesis 17:5) and Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Genesis 35:10) so that "as long as one speaks of the nation, (one) speaks of ISRAEL, the

blessed as a fulfillment of Abraham. These Hebrews placed great confidence in that national promise. Thus the author reminds them of this familiar foundation (6:13-16) in order to show the relationship of Melchizedek to the promise, and thus to them. Delitzsch states,

But the Hebrews, who witnessed a manifest fulfilment [sic] of it in their own time, needed not to be reminded of its having been once confirmed by an oath; nor would the author for his present purpose have quoted it in such a form to them, but rather have reminded them of the promised blessing of "all nations" through Abraham's seed, which formed a part of it. The fact is, however, that he has in view another divine utterance, also confirmed by oath, which he is about to present more particularly to their minds, as a stimulus to pusillanimous and fainting hope. A glance at what follows is enough to show that he is now making full sail towards the haven of Christian hope and confidence in the great oath-established utterance of God concerning the priesthood of His Son.<sup>25</sup>

#### Confirmed by oath

The author of Hebrews has now given one event in the life of Abraham which was so important that God affixed His oath to it. This clearly is one "unchangeable thing". For the author of Hebrews raises oaths above anything else. He states in the next verse (6:16),

"For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute."

The author here is pointedly making an emphasis concerning the use of oaths as unchangeable under any circumstances.<sup>26</sup> God removes all

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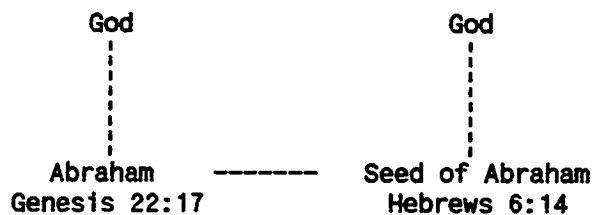
man remains in the name of the nation." (Elliott Johnson, Unpublished notes from Bible 371, Seminar in the Pentateuch, "Genesis," Winter, 1986).

<sup>25</sup>Franz Delitzsch, Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 1:315.

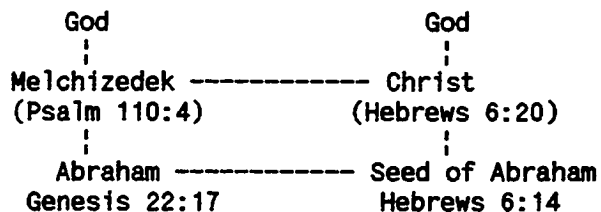
<sup>26</sup>The word here, ἀντιλογίᾱς, translated "dispute" (N.A.S.V.; "strife," K.J.V.; "argument," N.I.V.) is problematical. How is "dispute" related to the context of Abraham and God? The word in its

doubt or appearance of contradiction by confirming to Abraham with an oath. It was as if God had said, "As long as I exist you may be assured of the fulfillment of this promise."

The Hebrew reader based his hope in the promise to Abraham. He misunderstood that the blessing from God to his nation was direct, without mediation. It is diagrammed as follows:



But in Hebrews 6:17-20 the author demonstrates that there is more to the keeping of the promise than their simple scheme. This passage shows the ability and necessity of a heavenly mediator to provide the channel of blessing to the nation.




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most common usage should be translated "contradiction". (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 75). The N.A.S.V. translates it "dispute" in the sense of "contradiction" in Hebrews 7:7 while the N.I.V. there translates it "doubt" (K.J.V., "contradiction"). Thus it may be stated that the sense of the word is "doubt". The doubt that existed was in Abraham's mind as to how the promise would come to pass in its ultimate sense.

Mediation between Christ and Abraham's Seed: 6:17-20

Verses 17-20 now form the last half of the section begun in verse 13. Prior to the point of verse 17 he has reminded the reader of the Abrahamic promise, that of blessing to the nation (of which these readers were not only familiar, but was a basis of their desire to cling to the nation Israel).

Mediation guaranteed by oath (Psalm 110)

It is here (6:17) that the author, having discussed the foundational Abrahamic Covenant, moves to demonstrate its relationship to the mediatorship of one "like Melchizedek." He relates these two truths (covenant and priesthood) as being so important that both were confirmed by oaths.

"In the same way God, desiring even more to show the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose interposed with an oath . . ."

Similar in manner to the Abrahamic oath. The ἐν ᾧ ("in the same way," N.A.S.V.) relates the following verses to the "oath" (verses 13-16).<sup>27</sup> In other words, "in the same way" reflects a repetition of

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<sup>27</sup>What "oath" is he speaking of in verse 17. Is it the same "oath" as that given to Abraham? Many commentators hold the view that the "two unchangeable things" in 6:18 are the "promise" (Genesis 12:1-3) and the "oath" (Genesis 22:16-18) to Abraham. However, beside the other reasons presented here, to make a difference in surety between God's word of promise in Genesis 12:1-3 and God's word of promise in Genesis 22:16 is clearly contradictory to what the author has argued about God's word throughout the book. Chapter 11 is a basic chapter on how men acted by faith with no evidence other than God's word. Most of those cited there never had an oath. Was God's word any less sure because it lacked an oath? Clearly this is not the comparison. All that he is saying is that God placed everything He could behind the promise of Genesis 22. The comparison (6:13-16 to 6:17-20) is between the Genesis 22 oath and the Psalm 110 oath. One gives the means of the other. And

the *manner* of Abraham's security, that is, the oath. Verses 17-20 indicate another oath in which *mediation* of the first promise is assured beyond doubt. Lange states it well,

That which holds of the word of promise made to Abraham and confirmed by the oath of God holds also of that word of promise in regard to the everlasting high priesthood of Christ (Ps. cx. 4) which *in like manner was accompanied by an oath*, and which to us as Christians is especially important.<sup>28</sup>

Witnessed by the writer of Psalm 110. Again, as with the Covenant to Abraham, God considered mediatorship "like Melchizedek" so important that He confirmed it with an oath. Continuing in verse 17, the statement is made that "God . . . *interposed* with an oath." The

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if oaths are greater than promises then why are they equated into the seemingly equal "two unchangeable things". If his stress is that a promise is as "unchangeable" as an oath, then why bother with another oath?

The word περισσότερον ("even more") is a comparative word relating the greater to the lesser. Thus this oath attains a greater guarantee (in some area) than the previous oath, the oath to Abraham (vv. 13-16). Thus the second oath guarantees the first oath (the blessing of the nation) by providing an important requirement (the avenue of blessing from the spiritual) for the first oath to occur. Then the second oath becomes an "even greater" guarantee of the first oath. God has guaranteed the first oath by insuring the blessing of Abraham (Israel) through Melchizedek (Christ). And this has already been referred to as Psalm 110, a main point of the author's argument. Stuart agrees with this view as he states, ". . . to represent the promise and the oath to confirm the same, as the *two immutable things*, seems to be inapposite; for the writer here states that what is sworn to, even among men, must be regarded as fixed or established. More surely what *God* has *once* solemnly declared, can never be annulled. The two things, then, which are immutable, are those referred to in the two different oaths, viz., that in Gen. xxii, 15--18, and that in Ps. cx. 4. To these the writer had repeatedly adverted" (Stuart, A Commentary on the Epistle to Hebrews, 362. Italics are Stuart's.).

<sup>28</sup>Lange, 123-4. (Italics are Lange's).

word here is ἐμεσίτευσεν. Its meaning is clearly related to the involvement of a third party. Kittel defines it, ". . . the "witness" to a legal transaction. . . . The clerk who has notified the contract of purchase . . ."29 The thrust is that the second oath was given through a third party ("interposed," NASV) in Psalm 110.

The Psalm also is mentioned here to point out that the importance of the time it was written. Since the Psalm was written at the pinnacle of the Old Covenant, it demonstrated to the Old Covenant people that there was a greater priest yet to come who would bring about the promise to Abraham. Thus the ultimate stage of the promise had not been reached during the reign of the kings of Israel.<sup>30</sup>

#### Mediation for the seed

The receivers of this second oath are the "heirs of the promise." The promise has just been identified as the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 22:17-18. While all believers are the heirs of the promise to Abraham, specifically the author has in view the nation Israel of

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<sup>29</sup>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 4:599-600, S.v. "μεσίτης." Spicq is one of many commentators who admit that 'mediation' is the main thrust of the word as he states, ". . . ne peut avoir ici son sens ordinaire de médiation, arbitrage . . ." (C. Spicq, *L'Épître Aux Hébreux*, 2:161). There is a transitive and intransitive sense of this verb. If it is transitive then the sense is to bring about through mediation. If it is intransitive then the sense is to act as a mediator (Delitzsch, 1:314). Delitzsch recognizes the problem of the inference of the word. However both Spicq and Delitzsch modify the main meaning of the word since they do not see mediation in the context. In the Psalm the writer is clearly witnessing (mediating) the transaction taking place.

<sup>30</sup>This is a practice of the author. He alludes to a Psalm to show that during the height of the Old Covenant, the Psalmist looked forward to a more ultimate day. Refer to 4:7 for an example of this use.

whom this audience clearly was a part through genealogy.<sup>31</sup> Then the "unchangeableness of His purpose" is the same purpose that God had when He gave the promise to Abraham. He would provide Abraham with a nation from his loins and they would receive blessing.

#### Mediation by the Christ

This oath is to David's Lord in Psalm 110:4, directly referred to in 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 7:20-25, 7:28. In fact, it is directly referred to so often in the following context that it is clear that Christ, the ultimate Melchizedek, is the subject of chapters 5-7. The sentence contained in 6:18-20 concerns the mediatorship of Christ, "after the order of Melchizedek," especially since Psalm 110:4 is prominently quoted in verse 20.

#### A mediator in the heavenlies

The next few verses (18-20) confirm that the second unchangeable thing refers to the oath to David's Lord. This hope was of a high

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<sup>31</sup>Most commentators interpret the "heirs" more generally as all believers. As Hodges states, "Then the author of Hebrews affirmed that the messianic hope which the promise entailed was sure, not only to Abraham, but also to the Christian heirs of what was promised." (Zane Hodges, "Hebrews," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition, 797). However, while this may be true, it is important to note that the author is relating this to the original promise in Genesis 12--22, and thus the mediation of Melchizedek in relationship to the promise. His historical audience was concerned about their *physical* relationship to the nation.

This is not to deny that believers in Christ would also be heirs (Galatians 3:29). The problem here is not one that every believer normally confronts. These listeners were the literal *seed* of Abraham, and as such were considering aligning themselves with the apostate nation. Therefore, while the promise and the mediation of Melchizedek has a like benefit for Gentile believers of this age, it is not a genealogical relationship, which is primary in these readers thoughts.

priest in the heavenlies (6:19-20). This was clearly not in the Levitical priesthood (7:11) and thus not explicitly in the promise to Abraham. The Levitical priesthood had been earthbound. Not one of the priests could enter God's heavenly dwelling place in any sense. Now there was One who could.

The deliverance by a heavenly mediator. This mediator is a real mediator who actually is in the presence of God. He was unlike the Old Covenant priest who only entered an earthly tabernacle. Now the hope was real (6:18).

. . . in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.

Thus a mediator of blessing, an intercessor, is required in order for the blessing and deliverance to be accomplished in the seed of Abraham. The seed of Abraham now has a real high priest to whom they can flee for refuge. Buchanan states concerning the guaranteed support that this mediation brings the heir. "The verb, in relationship to an oath, can mean 'have recourse' in the sense that the people who flee to an oath are the ones who can gain support from it, count on it, make a legal claim against it."<sup>32</sup>

This exhortation which concerns the realistic, gracious, and helpful function of a *real* high priest has been a repetitious exhortation for the author (2:18, 4:16, 10:21-22). Delitzsch well describes

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<sup>32</sup>George Buchanan, To the Hebrews, 115.



the Old Testament basis for "fled for refuge," for the help of a real high priest.

He who has reached an asylum lays hold of the object which there constitutes his security; he who takes refuge in the temple lays hold of the horns of the altar (1 Kings i, 50, ii, 28). We, in like manner, have sought an asylum in laying hold of the hope set before us in the promise and oath of God.<sup>33</sup>

The accomplishment of the heavenly mediator. The author now proceeds in 6:19 to describe what this real priest of Psalm 110 has done as a direct benefit to the believer.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil.

The anchor indicates the surety of this help. However, it is the phrase "enters within the veil" which again relates this function to the priest. The Aaronic Priest would enter once a year into the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the congregation of Israel. It is in Hebrews 9:11-12 that the author explains this function of the real high priest in detail.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come. He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

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<sup>33</sup>Delitzsch, 318. Fleeing for refuge also included the reference to the cities of refuge whereby one would receive graciousness for unintentional manslaughter. The cities of refuge, and the altar, were both allotted to the priestly function and the mediation of grace (Numbers 35:6-34; Deuteronomy 19:1-13).

Thus this reference to the veil confirms again that the hope which the seed of Abraham possesses is that of the heavenly and real mediation of Christ in Psalm 110.

The identity of the heavenly mediator

Verse 20 identifies this mediator. He then makes formal statement that Jesus is the One spoken of in Psalm 110. ". . . where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Here the author, as he so often does, after convincing the audience of the Old Testament theology, names Jesus as the person whom the theology identifies (2:9, 3:1, 4:14, 7:22, 13:12). Following that identification, he again relates the reader back to Psalm 110, the location of the oath which assigned this appointment to Christ. It is here that the author relates Jesus to the Abrahamic Covenant and the obscure Genesis character of Melchizedek. He clearly states, that Christ in His high priestly role, is "after the likeness<sup>34</sup> of Melchizedek."

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<sup>34</sup>The word for "order" or "likeness" here is *τάξις*. Its definition is that of 'likeness', 'order' or 'rank'. "In any case the reference is not only to the higher 'rank', but also to the entirely different nature of Melchizedek's priesthood as compared with that of Aaron . . ." (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 804). The word "order" indicates that Jesus was a priest after the 'likeness' of Melchizedek in Genesis. In Genesis Melchizedek displayed certain attributes of his priestly office. Jesus is high priest just like the pattern set up in Genesis 14.

### Summary

In 6:13-17 the author has recalled for the hearers that the Abrahamic promise, that of blessing to the seed of Abraham, was confirmed with an oath. In 6:17-20, the author builds on that to show that a second oath, in Psalm 110, was the insurance of a mediator between God and the "seed" which provide the means of Abrahamic blessing. This contextual meaning is precisely the meaning of the context determined in Genesis 12--14 in the previous dissertation chapter. Abraham was given a promise in Genesis 12:1-3, and the mediator (Melchizedek) was revealed in 14:18-20. Therefore the author of Hebrews now feels it necessary to proceed back to Genesis 14:18-20 to explain the original Melchizedek for his readers. He will point out that what Christ does now for Israel will be "just like" Melchizedek in Genesis.

#### Section 4: The "Order of Melchizedek" from Genesis: Hebrews 7:1-10

The author has now established that the mediatorship guaranteed in Psalm 110 was mediatorship to the seed of Abraham. He now wishes to explain the significance of "after the likeness of Melchizedek" as mentioned in that Psalm. As is the author's custom, after quoting a Psalm, he moves to the historical precedent to explain the Psalmist's reference.<sup>35</sup> The author will first paraphrase the Genesis reference (7:1-2a) to establish his authority. Then, in verses 2b-3, he will

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<sup>35</sup>He did this previously in 4:7-8. After quoting David he referred to Joshua's movement into the land.

elicit the attributes of Melchizedek from Genesis to show their significance.<sup>36</sup> In verses 4-10, he will apply these attributes to show that Melchizedek was not only superior, but also a mediator, to Abraham. His point is that as early as Genesis, God had indicated there must be a priest who would bless Abraham's seed.

The Genesis Authority: Hebrews 7:1-2a

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of the spoils . . .

The first thing the author does is to quote from his source, Genesis. This will establish the authority he uses to demonstrate the meaning of "a high priest . . . according to the order of Melchizedek." He quotes directly from the LXX, using almost the identical language.<sup>37</sup>

Interpretation of Genesis 14:18-20:  
Hebrews 7:2b-3

The author moves to explain his understanding of these Genesis verses. The difficulty of these verses is of the greatest degree, perhaps in the New Testament. Padva states,

*. . . C'est moins une description qu'une mention hative et obscure. La personnalité de Melchisedek y passe comme un éclair et laisse le*

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<sup>36</sup>Verses 1-3 are dependent on a knowledge of the Genesis message. The study here will consist of primarily the use of the Hebrews statements without major reference to the Genesis argument since this was completed in the previous dissertation chapter. The following dissertation chapter will deal with the comparison of their messages.

<sup>37</sup>Basically the only thing that the author leaves out is the presentation of the bread and wine to Abraham. He also leaves out the details of Melchizedek's blessing to Abraham, stating only that he blessed him.

*lecteur dans la perplexité, dans les ténèbres. Ce récit si embarrassant pour les commentateurs ne l'est nullement pour l'auteur de l'épître. . . .*<sup>38</sup>

Further, it is clear that the author himself viewed the topic as being of the greatest difficulty as he states in 5:11 where he begins his discourse on Melchizedek,<sup>39</sup>

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.

"King of righteousness" and  
"king of peace": Hebrews 7:2b

. . . was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.

The author here understands that the attributes of Melchizedek in the Genesis text were listed for the purpose of providing a representation of the ultimate priest. He thus interprets Melchizedek's names as being significant. He indicates that this ultimate priest will have a meaningful name, "the king of righteousness" and his domain will be "peace". Having stated the importance of his name, he makes nothing more out of it.<sup>40</sup> The writer simply notes the relationship of the name

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<sup>38</sup>Paul Padva, Les Citations de l'Ancien Testament dans l'épître aux Hébreux, 71.

<sup>39</sup>There are two options on the pronoun translated "concerning him" in 5:11. Either the pronoun is neuter or masculine. If it is neuter ("concerning this") as the NIV translates, then it likely refers to all of the foregoing discussion about Christ, priests, and Melchizedek. However, in view of the discussion of 7:1-3, it should be taken as masculine (so the NASV, KJV) to refer to Melchizedek himself.

<sup>40</sup>There are two options which are viable in the understanding of this sentence. They are both based on the meaning and use of the word ἐρμηνευόμενος ("translated"). This word may be taken as simply "translated" (1 Corinthians 12:10, 14:26, 28), as one would "translate"

of Melchizedek and his kingdom as being significant in relationship to the qualities of the coming One.

Lack of Father, Mother, Birth  
and Death: Hebrews 7:3

Now the author moves to traits which are absent from the literary Melchizedek. Melchizedek possessed none of the specific

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from a foreign tongue. However, it can mean "explained" (Luke 24:27). At minimum the author is simply observing that Melchizedek's personal name (righteousness) and the name of his kingdom (peace) match the one whom he prefigured.

On the other hand the author could be recognizing that Melchizedek and the king of Sodom are presented in a literary comparison and thus compares them item for item. Melchizedek's name then would be significant, since it could have been left out of the narrative without changing the import of the message. (The king of Sodom's name is left out of the Genesis comparison). The meaning of the name would be the significant reason that it was included in the narrative. It would be an attribute brought into the narrative to prefigure the future Son.

Sodom already had contracted literary significance in Genesis 13:13 as a place of wickedness. Having already named Melchizedek (righteousness) in the contrast, the name of Melchizedek's city is brought to the text to contrast with the reputation of the king of Sodom's. It is the peace of righteousness verses the wickedness of Sodom.

An examination of the text of Genesis gives no hint that Melchizedek's name or his city is significant in the geographic wars which were taking place in that chapter. He is not a participant. The reader is not told anything about his city, as he is about Sodom. Therefore, it appears to be brought to the text strictly because the name matches the attributes that are to be part of a representation. Had this man had attributes, or other names, which did not prefigure Christ, they would not have been entered into the text for they did not form part of the image.

At this point it would be well to quote Adele Berlin (Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, 13) concerning the nature of literary analysis of narrative literature. "Above all we must keep in mind that narrative is a *form of representation*. Abraham in Genesis is not a real person any more than a painting of an apple is a real fruit. This is not a judgment on the existence of a historical Abraham any more than it is a statement about the existence of apples. It is just that

genealogical credentials required to participate in the Abrahamic national promise. It was clear to that New Testament audience that all Levitical priests required genealogical connection to the fathers. The Melchizedekian priesthood was therefore not to be granted on a hereditary basis.

In 7:3 these Genesis attributes are presented and in 7:4-10 are assessed. In other words the author clearly explains in 7:4-10 what the attributes of 7:3 mean. In the dissertation format to follow, the explanation in 7:4-10 will follow the listing of attributes (7:3) in order to see the parallel clearly.

"Without father, without mother"

The importance of recorded genealogy (7:3a). The first set of terms noted are Melchizedek's lack of any Biblical record of his father and mother. The author is not saying that Melchizedek did *not* have mother and father. He is referring to the record of the text in Genesis and not to the historical Melchizedek independent of the text. First, in 7:1-2a he had listed the Old Testament as his authority. In addition the use of the word "traced" in 7:6 indicates that it is not actual genealogy, but documented genealogy that is of concern here.

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we should not confuse a historical individual with his narrative representation."

And thus it is with Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews recognizes that the author of Genesis has included only the attributes of Melchizedek which correspond to his representation as a mediator of blessing to Abraham. Thus the inclusion of his name and city are there for the purpose of displaying a quality of this ultimate figure.

The lack of father (7:3a). The point of having a patriarch as father is clear. Not being descended from a patriarch meant that one was not in line to receive the direct Abrahamic blessing from God. To not have a patriarch as father in Genesis meant that he did not have part in the human redemption line through the nation Israel.

The importance of having a "father" (7:4). As great as Abraham was, he submitted to Melchizedek by giving him a tithe. The word " πατριάρχης " (patriarch) stresses Abraham's credential as a "father". In contrast Melchizedek was not a patriarch nor descended from one ("without father"). The word πατριάρχης (7:4) has the same root as the word in 7:3 ἀπάτωρ ("without father"). It is not that Melchizedek was without *any* father, but that he did not have the proper patriarch to have a Levitical (or even Israelite) credential.

"Without father" emphasizes the lack of proper elect parentage required of those who were selected to carry on the redemption plan through Abraham's nation.<sup>41</sup> In the development of Genesis it was the fathers ( πατριάρχης ) who were important in the formation of the nation. Any Jew (including this audience) who held that the Abrahamic promise was valid, felt his claim to that promise was primarily due to his relationship to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the "fathers".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Demarest ("A Crux Interpretum," 161) notes that the words ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ were commonly employed both in Greek and Jewish circles to indicate absence of recorded parentage. Considering the literary emphasis here, it would indicate exactly that; Melchizedek's lineage was unrecorded in Genesis.

<sup>42</sup>John 8:39 and Luke 3:8 reflect this attitude toward the Abrahamic promise.



Importance of a "father" to a Levite. Further, for an Israelite priest the importance of a proper "father" relationship, not only to Abraham, but to Levi and Aaron was of the utmost importance.

"The lowest order of priesthood was the Levites who cared for the service of the sanctuary. . . The sons of Aaron, who were set apart for the special office of priest, were above the Levites. Only they could minister at the sacrifices of the altar."<sup>43</sup>

"Without mother" (7:3). "Without mother" was similar. Genesis demonstrates that the elect sons must have an elect mother. Not having the proper mother in Genesis was also a reason for eliminating one from involvement in the Abrahamic national promise.

Parentage to Aaron was not only necessary for a high priest, but also one had to have a mother descended from Jacob. According to Leviticus 21:14 and Ezekiel 44:22 the sons of Aaron had to marry a virgin of *Israel* so that they might not profane their descendants.<sup>44</sup>

Significance. Melchizedek was not a part of this great line. His credentials would not come from simply having any patriarchal father or mother. He had no claim as the Levites did. Thus Melchizedek, without elect parents, indicated that the real high priest would be elected by God on a non-genealogical basis. W. Robertson Nicoll sums it up well as he states,

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<sup>43</sup>C. L. Feinberg, in The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, S. v. "Priests and Levites," 4:854.

<sup>44</sup>Feinberg, The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, S.v. "Priests and Levites," 4:854-858.

. . . no mention is made of an illustrious father or mother from whom he could have inherited power and dignity, still less can his priestly office and service be ascribed to his belonging to a priestly family. . . . his office derives no sanction from priestly lineage or hereditary rights; and in this respect he is made like to the Son of God.<sup>45</sup>

"Without genealogy"

The second of the traits that Melchizedek lacks in comparison to the Abrahamic national line is his lack of genealogy.

The importance of pedigree of the patriarchs (7:6). Again the explanation of genealogy lies in the immediately following context.

But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises.

Recorded genealogy is very important. The first inference from verse 6 is the word "traced". This indicates that it is not simply historical lack of genealogy that is in view here, but lack of recorded genealogy.<sup>46</sup>

National genealogy is also important. Verse 6 states that one who did not have this privileged "genealogy" (γενεαλογούμενος) took tithes from the patriarch Abraham. This is another reference to 7:3, ἀγενεαλογητος ("without genealogy"). He is not saying that Melchizedek

<sup>45</sup>W. Robertson Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, 308.

<sup>46</sup>Paul Ellingworth goes so far as to say that the context indicates so strongly that it is recorded genealogy in view here that it should be included in the translation. He translates it "family tree." A Translator's Handbook on the The Letter to the Hebrews, 136-37.

is without human genealogy, thus making him an angel or a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Simply put the author states he does not have the genealogy of Abraham to which an Israelite priest made claim.<sup>47</sup>

Having shown Melchizedek's superiority by the fact that the patriarch Abraham submitted to him, the author points out the ultimate proof, Melchizedek received tithes. Note that the author substitutes "the one who had the promises" for Abraham's name. This emphasizes the importance of Abraham and his genealogy.<sup>48</sup> It was the genealogy of promise. The one who had the promises is the greatest. Yet here is one who actually requires subjection from the greatest. Knowing the Abrahamic Covenant it is clear that there is only one who can receive tithes from Abraham (as a superior to him) and that is one who represents God.

Significance. Melchizedek was a man whose credentials did not lie within the promised genealogy of Abraham. Yet, he was clearly Abraham's superior. The ultimate priest "like Melchizedek" would not claim His priestly position based on that lineage of promise.

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<sup>47</sup>A proof of the necessity of proper genealogical records is found in Ezra 2:62 and Nehemiah 7:64, where simply the lack of information concerning a priest's line eliminated him from serving.

<sup>48</sup>Kistemaker, 190.

Neither beginning of days nor end of life

This phrase is also referring to the literary Biblical record of Melchizedek's birth or death. This phrase is used here to show that the succession to the ultimate Melchizedek will not be through the birth/death process of the Abraham and Levi succession.<sup>49</sup>

Hebrews 7:8 - "Life" from Psalm 110. As he has done previously the author explains his statements of 7:3 in the later verses, here in 7:8.

And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.

The point of this verse is that the Levites were continued through mortality.<sup>50</sup> That is, they required a birth/death process to

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<sup>49</sup>A clarification needs to be made here. The birth/death process is speaking here of the continuance of *the Abrahamic or Levitical* lines. Lack of birth/death is then speaking of one's non-involvement in *that* line. His lack of recorded birth/death is not stating that Melchizedek's priesthood would not be continued by the birth/death process, only that it would not be the birth/death process necessary for inclusion in, and continuance of, the Abrahamic line. The reader is not told in Genesis how the Melchizedekian priesthood is to be continued, only that it would not be through Abraham's genealogy. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, also has lack of recorded birth or death. But one would not be so bold as to state that it was not continued through births or deaths, only that it was not through the births and deaths of the Abrahamic line.

<sup>50</sup>This verse probably receives more textual massaging than any verse in the passage. The difficulty is presented because of the clear contrast between "mortal" Levites and a "living" Melchizedek. One of the ways that this is dealt with is by making the "he lives on" phrase apply to Christ instead of Melchizedek. But this is problematic since Christ is nowhere to be found in the immediate context. Another way is to take the word "lives on" literally and thus one is forced to make Melchizedek an angel (Hodges, "Hebrews," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 798) or the pre-incarnate Christ (A. T. Hanson, Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, 38). However, the "witnessed" here is clearly Psalm 110. And since Christ has been eliminated on grammatical grounds, the subject must be Melchizedek. But Psalm 110 never notes that Melchizedek

continue their existence and the existence of the Israelite priesthood. The writer confirms this again in 7:23 as he states,

And the former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers, because they were prevented by death from continuing . . .

Melchizedek, on the other hand, has no record of birth and death, because the Abrahamic genealogical struggle is not significant to the continuation of his office. While he died,<sup>51</sup> since he was a literary prefiguration one like him would arise whether or not he had a son. Thus Melchizedek continues his "likeness" without birth requirements. He thus literally "lives" without real life.

The phrase, "of whom it is witnessed that he lives on" is a reference to the testimony of Psalm 110.<sup>52</sup> This Psalm never witnessed that the historical Melchizedek lived eternally or even lived in the Psalmist's day. It is basically stating that the representation of Melchizedek continues indefinitely awaiting an ultimate Melchizedek who

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"lives on" in a literal manner. Thus one is left with the solution that "lives on" indicates something different than a literal flesh and blood "life". And that figurative manner of writing is confirmed in the next verse as one observes Levi "living" in his father's loins, though not yet conceived (Arthur W. Pink, Exposition of Hebrews, 376-7). Refer to Appendix II for a discussion of Old Testament characters as "living" in Hebrews.

<sup>51</sup>Melchizedek died historically, though it is not recorded in the text. Refer to the discussion in the previous dissertation chapter.

<sup>52</sup>The author of Hebrews frequently uses the term "witness" as "supported by the witness of an Old Testament book" (Paul Ellingworth, A Translator's Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews, 142). However, here it is used in the same sense as ἑμεσίτευσεν in verse 17. In Hebrews it always refers to the testimony of the Word of God to man (Alford, The Greek Testament, 134).

would be identified with him. It is this that is witnessed in Psalm 110, that the attributes presented concerning Melchizedek in Genesis live on in his ultimate, David's Lord.<sup>53</sup>

The word "lives" and other similar words and tenses are used by the author to indicate Old Testament saints who "live" or "speak" today through the Old Testament. The author views the Old Testament as a "living" document (4:12). He sees Old Testament saints presently "testifying" (12:1) and "speaking" (11:4). They are thus seen in their literary presentation in the Old Testament. This same sense is applied to Melchizedek who is seen as a representative of the ultimate priest, and thus his 'representation' is seen as continuing or "living" to, and in, Christ. This is what Psalm 110 is testifying. That Melchizedek's image lives on in Christ. (See Appendix II for a further development of this literary characteristic of the book of Hebrews). The same imagery is applied in the following two verses (9-10) as he sees Levi living in Abraham's actions.<sup>54</sup>

Significance. Abraham had to have children since his promise was fulfilled by the birth/death process. Melchizedek's successor, on the other hand, was not dependent on that Abrahamic genealogical struggle.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Refer to Appendix I and II for the author of Hebrews' use of the present and perfect tenses as well as "lives on" and "perpetuity".

<sup>54</sup>Kistemaker, 190.

<sup>55</sup>The question must be asked if there is any connection between Melchizedek's lack of birth and death and Christ's eternity. There appears to be no connection. The lack of birth and death was only to indicate that Melchizedek's priesthood would not be carried on through

"But made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually"

Now the author moves to a summary statement concerning Melchizedek's attributes. Melchizedek had been "made like the Son of God." The author is stating that the author of Genesis has presented a literary picture of the Son of God.

"But"

The "but" (δέ) which begins the clause, is a mild conjunction.<sup>56</sup> The English conjunction "but" actually implies a strong adversative conjunction, while δέ carries necessarily no adversative

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the Levitical and Aaronic (and Abrahamic) human process. Hebrews makes no reference to Christ's eternality in chapter 7 until verse 16. It is nowhere hinted in the Genesis discussion of verses 1-10.

Where is the Old Testament indication of Christ's eternality in relationship to Melchizedek? The answer is clearly Psalm 110:4. It is there that the term "forever" is added. The term "forever" in Psalm 110:4 is not part of "like Melchizedek." It is an added feature. Simply stated the Psalmist says that one will come with the attributes of Melchizedek (blessing Israel) and that this one will be blessing them forever. This is where Christ's eternality is introduced in relationship to Melchizedek.

This is exactly what the author states in 7:15-17. Christ did not assume the priesthood based on a physical requirement (genealogy) like the Melchizedek of Genesis 14, but on the power of an indestructible life. Then he quotes Psalm 110:4 to show his authority for Christ's eternality. For the one who would be "after the likeness of Melchizedek" must fulfill Genesis 14 and Psalm 110:4.

<sup>56</sup>John D. Grassmick, Unpublished notes from Greek 202, Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring, 1981. The only contrast which δέ indicates is a mild contrast. Three out of four of its primary uses imply no contrast and are connective, transitional, or untranslated. Concerning the one use which may imply mild contrast, he states, "δε is a weaker contrastive conjunction than αλλα." Also refer to Dana and Manthey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 244.

connotations. If it is translated "but" then there is a tendency to take it back only to the negative phrases. However, not having that connotation, it should be taken back to comment on all the interpretive phrases from verse 2b through 3a.<sup>57</sup> Thus "made like the Son of God . . ." refers to the "king of righteousness", "king of peace", "without mother", "father", "genealogy", "birth" and "death". All the characteristics of Melchizedek brought into the Genesis literary narrative were fully matched in the present high priestly function of Jesus Christ.

#### "Made like"

The word here signifies 'likeness'.<sup>58</sup> The previous attributes referred to by the "δε" (verses 2b-3) are now in view. The attributes that Melchizedek displayed in his person are the attributes that are carried by the Son of God.<sup>59</sup> It is perhaps best stated that Melchizedek

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<sup>57</sup>Refer to W. Robertson Nicoll, The Expositor's Greek Testament, 307 for discussion on this point.

<sup>58</sup>Kittel defines this word as signifying "'likeness,' 'correspondence,' the resultant 'similarity'" (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol IV., S.v. "ὁμοιότης"). Robertson defines it as producing "a facsimile or copy" (Archibald Robertson, The Fourth Gospel - The Epistle to the Hebrews, 381). This word is not the word used in the LXX translation of Psalm 110. That word is τᾶξίς. The author basically uses a synonym in order to show he is focusing on the Genesis account and not the Psalm. Other arguments concerning this word are presented in Paul Ellingworth's article "Just Like Melchizedek," The Bible Translator 28 (April 1977): 236-239.

<sup>59</sup>Buchanan (To the Hebrews, 119) notes the similarity of this phrase to the phrase in Daniel 3:25, "like the Son of God." The wording is not exact, but the root words are the same.



is a perfect pattern of Jesus as high priest.<sup>60</sup> "The likeness is in the picture drawn in Genesis, not in the man himself."<sup>61</sup>

### "The Son of God"

The Son of God refers to Jesus in His relationship as the ultimate agent of God. It is speaking about Jesus as the appointed One from Psalm 110. His earthly credentials, as the Son of Abraham, did not fully qualify Him as the High Priest.<sup>62</sup> It was only His relationship to God, His appointment to the likeness of Melchizedek, and His life as a man that enabled Him to minister as the real Mediator. It is then at His resurrection that He makes a full claim to the 'eternality' of His humanity granted to Him by God (7:16).<sup>63</sup> For the earthly human Jesus, the physical seed of Abraham, clearly had elect parents, recorded

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<sup>60</sup>Refer to John W. Pryor, "Hebrews and Incarnational Christology," The Reformed Theological Review 40 (May-August 1981): 47.

<sup>61</sup>Archibald Thomas Robertson, The Fourth Gospel - The Epistle to the Hebrews, 381.

<sup>62</sup>However, recall the discussion of 5:1-10 where it was stated that He was required to be fully a man. Although for the priestly role, particular genealogy would not be required.

<sup>63</sup>The Son of God is the ultimate of the Psalm 2 "Thou art My Son," quoted in Hebrews twice, at the beginning of the book in 1:5, and at the beginning of the treatise on Melchizedek in 5:5. Jesus was a Son before His resurrection, but the fulfillment of His "Son" function is clearly vindicated at His resurrection. While the fact of Christ's election as Melchizedekian priest was recorded in Psalm 110 (at the height of the Old Covenant), it was not until His resurrection that He operated as Melchizedek in His fullest potential (7:16). Romans 1:1-4 defines this title similarly. He was the Son, but was declared to be the Son at His resurrection. Refer to C. E. B. Cranfield's work on Romans A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, 1:61-64 or John Witmer, "Romans" in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition, 440.

birth and death as well as a well documented Abrahamic genealogy. It was at the resurrection that Jesus became eternal in a human body, fully performing a function as a mediator between the seed of Abraham and God. His specific credentials as high priest were independent of His genealogical credentials, obtained through His election to the post by God Himself.

"Abides a priest perpetually"

The phrase "abides a priest perpetually" is a most difficult phrase. Many commentators parallel this phrase to "having neither beginning of days nor end of life." Since they typically take that phrase to indicate immortality, then the word "perpetually" (διηλεκτός) seems to relate in a parallel sense. However, as was stated previously, the "δέ" sets off a clause which refers to all the listed attributes of Melchizedek and not simply to one negative attribute.

Priest. Melchizedek in Genesis was set apart because of his priesthood. All his attributes, which were presented in interaction with Abraham, are a part of his priesthood and contribute to the understanding of it. The priest of Hebrews is primarily a mediator, a representative of God to man and of man to God. The author of Hebrews has limited his interpretation of Melchizedek in Genesis to the priestly attributes. He refers to him as king only when utilizing the significance of his name.

Abides. The word abides indicates 'continuing in a state established by the context'. How does Melchizedek "abide?" It is in the same manner Abraham's name is substituted in a prophecy concerning Israel (6:14). The writer sees the Old Testament presenting Abraham as "abiding," living in the promised seed. Just as the "witnesses" are seen in 12:1 as alive and observing the present day saints, Abraham is seen as alive and submitting to Melchizedek as Melchizedek comes and blesses him once more. Thus Melchizedek abides as Abraham abides.<sup>64</sup> The one abides in his seed. The other abides independent of his seed. Melchizedek stands ready to bless the nation Israel.<sup>65</sup>

The word "abides" (μένω), used here in combination with δεινότης, reinforces that thought. Abides is not the word for actual living, but remaining in a state implied by the context. Thus Mel-

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<sup>64</sup>It should be noted that while both men are representatives of a someone or something yet future, their ultimates are brought about differently. Melchizedek is like a picture. The attributes presented of him, though few, are identical to his ultimate. Abraham, on the other hand, represents a nation. He is clearly not identical to that nation, since he is only one and the nation is many. Thus while his fulfillment is an expansion of himself through time, Melchizedek's ultimate is unchanging. Time will bring about the change in Abraham, it will not change Melchizedek. Here is the thrust of the likeness of Melchizedek. The picture painted describes the reality perfectly. Time does not change it. Melchizedek is "made like unto the Son of God" (7:3).

<sup>65</sup>Refer back to the discussion on the quotation from Genesis 22:17 in Hebrews 6:14. Here the Old Testament quotation had been changed from "your seed" to "you" indicating that Abraham was representative of the future seed. This is the metonymy which the author uses frequently indicating that in one sense Abraham and Melchizedek, as well as others, stand alive in the sense of their ultimate fulfillment. A similar use is when he states that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek while still in Abraham's loins (7:9-10). Thus Levi lived in his father Abraham.

chizedek is not presented as in heaven continuing his priestly duties,<sup>66</sup> but as fixed in the same state that he is seen in Genesis 14, blessing Abraham. Christ assumes fully the role of Melchizedek following His resurrection as He mediates for the remnant. (See Appendix II for the author's use of Old Testament characters as "living").

Perpetually. The word  $\delta\iota\eta\nu\epsilon\kappa\eta\varsigma$ <sup>67</sup> is very important here. It is clearly different from the word  $\alpha\iota\omega\nu\alpha$  used of Christ in the sense of "forever" or "for the ages".<sup>68</sup> The author has taken great pains to avoid that impression.  $\delta\iota\eta\nu\epsilon\kappa\eta\varsigma$  indicates a 'continuous state'. Whatever state one is in from the context, that state is continued.  $\delta\iota\eta\nu\epsilon\kappa\eta\varsigma$  is used in 10:1 where the Aaronic priests are seen in a continuous state of offering sacrifices.<sup>69</sup> In 10:12 it is seen that Christ offers a sacrifice which effectiveness is fixed in a continuous state. And in 10:14 it is seen that the perfected believer is also held continuously in a state of perfection. It does not necessarily indicate "forever" as can be seen from the above references. Thus there is a

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<sup>66</sup>This is the view espoused by Carl Auberlen ("The Eternal Life and the Priesthood of Melchizedek," Bibliotheca Sacra 16 (1859): 528-57).

<sup>67</sup>The word  $\delta\iota\eta\nu\epsilon\kappa\eta\varsigma$  is very important to this study. A summary of the study has been presented here. For further details see Appendix I.

<sup>68</sup>The word  $\alpha\iota\omega\nu\alpha$  is used of Christ whenever the author is referring to Psalm 110:4. It is never used in connection with Melchizedek, but the word  $\delta\iota\eta\nu\epsilon\kappa\eta\varsigma$  is used instead. Thus Melchizedek "abides perpetually," while Christ "lives forever." Melchizedek lives on in the picture painted in Genesis. Christ fills that picture eternally.

<sup>69</sup>No one would state that their sacrifices continue *forever*.

clear difference between Melchizedek abiding continually ( διηνεκής) and Christ living forever ( αἰῶνα ). Melchizedek continued on in his literary representation. Christ is continuing on in an actual indestructible life (7:16).

. . . who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.

"Abides . . . perpetually" is later explained in 7:8 with the parallel "he lives on." This phrase has already been explained under the "without beginning of days nor end of life" section and will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that the phrase "he lives on" indicates that Psalm 110 witnessed that Melchizedek's representation from Genesis was living on in Christ. His "likeness" was being continued. This was in contrast to the Levites whose order must be continued through the mortality struggle of birth and death (7:23-24).

#### Summary: 7:1-3

The author continues with his literary exposition. The audience has just grasped (6:13-20) that the visit by Melchizedek in Genesis prefigured an ultimate Melchizedek (Christ) blessing an ultimate Abraham (Israel). The Old Testament reader awaited the ultimate appearance by Melchizedek to give the blessing of God on Israel. This literary image is affirmed (7:8) when David testified that Melchizedek's attributes ("order") "live on" in David's Lord.

These attributes of the ultimate Melchizedek are that He is the King of righteousness, whose domain is peace. His credentials as heavenly high priest will not be parental, genealogical, nor with a continuance through the "seed" of Abraham's line.

**The Relationship of Melchizedek to Abraham:  
Hebrews 7:4-10**

The exegesis of this section as related to Genesis has already been presented in the previous section, and thus needs not be presented here. However a basic summary of this section is necessary to demonstrate the relationship of the contexts following the Genesis references.

The importance of this section is to demonstrate what the Genesis references to Melchizedek (7:1-3) indicated with reference to the promise and its bearer, Abraham. Verse 4 indicates that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham since Abraham gave him a tithe. Levites, on the other hand, received tithes from the Israelites, and were descended from Abraham. Thus (verses 6-10) Levites would be of lower rank than Melchizedek since they figuratively gave tithes through their father. This Melchizedek is a superior priest who gained his priesthood apart from genealogical credentials (verse 6). The testimony of Psalm 110:4 (Hebrews 7:8) verifies that he lives on in a successor independent of Abrahamic genealogy.

"After the order of ('just like') Melchizedek" indicates that Christ had all the attributes ("king of righteousness", "king of peace"), non-genealogical credentials (no priestly father or mother, no priestly genealogy, nor Abrahamic birth/death process), and would once again bless Abraham (Israel) "just like" Melchizedek.

Christ: The Ultimate Melchizedek:  
Hebrews 7:11-28<sup>70</sup>

In this passage, the author leaves his Genesis analysis, and continues with the results. Having defined the "order of Melchizedek" from Psalm 110 and Genesis 14, he reasons that Levitical heritage would not have qualified Christ as the real High Priest (7:11-14).<sup>71</sup> Christ's credentials as priest are non-Abrahamic credentials, appointment by oath and His eternality (7:15-24).<sup>72</sup> The application to the audience is made in 7:24-28. They were to utilize this mediator to access the very throne of God. Jesus is now a real high priest, undying, able to mediate for and deliver believers. He would continue forever acting "just like Melchizedek."

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<sup>70</sup>Since this is only a continuation of the argument of Hebrews and is not directly related to Genesis references concerning Melchizedek, it will not be discussed here in detail.

<sup>71</sup>Note that again the author refers to Psalm 110 as his basis when he states, "what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek" (7:11b). He is simply stating that if the Levitical order was ultimate, then why Psalm 110:4?

<sup>72</sup>Again it should be noted that Christ's eternality is a fulfillment of Psalm 110:4. It is there that the stipulation is revealed that the ultimate priest "like Melchizedek" would officiate forever. When Christ is resurrected to undying status at His resurrection, He verifies the fact that He will never cease His operation as the 'real' High Priest. Genesis 14 does not seem to indicate the eternality of

Summary: Chapter IV

The real high priest was presented in Hebrews as being a functioning high priest. He was actual, as opposed to the Levitical which was symbolic and partial. The author of Hebrews points out that this mediator was specifically to be the mediator to the seed of Abraham. The author's immediate audience appears to have been totally Jewish, and as such they were the physical as well as spiritual beneficiaries of that promise.

Hebrews 1--4 pointed out that this high priest was fully God so that He could represent God to man, specifically in the revelation of God's word. He had to be fully man so as to represent completely those who suffered.

Chapters 5--7 began a discussion "the order of Melchizedek." As in the Aaronic order, the ultimate Melchizedek must be a man and must be elected as was the case in Psalm 110:4 (5:1-10). Following the parenthesis of warning (5:11-6:12) the author points out that the oath to Christ in Psalm 110 provided mediation (6:17-20) to the beneficiaries of the Abrahamic promise (6:13-16).

Christ was pronounced as this mediator priest "after the order of Melchizedek" in Psalm 110 (6:20). Thus the author, in 7:1-3, turns to Genesis to explain that phrase. This showed that Melchizedek was without genealogical credentials, as required by Levitical earthbound

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this ultimate Melchizedek. One might derive that an undying mediator might be necessary to mediate continually to the promised nation. But it does not seem to be an explicit inference.



priests. Melchizedek's likeness ("order") was carried on independent of genealogical means. His attributes will be seen in his ultimate successor. In 7:4-10 the author applies this specifically to the case of the Levitical order. He shows that the Levitical order was of lower rank than the order of Melchizedek.

In 7:11-14 the author points out that Christ did not qualify as a Levitical priest, but did qualify, through election and resurrection (Psalm 110) as the priest "like Melchizedek" (7:15-25). Being fully God, fully man and living forever made Him able to give God's aid to man, delivering in every sense.

Thus Christ became "just like" Melchizedek. He was the king of righteousness and peace. He received His priesthood based on God's appointment to eternal life (Psalm 110) and not because of His relationship to Abraham. Then He blesses and mediates for the "seed of Abraham" "just like" Melchizedek.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Christ is placed into the literary picture established in Genesis. Essentially "just like" indicates that one can tell no difference between Melchizedek and Christ. Literarily a reader of only Genesis 14:18-20 could not tell that Melchizedek was not Christ since the only attributes presented in the text are those which match the coming priest.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Chapter I: Introduction

The focus of this dissertation was to show that the author of Hebrews' use of Melchizedek is compatible with the original intended meaning of Genesis 14:18-20. Since there appears to be no one presently who has shown that connection, the need for this dissertation was clearly established. The dissertation would analyze both the book of Hebrews and Genesis and determine the meaning of the Melchizedek passages within their literary context.

Chapter II: Views

This chapter surveyed many of the most common explanations of the author of Hebrews' use of Genesis with regard to Melchizedek. None of these arguments claimed or demonstrated that the author of Hebrews utilized Genesis in its normal original intended sense.

Rabbinic Midrash was the first option examined. While the use of Melchizedek might vary from rabbi to rabbi it was clear that none of the more popular views demonstrated a use of Genesis 14:18-20 in its original intended meaning.

Philonic interpretation concerning Melchizedek was also briefly examined. Philo at times used a non-normal hermeneutic which basically would come under the heading of allegory. Philo's explanation of Hebrews use of Genesis 14:18-20 is basically allegorical.

The discoveries at Qumran also revealed an interest in Melchizedek. Primarily, it appeared that Psalm 110 was used as a basis, albeit somewhat loosely. However, it too expanded beyond the boundaries of a normal sense of the Genesis text.

The 'angelic being' interpretation was then examined to determine its parallel to the Genesis message. This view focused on the principle that Melchizedek was an angel. This apparently solved the problem of how Melchizedek could "abide a priest perpetually" (Hebrews 7:3) and how it could be that "he lives on" (7:8). However, while this view attempted to deal with the difficult phrases of Hebrews, the concept of Melchizedek as an angel could not have come from the Genesis text alone. Thus, one who holds that interpretation would see this as a later understanding or revelation concerning Melchizedek, not part of the original message.<sup>1</sup>

The 'priesthood of the believer' view was then examined. This view espoused that Melchizedek was a priest similar to Abraham, Abel as well as any other believer living prior to the initiation of the Old Covenant. Thus Melchizedek pictured a return to the priesthood of the

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<sup>1</sup>It was pointed out that the various views overlapped to some degree. For instance, Qumran seemed to hold Melchizedek as an angelic being. However, Hodges ("Hebrews" in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 777-813) also holds that Melchizedek is an angel, but would not necessarily espouse Qumran as being the source of Hebrews.

believer in the future following the demise of the Old Covenant. While this was a valiant attempt to deal with the context of the book of Hebrews as well as Genesis, it brought up many questions which could not be answered? For instance, it presents Melchizedek as the type of all New Testament believers. In doing that, it equates Melchizedek to Christ and then to all believers. Christ's priesthood is clearly superior to that of a New Testament believer, and thus the equality that this view gives to Christ and believers is difficult. Also, how is it that Abel, Enoch and Melchizedek were believer-priests in the same sense as the New Covenant believer when the potential did not exist until the death of Christ? Further, it is of prime importance, when developing the message of a book, that individual points of the book are explained by that message. This view solves many of the initial problems, but his argument creates others which are not solved. It thus did not develop a consistent argument from Genesis.

The pre-incarnate Christ view was examined. The basic view holds that Christ in His pre-incarnate form appeared as Melchizedek to Abraham. Beside the theological difficulties that this presented, it could not be demonstrated from the context of Genesis alone that someone other than a historical character was indicated. In addition this view did not do justice to the phrase "made like the Son of God" (Hebrews 7:3). Thus, while an attempt was made to solve the Genesis context (Abraham's submission), it created problems in the language of Hebrews.

Then the 'argument from silence' views were examined. This is a broad category, but in its essentials is held by many conservative evangelicals.<sup>2</sup> The initial problem is the statement that Melchizedek has "no beginning of days, nor end of life" (Hebrews 7:3). They correctly recognize that this refers to the absence of any Biblical record of his birth and death. They then claim that Melchizedek's eternal life ('abides a priest perpetually') is related to his lack of birth and death records using the literary technique 'argument from silence'. What the author of Hebrews is thus saying is that since there is no record of his death, he is literarily indicating Melchizedek's eternal life. This apparently solves the problem of Hebrews 7:8 where it states that Melchizedek "lives on."

While this is a bold attempt to determine the connection between Genesis and Hebrews without going to extra-biblical literature, this 'argument from silence' cannot be derived from Genesis. It would be difficult to derive from the context of Genesis that Melchizedek's lack of birth/death records indicated his eternality. The king of Sodom, who is compared to Melchizedek in the context, had no birth/death records but is not claimed to be eternal. The 'argument from silence' thus indicates either that the author used a New Testament era special<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>It is impossible to represent all the different variations of this view, and thus the most frequent use is presented here.

<sup>3</sup>This hermeneutic could not be used broadly but must be used only on particular people such as Melchizedek, not the king of Sodom. Normally its advocates would state that it could not be used by the twentieth century reader to interpret Old Testament books.

hermeneutic or that he received special revelation concerning Melchizedek, as opposed using the normal message of Genesis.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter one completed a review of these options and it could be seen clearly that none demonstrated that the original message of Genesis was utilized by the author of Hebrews. All the options suggested extra-biblical sources for the author's information, or the use of cultural, rabbinical, allegorical or other hermeneutical methods. This author is not aware of any work which demonstrates a consistent contextual message in Genesis from which the author of Hebrews obtained his information.

### Chapter III: Genesis

The point of this chapter was to determine the purpose of Melchizedek in the Book of Genesis.

#### Contextual Analysis

The chapter first examined the contextual setting of the Melchizedek narrative (chapters 12--14). Abraham was the hero, based on the covenant of Genesis 12:1-3. In chapter 14 nations who interacted with him were blessed or cursed based on Genesis 12:3a. Thus Abraham is seen as the one who will mediate blessing (or cursing) to the nations based on the covenant.

It is in this setting that Melchizedek steps on the scene. He is the one who stands between Abraham and God. He offers confirmation

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<sup>4</sup>This is a difficult view to classify under one conclusion since there are so many different diversions from the main precept. However, it seems that many advocate that the author of Hebrews used a hermeneutical technique unique in New Testament times.

to Abraham that the covenant's benefits (12:3a) have been reflected in the defeat of the enemies. He then turns and offers praise to God on behalf of Abraham for this covenantal deliverance. Abraham confirms Melchizedek's superior status by offering him a tithe. Melchizedek is thus a priest who acts as a mediator between Abraham and God.

#### The 'Bridge' Motif

The second portion of the study in Genesis examined the 'bridge' motif. Since the fall of Adam, God had begun to reconcile heaven (God's residence) and earth (man's residence). Babel had tried to bridge the gap between the gods and their nation with their man-made tower. Following its failure, God provided a nation in Abraham instead of Babel, and a chosen mediator between heaven and earth instead of a tower. God reconfirmed the national promise and the God-made 'bridge' to Jacob in 'Jacob's ladder'. It was demonstrated that these three episodes were literarily linked. This confirmed that the 'bridge' motif of reconciliation was an intended part of the message of Genesis. The fact that Melchizedek was an integral part of this motif confirmed that Genesis intended to present Melchizedek as a 'bridge' or mediator between God and Abraham (Israel).

#### Melchizedek as Representative

The third section demonstrated that Abraham was intended as a literary representative in the Genesis 12--14 narrative. That is, as the covenant was reflected in Abraham's life, so would it be in the future nation. Therefore as Melchizedek interacted with Abraham, he too

represented a future One who would come. That future One would bless Israel "just like" Melchizedek had blessed Abraham. This section demonstrated that Genesis intended Melchizedek to represent an ultimate Melchizedek.

### Toledot Motifs

The fourth section examined the three motifs presented in Hebrews 7:3. They were toledot, father/mother, and birth/death.

#### *Toledot*

The toledot motif demonstrated that the genealogy of Genesis was important if one was to take part in the human redemption line through Abraham. This line would produce the nation Israel, and the Messiah. Melchizedek had no part in that genealogical line, and thus received his priesthood on a non-genealogical basis.

#### Father/Mother

Father/mother was a part of the genealogical motif. For one to be included in that human redemption line from Abraham he had to have the correct patriarch and matriarch as his father and mother. Melchizedek did not and thus his priesthood was not inherited as part of that line.

#### Birth/Death

Birth/death was also a part of the genealogical motif. It was through the hope of birth that the human redemption line was carried on. Death continually threatened the line, yet a birth of a son would carry



on the hope. As Melchizedek's birth and death is not recorded, it is clear he was not part of the line traced in Genesis. Thus his priesthood is not carried on through that human genealogical process.

**Summary: Toledot motifs**

The summary of this motif section is that Melchizedek received his priesthood on a basis other than Abraham's national genealogy or through its human means of selection and continuance.

**Summary: Chapter III**

Several things were reflected concerning Melchizedek in the Book of Genesis. Melchizedek was a mediator between God and Abraham. He was representative of an ultimate Melchizedek. And this ultimate Melchizedek would receive his priesthood on a non-genealogical basis.

**Chapter IV: Hebrews**

The point of this chapter was to determine what the Book of Hebrews stated about Melchizedek from Genesis.

**The High Priest**

The Book of Hebrews presented the real High priest as a mediator between God and the seed of Abraham. This High Priest, Jesus, represented man in heaven, in the very presence of God. He had made a real, not symbolic, sacrifice. He thus became a mediator of the seed of Abraham.

Hebrews 1--4

Jesus, as the ultimate representative of God, had brought the revelation of God to man. Also, being fully man, he was able to present man's concerns to God.

Hebrews 5--6

These chapters first reflected that the real high priest must be a man, and he must be elected by God (5:1--10). Jesus was demonstrated to be a man in the gospels, and His election recorded in Psalm 110:4. Following the warning parenthesis (5:11--6:12), the author pointed out that the Abrahamic promise (6:13-16) was insured by the mediation of the real high priest like Melchizedek (6:17-20).

Hebrews 7:1-10

The references to Genesis 14:18-20 concerning Melchizedek lie in these verses. It is here that the author explains what "like Melchizedek" means. Basically, the author points out that the priest like Melchizedek would not make claim to the office on the basis of heredity ("without genealogy, without father, without mother, having no beginning of days nor end of life"). His attributes ("king of righteousness, king of peace," blesser of Abraham) were exactly those of his ultimate, Jesus ("made like the Son of God"). Melchizedek had been presented carefully in Genesis to picture the ultimate priest. This picture continued to, and in, Christ ("he abides a priest perpetually"). Thus the author presents that "after the order of Melchizedek" means that Christ does exactly what Melchizedek did, He blesses Israel (Abraham).

### Summary: Hebrews

Hebrews presented the ultimate priest as one who represented man in the very presence of God in the heavenlies. He mediated blessing to Israel (Abraham), "just like" the Genesis Melchizedek. Also "like Melchizedek" He did not gain His priesthood through genealogical inheritance.

### Comparison of Genesis and Hebrews

This summary section will be a comparison of the similar messages in both Genesis and Hebrews. This should demonstrate that the author of Hebrews clearly could have derived all his statements concerning Melchizedek from the Book of Genesis alone using a normal understanding of the text.

### The Place of Abraham

#### Genesis

Abraham is the receiver of the Abrahamic Promise, the promise from God that made him the beginning of a great nation. Abraham was a representative of his nation in the Abrahamic Promise and this was demonstrated in the chapters following its original statement (12--14). Chapter 14 narrated the story of Abraham in conflict with international kings. As the promise in 12:1-3 had guaranteed, Abraham was blessed in victory over the kings of the earth, demonstrating their submission to him. All nations would be blessed or cursed based on their treatment of Abraham. He was superior.

The incident concerning Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-24) demonstrated this relationship. The king of Sodom attempted to place himself as superior to Abraham and was rejected.

#### Hebrews

The audience of the book of Hebrews had a foundational knowledge of the sureness of the Abrahamic Covenant (2:16, 6:13-15). They considered themselves the physical and spiritual seed of Abraham, and thus the sure receivers of the promise. Abraham was viewed as the representative of his nation (6:14) in receiving the blessings of the promise. Clearly Abraham is seen as this receiver of the promise on behalf of the nation Israel (7:6: "the one who had the promises"). He is the representation in Genesis of the remnant of Israel in Hebrews.

#### The Place of the Melchizedekian High Priest

##### Genesis

Melchizedek is the only priest in Genesis. As Melchizedek stood blessing both Abraham and God, he demonstrated his superiority two ways; as a representative of God to Abraham, and as a representative of Abraham to God. As Abraham represented his future nation Israel in his Genesis 12--14 relationships, so Melchizedek represented an ultimate Melchizedek who would mediate between God and that nation.

The 'bridge' or 'link' motif was a theme which ran throughout the book of Genesis. It was the linking of 'heaven' (God's spiritual realm) and 'earth' (the realm of man). Babel had tried to 'link' with heaven through human efforts in their tower. But God would not link

with man through human means. Jacob's ladder illustrated that. It was a ladder provided by God. Parallel to this was Melchizedek. Abraham was an earthly mediator for man. Melchizedek was the 'link' and thus the 'bridge' from God to earth (in Abraham).

### Hebrews

Hebrews contrasts the symbolic Levitical high priest with the real high priesthood of Christ. The Levitical high priest performed acts which were only pictures of the priesthood that performed in the spiritual reality. The priesthood of Christ was able to offer them actual relief from their difficulties, since He was a real representative of God and a true representative of man.

Hebrews 6:13-20 showed that while Abraham (Israel) was to receive blessing from God according to the Genesis promise, it was ultimately to be through the mediatorship of Christ as Melchizedek (Psalm 110). Christ was 'according to the order of Melchizedek', that is (Hebrews 7:1-10), as Melchizedek was superior to Abraham in Genesis and blessed him, so Christ, as the ultimate Melchizedek, would be superior to Israel and provide mediation for them.

### The Object of Melchizedek's Priesthood

#### Genesis

Melchizedek provided blessing to Abraham from God. Abraham was the representative of his future seed, the nation Israel. Abraham was the object of Melchizedek's mediation or priestly duties. This was

demonstrated, not only in the Genesis 14:18-20 incident, but also in the Jacob's Ladder narrative, where Jacob represented Israel. Thus Israel is the object of Melchizedek's mediation.

#### Hebrews

Christ, as Melchizedek, was to bless the seed of Abraham (2:16; 6:14,17). The author of Hebrews specifically has in mind the believing physical remnant of Israel.

#### The Credentials of the Melchizedekian Priest

##### Genesis

Melchizedek was totally apart from the toledot of Israel. This toledot was the credential required to be a part of God's redemption plan through the blessed nation.

Melchizedek did not have an 'elect' father or mother. In Genesis, to be part of God's great national blessing, one would have to have either Sarah, Rebekah, or one of Jacob's wives as mother. Ishmael had a patriarch as father, but lacked physical descendency from Sarah and was disqualified. Lack of descendency from a patriarch removed all possibility of participation in the human redemption line.

Melchizedek had received his priesthood without being born into it (else his father and mother would have been recorded). His successor would not inherit it through the birth/death continuance of the human redemption line.

Melchizedek had no physical credentials which are valued in the book of Genesis. Those physical credentials in Genesis meant one was part of the earthly redemption plan through the formation of the nation Israel. The ultimate Melchizedek, similar to his predecessor, would not receive his priesthood based on physical requirements.

#### Hebrews

The Melchizedekian priesthood was on the basis of election by God (Psalm 110), apart from any genealogical credential (father, mother, pedigree, birth or death record).

#### Problem Passages

"Without Father, Without Mother:  
Hebrews 7:3

#### Hebrews

The author paraphrased Genesis in 7:1-2a as his basis for this remark in 7:3. He is pointing out that Genesis is the basis for his statements to follow. Thus 7:3 is not speaking of absence of *any* father and mother, but not having a *record* in Genesis of a father and mother.

In 7:3 the Greek word is  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\rho$  ('no father'). Following, in 7:4, he refers to Abraham as 'the patriarch' (  $\pi\alpha\tau\rho\iota\alpha\rrho\chi\eta\varsigma$  ). The literary connection demonstrates that Melchizedek is without *patriarchal* connection. Thus as Melchizedek's credential was not based on the proper parentage, so the ultimate Melchizedek will not claim the priesthood based on His physical parental relationship.

## Genesis

As the nation of Israel is developed in Genesis, it becomes apparent that one must be part of that elect genealogy in order to function personally in that movement of redemption. All the patriarchs who were part of that national redemption line were from an elect father and mother. Ishmael was a prime example of that principle, being born of a woman other than Sarah, God's chosen mother (Genesis 17:19). Clearly one needed to come from Abraham, Isaac or Jacob (and the proper matriarchs) to be part of the elect seed.

### "Without Genealogy"

#### Hebrews

It is clear that the author is speaking of the required genealogy of the patriarchs, for in 7:6, the author repeats the word γενεαλογούμενος (genealogy), stating that Melchizedek's genealogy was not traceable to Abraham's. The point of this absence is to demonstrate that the credentials of the Melchizedekian priesthood are not related to the national genealogical requirement.

#### Genesis

The focus of the book of Genesis is the beginning of the nation Israel. The credential of that nation, and the line to form that nation, is 'genealogy.' If one did not have genealogy traceable to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob then he was without credential as the 'seed'.



Melchizedek, the only one greater than Abraham in the book, displays no genealogical credential. His status was thus obtained apart from genealogy.

"Not having beginning of days  
nor end of life"

Hebrews

Again this phrase is based on the literary record of Genesis. There was no record of his birth or death in Genesis. This indicates that his ultimate successor does not come forth through the birth/death process of the Abrahamic line or of Levitical priests. The ultimate will not come forth due to any birth/death requirement for continuance of the Abrahamic line (7:16).

Genesis

Not having a birth or death record simply indicates that one is not part of the genealogical movement to continue the nation Israel. Births were required because the line had to be continued despite the sure deaths of the patriarchs. Thus each patriarch had his death recorded, and births became of prime importance. This is illustrated in the Abraham and Sarah's desire for Isaac. If Abraham died before the birth of an heir, all hope was gone. This is the succession struggle in Genesis. Melchizedek, representing an ultimate priest, does not have any listing of his demise, nor a record of a successor being born. Thus his successor must be brought about independent of that human process to bring forth the nation Israel.

"made like the Son of God"

## Hebrews

This phrase indicates that Hebrews understood that the Genesis Melchizedek was brought into the literary text as a representation of his ultimate successor, Christ. All the attributes demonstrated in the Genesis text were to be representative of the Son of God's mediatorial role.

## Genesis

Within the Melchizedek narrative in Genesis, Melchizedek's part is only that of mediatorship between God and Abraham. Abraham is shown to be a microcosm of the nation Israel. Melchizedek is shown to be a representative of the ultimate priest. Thus the only attributes brought into the text are those which exactly represent the successor.

"he abides a priest perpetually"

## Hebrews

The verbal statement is 'abides perpetually.' The book of Hebrews frequently pictures Old Testament characters as still living in whatever state the literature presents them (See Appendix I and II). Thus Abel still speaks concerning his faith (11:4) and Abraham still lives in his seed (6:14). So Melchizedek (presented in Genesis in his attributes) 'abides' and lives on in his successor Jesus Christ.

## Genesis

Abraham was presented as the representative of his seed. Melchizedek was pictured as the representative of the ultimate mediator of that seed. Thus their literary presentations in the text continue, awaiting the ultimate realization of their attributes.

"of whom it is witnessed  
that he lives on"

## Hebrews

Rather than a reference to Genesis, this is a reference to Psalm 110. When David witnessed YHWH's oath to David's Lord he observed that Christ was to be a priest after the 'likeness' of Melchizedek. This testimony validated that Melchizedek's priestly representation in Genesis was to live on in Jesus Christ. "Lives on" is a literary device used by the author of Hebrews to describe how Melchizedek lives on in the picture painted in Genesis. (See Appendix II).

## Conclusions

It was the purpose of this dissertation to demonstrate that the message of Hebrews concerning Melchizedek could be obtained from the original intended message of Genesis. As can be seen from the above survey and comparison of the major emphasis of the respective portions of the books, the statements of the author of Hebrews concerning Melchizedek are derived from the message of Genesis. All of this work was determined using literary analysis and normal hermeneutical methods. Clearly this view shows a literal correspondence between Hebrews and Genesis concerning the place of Melchizedek.

A definite result of determining that the New Testament author of Hebrews used a historical understanding of the text is the reinforcement of the pre-millennial assertion that there will be a future for Israel. The clear understanding of the Genesis text was that there would be a literal seed of the nation Israel in a literal land of Canaan. The book of Hebrews confirmed this thought (6:13-17). While the earthly promise was clearly continued in Abraham's physical seed, the author explained that the heavenly dimension was now added in Christ. This would provide for God's ultimate purpose, the reconciliation of heaven and earth. It instructed them, not concerning a change in plans, but concerning a high priest who would guarantee the surety of the original promise. Thus the promise has never changed from Genesis, it has only been explained. Abraham lives on in his seed. Melchizedek lives on in Christ. The point is that even today the author of Hebrews sees Melchizedek still blessing Abraham as Christ blesses the true remnant of Israel.

## APPENDIX I

διηνεκής

The phrase "he abides a priest 'continually' found in Hebrews 7:3 seems to indicate an ongoing priesthood for Melchizedek. The word that is used to describe that 'continual' life is διηνεκής. It is never used in any other book of the New Testament and is used only three other times in the Book of Hebrews.

Some would say that the phrase εἰς τὸ διηνεκές ('perpetually') is synonymous with εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ('forever') found in Psalm 110:4 and used to describe Christ's eternal priesthood.

The words are taken from the Psalm; only eis to dianekes, "continually," is put in place of eis ton aiona, "forever" (5:6; 6:20). But it is entirely synonymous with the other, as the reference in 10:12, 14 shows, and the verb "abideth" requires.<sup>1</sup>

Their conclusions are that Melchizedek and Christ had similar eternal lives.

Christ is not only a priest, but priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. Thus it is that, in some sense, an eternal priesthood is ascribed to the king of Salem.<sup>2</sup>

However, if the author of Hebrews wished to relate the quotation in Psalm 110 as well as the accompanying eternal life to the historical Melchizedek, why did he not use the same term εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα? The author of Hebrews was well aware of the language of the LXX (5:6,

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<sup>1</sup>Carl August Auberlen, "The Eternal Life and the Priesthood of Melchisedek," Bibliotheca Sacra 16 (1859): 550.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 550-51.

6:20, 7:17, 7:21), and never fails to use the precise term εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα when clearly speaking of the Son of God and His eternity (6:20, 7:24, 7:28). It appears therefore that there is an avoidance of the use of the phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα from Psalm 110 when applied to Melchizedek. In some sense, Melchizedek's continuing life must be different than Christ's. Delitzsch recognizes this fact as he states,

There seems to be an intention to keep asunder the two Scripture passages by the avoidance of the expression of Ps. cx., eis ton aiona, and the substitution for it of eis to dianekes, as the significant closing word of the period.<sup>3</sup>

Horton states much the same idea,

Besides the lexical difference between the two expressions, there is perhaps an unwillingness of the author to use the words eis ton aiona, which remind one of Ps. cx. 4, in regard to Melchizedek, since they should apply to Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Delitzsch continues with his understanding of the word διηνεκής as he states, "The notion involved in the rendering 'perpetually,' 'without break or change,' is still much below that of eternity."<sup>5</sup> He also states, "To dianekes . . . is combined from dia and nekes = that which holds throughout, is continuous and unending."<sup>6</sup>

The only references in the New Testament are in this epistle. The references are in chapter 7 (7:3), and in chapter 10 (10:1, 12, 14). The confusion which reigns in the translation of this word is evident in

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<sup>3</sup>Delitzsch, Commentary on Hebrews, 335.

<sup>4</sup>Horton, The Melchizedekian Tradition, 162.

<sup>5</sup>Delitzsch, 335.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 336.

the NASV which changes from 7:3 ("perpetually") to 10:1 ("continually"), 10:12 and 10:14 ("for all time"). The word cannot by itself mean 'for all time,' as the priests in 10:1 clearly are not making sacrifices continuing forever. The only word suggested by the commentators that fits all four instances is 'continual' (not in the sense of 'repeated' or 'forever' although the context might include that connotation).<sup>7</sup> This 'continual' would have the implication of 'continuation in a state'. The state would be determined by the context. Thus in 10:1 the priests are sacrificing 'in the same state continually.' (Here 'repeatedly' would be implied by the context ("year by year") and would emphasize their continuity in that 'state'). In 10:12 the one sacrifice of Christ is 'continued in its state', that is its effectiveness continues. In 10:14 the believer is complete<sup>8</sup> continually without change.

This same phrase applied to Melchizedek would mean that Melchizedek abides, or exists presently in the same state as he was presented in Genesis. The nature of that state shall be determined

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<sup>7</sup>Buchanan states, "The Greek means 'continually,' 'without interruption,' or something like that, depending on the context." (To the Hebrews, 120).

<sup>8</sup>One of the best examples of the inconsistency in translation is the translation of the word τετελειωκεν (here translated 'complete'). The word and its related forms are used in Hebrews to show what Christ finished ('completed') in His sacrifice in bringing forth the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was *incomplete*. In 5:14, 6:1 the word is translated 'mature' when applied to believers. However, it is not speaking of spiritually mature believers. It is speaking of those who have experientially appropriated the New Covenant and are 'complete'. The word τέλος is used in 7:3 to demonstrate 'end of life' or 'death.' Clearly death would not be referred to as 'perfection' or 'maturity.' It is the end, 'completion' or 'finality' of life. In 10:14, the believer is 'completed' or 'finalized' in his relationship with God. This state is continued without interruption.

within the study of the Genesis and Hebrews references. The subject is 'fixed in his effective state.'

He was presented in Genesis as a literary representative of Christ. All his attributes pictured the ultimate priest. Thus his literary image lives, awaiting the ultimate One, Christ. The Melchizedek of the Genesis picture lives on, as though he never died. The ultimate priest came (Psalm 110:4) who fit the picture exactly. Thus Melchizedek continues on, "just like" the picture painted in Genesis, representing continually an ultimate blessing of Israel.



## APPENDIX II

### THE OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS AS "LIVING" IN HEBREWS

#### The Literary Use of the Old Testament Characters in Hebrews

When wading into the deep difficulties of Hebrews 7:1-10, there is a subject that must be discussed in some depth. This subject is the author's presentation concerning the Old Testament's message.<sup>1</sup> Of course, it goes without saying that he presents it as the very words of God through prophets (1:1) and unalterable (2:2). But literarily he describes it in a unique manner. He presents it as God speaking to the very audience of the author.

#### God, the Author of Scripture

First of all, the author of Hebrews considered the text to be authored by God. In the whole of a book which is filled with Old Testament quotations, there is only one time that a quotation is ascribed directly to a human author. This is in 4:7, where it is necessary to establish a time frame, and thus he uses David's name. However, even there the authorship is attributed to God as he states, "(The Holy Spirit) . . . saying through David . . ." The rest of the quotations are all directly attributed to God. God Himself is seen stating a Psalm

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<sup>1</sup>This subject will be treated only narrowly here, as it relates to the words used in the text relating to this dissertation.

in 1:5 (" . . . to which of the angels did He ever say, 'Thou art my Son . . .'", and 1:6 ("He says, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him.'"). Thus, the author of Hebrews clearly puts forth the belief that it is God Himself who speaks in the Old Testament.

### The Old Testament Speaks Today

Second, regularly the author sees the Old Testament as speaking to his present audience. The present and perfect tense are used throughout the book for this purpose. DeYoung states concerning the use of the perfect and present tenses,

. . . the author views the Old Testament as a living document. What it says stands written as the eternally operative Word of God (cf. 4:12). Because of this the author uses the perfect tense (for statements) or the present tense (for events). This accounts for fourteen perfects . . .<sup>2</sup>

He acknowledges the historical revelation as being given at a point in time, as in 1:1 ("God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers . . ."), but continually speaking today as in 1:6-7. Markus Barth observes,

The author of Hebrews does, however, not ask his hearers to be subjugated to written things or to a book. Instead, when he uses any verb to introduce a quotation . . . he employs words expressing diction. He refers to what "He says," is "saying," "said," or to what "is said" . . . The *present* tense is preferred to the past tense, *active* forms to passive.<sup>3</sup>

Barth continues,

What *has* been said is also *being* said. The "living word" of the "living God" sounds from the Bible (cf. 4.12). This may be the reason why the author prefers to speak in the present tense of what

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<sup>2</sup>James DeYoung, A Grammatical Approach to Hebrews, 341.

<sup>3</sup>Markus Barth, "The Old Testament in Hebrews" in Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation, 59.

the Bible "says," and why he never uses the word "fulfill" in relation to the Old Testament texts he quotes."<sup>4</sup>

Probably the best example of his use of the present tense in terms of the Old Testament is found a quotation from Psalm 95:9 in Hebrews 3:7.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,  
 "Today if you hear His voice,  
 Do not harden your hearts . . .'

Then following in 3:13 he states,

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Thus he applies Psalm 95:9 as if it had been spoken to the author's audience.

In one instance the author uses a form of both simile and personification in speaking of the text. He speaks in 4:12 as if the text were alive and breathing, as well as being effective in its purpose.

For the word of God is *living* and *active* and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

He seems to change in mid-sentence as he likens the word of God to the actual "eyes" of God in 4:13 actively looking in his day. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Hughes explains this,

There is a natural transition from 'the word of God' in the previous verse to "God" himself here, for the word of God is not only the activity of God but also his revelation of himself, whether it be in judgment or in salvation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>5</sup>Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 167.

The author has made the point that the text is not only directly from God, but *He, Himself*, speaks presently to His audience.

#### The Old Testament Speaks in its Characters

A major point is that the author presents faithful Old Testament men as still actively speaking. These men exemplify the message of the Old Testament. The best example of this is found in 11:4.

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

How is it that Abel still speaks? DeYoung describes the use of the present tense with the Abel reference,

Twice Abel is referred to (11:4; 12:24) and in each case the same verb (*laleo*) occurs. This may refer to the same thing in both places; that is, 12:24 may explain how righteous Abel, though dead yet speaks.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly in Genesis, Abel is not recorded as saying one word. But it is not that Abel actually 'speaks' today, but that his righteous actions recorded in the text still have a message for us (12:1). Hence Abel still speaks. Hughes adds to this by stating,

But the simplest sense remains the best sense, namely, that Abel by his example of faith and righteousness still speaks to us today, even though he has so long been dead.<sup>7</sup>

#### The Living Witnesses

In another major example of these living Old Testament characters, the author takes all the witnesses of chapter 11 and places them

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<sup>6</sup>DeYoung, 339.

<sup>7</sup>Hughes, 457.

in the observation gallery of an arena, where they urge the contestants on with their testimonies (12:1). Hughes outlines the imagery.

Thus our author pictures himself and his readers as competitors who, as they contend for the faith in the arena of life, are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, namely, those champions of faith and perseverance of earlier generations, crowded as it were row upon row within the encircling amphitheatre. If these are witnesses in the sense of spectators, as the imagery implies, it is even more important to understand that they are witnesses in the sense of those who have proved themselves to be unflinching professors of the faith and have overcome by the word of their testimony . . . faithful in their witness both in life and even unto death.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that our author here clearly displays the faithful fathers and saints of the Old Testament as living in their testimonies.<sup>9</sup>

#### Representatives "Living" in their Predecessors or Seed

In 6:13 the author quotes Genesis 22:16. However, he substitutes one word. He changes "in your seed" (LXX) to "in you" (Abraham). He has substituted the patriarch for the people of promise. His point is to show that Abraham represents Israel in the Genesis 22 reception of the oath. Thus Abraham *lives* in his "seed."

In 7:6 both Melchizedek and Abraham are seen as living in their ultimates. There the author recalls the Genesis 14 scene, where Abraham submits to Melchizedek. The verbal statements "has taken a tithe" and "has blessed" are both in the perfect tense. The use of these tenses

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<sup>8</sup>Hughes, 519.

<sup>9</sup>It should be noted that the emphasis is on their lives whether recorded in the text or out of the text, since some of the witnesses in chapter 11 have histories not recorded in the sacred writ. However, these testimonies are primarily applicational, so that the reader might see himself joining those great men and women of the faith. The testimonies that the author refers to in the text are treated as if they are living.

here are the author's indication of the importance of a historical event continuing into the present.<sup>10</sup> Thus the picture is one of Melchizedek still receiving the tithe from Abram. The meaning is that Israel (the ultimate Abraham) continues in the present to submit to the mediatorship of Christ (the ultimate Melchizedek).

In 7:10, the author reverses the trend of representatives acting in their ultimates. For here he uses the example of Levi in the loins of Abraham. He points out that when Abraham offered tithes to Melchizedek, it was as if Levi had offered them himself. Levi was seen as living in his predecessor as if he himself offered the tithe.

Of course, this particular item has merit when we view the case of Melchizedek. He is the representative of Christ, and thus he is considered to live, as his attributes live on in Christ.

#### Summary

With the above literary evidence it seems that one should not overlook this weighty use of the Old Testament and its characters as "living." It is not difficult to understand when he refers to a man, long since dead, as "abiding a priest perpetually." He prefigured Christ's priesthood in life, and his representation lives on. It is no longer difficult to understand how Psalm 110 witnesses that Melchizedek "lives on" (7:8). It is simply that what Melchizedek had represented in Genesis (priesthood), lived on in the Scripture and was matched in Christ. The fact that David testified to this representation is tes-

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<sup>10</sup>Carl Stevens, The Use of the Perfect Tense in the Epistle of Hebrews, 18-19.

timony to the fact that Melchizedek's "likeness" had not ended in Genesis.

Lange states regarding Melchizedek,

The Melchizedek of human history has indeed died; but the Melchizedek of sacred history lives without dying, fixed for ever as *one who lives* by the pen of the sacred historian, and thus stamped as type of the Son, the ever-living Priest.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Lange, 129.





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