

**CHAPTER 9**  
**The Epistle to the Hebrews**  
**THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD (Hebrews 7:1-28)**  
by G. H. Lang

**Chapter 7:1-28**

1. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;
2. to whom also Abraham divided a tenth part of all (being first, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, which is King of Peace;
3. without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God), abideth a priest continually.
4. Now consider how great this man was, unto whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth out of the chief spoils.
5. And they indeed of the sons of Levi that receive the priest's office have commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though these have come out of the loins of Abraham;
6. but lie whose genealogy is not counted from them hath taken tithes of Abraham, and hath blessed him that hath the promises.
7. But without any dispute the less is blessed of the better.
8. And here men that die receive tithes; but there one, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.
9. And, so to say, through Abraham even Levi, who receiveth tithes, hath paid tithes;
10. for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him.
11. Now if there was perfection through the Levitical priesthood (for under it hath the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be reckoned after the order of Aaron?
12. For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.
13. For he of whom these things are said belongeth to another tribe, from which no man hath given attendance at the altar.
14. For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests.
15. And what we say is yet more abundantly evident, if after the likeness of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest;

16. who hath been made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless [Gr. indissoluble] life:
17. for it is witnessed of him, Thou art (a) priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.
18. For there is a disannulling of a foregoing commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness;
19. (for the law made nothing perfect), and a bringing in thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw nigh to God.
20. And inasmuch as it is not without the taking of an oath;
21. (for they indeed have been made priests without an oath; but lie with an oath by him that saith of him, The Lord sware and will not repent himself, Thou art (a) priest for ever);
22. by so much also hath Jesus become surety of a better covenant.
23. And they indeed have been made priests many in number, because that by death they are hindered from continuing;
24. but he, because he abideth for ever, bath his priesthood unchangeable.
25. Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near to God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.
26. For such a high priest became us, holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;
27. who needeth not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself.
28. For the law appointeth men high priests, having infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was after the law, appointeth a Son, perfected for evermore.

The stimulus needed by the sluggish having been administered the main theme is resumed. Such as have been revived by the stimulus will find their spiritual understanding quickened to master the teaching otherwise difficult to explain to them (5:11).

Christ is the heavenly High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Ponder the situation implied by the Writer. One who cannot grasp the significance of the fact stated is dull of apprehension, is a spiritual babe. Then, alas, is not the church of God mainly an infant nursery?

Jesus has been proclaimed by God as "high priest after the order of Melchizedek." Not "a high priest," as if there were other high priests. God appointed in Israel only one high priest at a time. It is so in the heavenly realm. Jesus is that high priest, and there is no other. The main argument of the Writer hangs on this fact; so that

he who would draw near to God must do so through *this* High Priest or he cannot do so at all. And this High Priest does not belong to the order of priests of which Aaron, the God-appointed high priest in Israel, was the head, but to the order of a priest named Melchizedek.

Of this Melchizedek the sole and very brief historical record is as follows: (Gen. 14:17-20):

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him [Abram], after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, at the vale of Shaveb (the same is the King's Vale). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all.

Our Writer draws lessons from two features of this short account: (a) from what is said; (b) from what is not said.

1. The first fact mentioned is that Melchizedek was priest of "*God Most High*." This was not the title of God which marked Aaron's ministry. The inscription on the gold-fronted plate of his turban was "Holy to *Jehovah*" (Exod. 28:36). Full revelation of His character as *Jehovah* came four centuries later than the time of Abraham. In the time of the latter He made Himself known chiefly as El Shaddai (Exod. 6:3), that is, God Almighty, or All-sufficient; or as El Elyon, which emphasized His solitary exaltation above all creation. That the Person was one and the same is true, and is intimated by Abraham in Gen. 14:22, where he speaks of El Elyon as *Jehovah*, but the emphasis was on the former title then, on the latter in the days of Aaron.

Thus in that oldest period of history God asserted by His Self-chosen titles the dependence of all men upon Him and His sufficiency for them, as well as His supremacy over and control of His universe. Already by the time of Abraham men generally had set aside this knowledge of the true God which they possessed and had created of their own fancy, or by the seduction of demons, gods many and lords many (Rom. 1:18-32); but there remained some who maintained among the nations a witness to the true Creator, God Most High, and of these Melchizedek was standing for this only true God, though amidst races devoted to and degraded by idolatries most foul. One can imagine the strength it was to the newly found faith of Abraham to find in Canaan a noble representative of the God whose glory he had seen in distant Chaldea, and the

pleasure it was to Melchizedek that a devout worshipper of his God had come to the land.

The revelation of El Elyon by the name Jehovah was made in due season to draw back to Himself the estranged race of mankind, by the declaration given in that name that the Most High was desirous to cancel the moral distance that separated sinful rebels from Himself and to enter into covenant relations with them, and that they could count implicitly upon His faithfulness.

But the chief point, it would seem, why the Writer quotes the earlier Divine title is to show that Melchizedek lived long before Aaron and represents an older and primal relationship between man and God; a relationship which the Aaronic system of religion was designed to restore, not to supersede, being thus itself but temporary.

2. The next feature stressed is that Melchizedek was a *royal* priest, a priest-king. His name interpreted means king of righteousness, and the name of his city, Salem, declares him king of peace. This sets him forth as an ideal sovereign whose rule being righteous will assure peace, because for evermore “the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence for ever” (Isa. 32:17). This union of the kingly and the priestly offices in one person is ancient. It was found in earliest times after the Flood. In ancient Babylon, the center of the first empire,<sup>1</sup> the sovereign was the high priest. This continued till century six BC, when Cyrus the Persian having crushed the Babylonian monarchy the priestly caste probably left Babylon. They seem to have moved their headquarters to Asia Minor, and in 133 BC Attalus, king of Pergamum, bequeathed his kingdom and priestly headship to the Romans. In the next century Julius Caesar revived the dual dignity by constituting himself, first, Pontifex Maximus, and later Emperor. The Emperors of Rome retained this twofold office until Gratian (emperor AD 375—383) refused the priesthood.

This feature marked the systems of idolatry that branched out of the original Babylonian idolatry. Thus Balak the king of Moab is shown offering the sacrifices required by Balaam (Num. 23:2,14,15,29,30). Down to quite recent years the Emperor of China acted as chief priest of his people, annually offering supplication to heaven on their behalf.

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<sup>1</sup> There were earlier kingdoms in Sumeria. in different districts, and sundry wars to the end of the 3rd millennium BC. "In the struggle which followed between various small cities, Babylon was successful, and under Hammurrabi she became the capital of 'Babylonia,' ultimately obtaining the position of the most important city in Western Asia." (*Enc. Brit.*, vol. II, 840.)

But the Bible shows that the union of ruler and priest obtained earlier than Babylon, for Noah was both head of the family and also as priest offered its sacrifices unto God (Gen. 8:20), and it was thus with Abraham (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; ch. 22, Isaac (Gen. 26:25), Jacob (Gen. 33:20; 35:3) and Job (Job 1:5). Though the head of a family or clan may not have been styled king, he was so *de facto*, and its priest also.

Thus Melchizedek was one example of a general feature of those earliest times, and Moses was another instance. For, as was shown above, he acted as chief priest before Aaron was appointed and he is also styled law-giver and “king in Jeshurun,” the senior over all heads and tribes of Israel (Deut. 33:4,5).

If we inquire as to the origin of this primal conjunction of king and priest, it must be observed that it is an original fact of the whole creation, for from its beginning the Son Who created it was both its Sovereign and the Mediator between it and God. In this as other matters the heavenly is the original, the earthly the copy.

And Scripture suggests more. The breastplate of the high priest in Israel was adorned with precious stones, on which were engraved the names of the tribes lie represented before God. Now a heavenly original of this had existed, for that anointed cherub, who stood next to God, and “covered” (as the cherubim in the holy place “covered” the mercy seal where shone a ray of the Divine glory), was adorned with “every precious stone”.<sup>2</sup> The whole picture in Ezek. 28, read in the light of the earthly copy, suggests that Satan in his unfallen state had a priestly office.

Again; in Chapter 5 of my commentary on the *Revelation* it is shown that the twenty-four elders are angelic beings having royal rank, for they are throned and crowned, and also render priestly service of worship and intercession (Rev. 5:8).

And when at last certain redeemed and glorified men, in fellowship with the glorified Man their Redeemer, take the place of that angelic government and priesthood they are royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6); and the picture of them in Rev. 22 is a holy city which also is “adorned with all manner of precious stones” (Rev. 22:19), this figure again corresponding to the earthly copy, the breastplate of Aaron.

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<sup>2</sup> The most ancient monuments constantly depict the king as having standing by him an official who “covered” his head with a screen of feathers or palm leaves. It suggests that the original knowledge men had of high things persisted, and influenced their earthly arrangements.

3. All this makes plain

i. That Melchizedek was one of *an order* of royal priests, not a solitary individual holding that rank, which feature the Writer stressed by noting five times that Ps. 110:4 mention “the *order* of Melchizedek” (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11,17). It shows also that this order is heavenly, primal, and to be permanent, which at once involves the argument of the Writer that the priesthood of Levi, in the persons of Aaron and his successors, must of necessity be but temporary, to make room at some period for the full establishment of that superior order.

ii. That the proper and permanent Head of this order the Son of God shows why it is said that Melchizedek was “made like unto the Son of God.” It is not that the Man Christ Jesus has been made like unto Melchizedek by being appointed a priest of a royal order, but, on the contrary, that Melchizedek has been honored to share in the dignity belonging properly to the Son of God. It is because of this that his history is so narrated in God’s record of him that, as far as that record goes, he is presented as without ancestry, birth, or death. Not that he was actually without these, else would he be eternal, uncreated, immortal, the Son of God Himself. This has been suggested, but the thought is forbidden by the statement that Melchizedek was *made*, and made *like unto* the Son of God. No one can be made like unto himself, for he is already himself.

Here the Writer builds upon the negative fact of the record, upon what is *not* said. Nothing can more emphasize the divine nature of the Old Testament histories, the perfect control by the Spirit of the historian, than that the omissions and silences give important lessons. The brief mention of Melchizedek was so given as to make him in the record correspond to the uncreated and eternal Royal Priest, the Son of God, in Whose order he was a subordinate.

iii. It is further clear why Melchizedek is, with accuracy, termed “*priest* of God Most High.” Though he was in his day the chief holder on earth of the royal priesthood yet was he not *high* priest; for the Son of God was already the holder of that supreme office.

iv. Because the order to which Melchizedek belongs exists in perpetuity, being an essential element in the ordering of the universe, therefore a man who is granted membership in it partakes of its permanency, and so it is said of Melchizedek that “he abideth a priest continually” (ver. 3).

Westcott remarks that the force of *eis to dienekes* (continually) is “satisfied by his actual continuance for ever,” but adds that this “supposition is excluded by the

circumstances.” Presumably this refers to the death of Melchizedek; but it is to be borne in mind that the order and office of royal priesthood belongs primarily to that world to a realm of which the death of the body dismisses the soul and to the glory of which the first resurrection introduces those then raised. The statement that Melchizedek “abides a priest continually,” taken simply, shows that death does not deprive a royal priest of his dignity, or it would do so for those mentioned by Peter as being such to-day.

But as this priesthood is not cancelled by death, but persists in that realm beyond, then obviously it is superior to that of Aaron, for priests of his order “by death are hindered from continuing” (ver. 23).

Thus the facts as to Melchizedek introduce the heart to a realm anterior to and superior to the economy of Israel and its priesthood. This latter was indeed of God and every way helpful to repentant and believing men of that period. The higher and royal priesthood had ceased on earth. It had been proposed to Israel as a redeemed people soon after their deliverance, when at Sinai God said: “If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant . . . ye shall be unto me a *kingdom of priests*” (Exod. 19:5,6). But Israel neither could nor would fulfil the necessary condition; the Divine offer could not take effect; the rulership was separated from the priesthood, and remained so until at length the “sceptre departed from Judah” and passed to the gentile Nebuchadnezzar; and at last, with the destruction of the temple by Titus, the priesthood also ceased.

Even at its best the Aaronic priesthood was but interim, a stop-gap; and all the circumstances called for a better covenant, a nobler priesthood, a better sacrifice, to which the Aaronic was designed to lead and to yield place. They therefore who upon faith in Christ had reached these better and higher privileges had attained to the heavenly realm and royal priesthood, and should not for a moment yield to pressure or allurements to return to the earthly and transitory. This the Writer enforces by

4. *The Relationship of Abraham to Melchizedek.* Now Abraham was the father and founder of the Israelitish economy, the fount and head of the whole nation, the holder of the original covenant and promises of God from which that people, and indeed the whole race of mankind, derived all hope and favour. And yet Abraham accepted the blessing of Melchizedek and owned his superior dignity by rendering a tithe of the spoils of war.

Evidently therefore in Abraham’s judgment Melchizedek was of a nobler rank than himself, for “without any dispute the less is blessed by the better” (ver. 7).

Again, Levi, the head of the priestly tribe in Israel, was descended from Abraham and therefore inferior to him; but when Abraham, his forefather, gave tithes to Melchizedek, for all practical purposes so did Levi, for the latter was bound by the precedent of his ancestor. Thus Melchizedek is superior to Levi and therefore to Levi's descendants, Aaron and his sons. This introduces a further consideration of weight.

5. *Levi and Melchizedek.*

i. *The Levitical priesthood was bound to prove temporary* because it could not serve the indispensable end of bringing in a perfect state (vers. 11,19). God, by virtue of His own perfection, must desire and require perfection in the relations between Himself and His creatures. Man must desire and strive after normal, perfect relation with his Maker, or he cannot be satisfied. This end Aaron and his sons could not fully serve. They could bring about a temporary accommodation between God and the sinner, but a perfect reconciliation, perfect in quality and duration, they could not effect.

ii. Neither Aaron nor any one of his successors could guarantee the eternal security of a worshipper because in due time he would pass off the scene by death and be no longer able to serve the worshipper (ver. 23).

iii. Those priests were themselves infirm and imperfect and could not raise others to a state higher than their own (ver. 28).

iv. The sacrifices they offered for sins were not adequate to the establishing of an eternal standing before God and therefore had to be often repeated (ver. 27; 10:4).

Because of this essential and ineradicable imperfection in the Levitical order, God, after it had acted for four hundred years, announced prophetically the coming of a new priest who should belong to the order that had preceded the Levitical (Ps. 110:4), which implied the superseding of the latter.

6. *The Law of the Aaronic Priesthood transitory.*

i. The law here in view is not the moral law as embodied at Sinai in the Ten Commandments. That law had been in force since man was created, and was prior to and independent of God's covenants with Abraham and Israel. Not under it but in connection with a code of religious ordinances the Aaronic priesthood was instituted, and by that code its service was regulated.

ii. The moral law is “holy, righteous, good” (Rom. 7:12), but this law of ritual is here described as “weak and unprofitable” (ver. 18).

It is true that neither law could make man perfect, but the reason in each case is different. The moral law was in itself perfect, being the declaration of the will of God to man, but it was “weak *through the flesh*,” though not in itself; that is, its requirements being so high, human nature could not render obedience and so the law could only condemn the disobedient, rather than help him. But the law of ritual was weak *in itself*, it was a “carnal” commandment, “fleshly,” that is, “it had its expression in flesh (comp. 9:10, *dikaionata sarkos*). All the requirements, for example, to be satisfied by a Levitical priest were literally ‘of flesh’; outward descent, outward perfectness, outward purity. No moral qualification was imposed” (Westcott on 7:16). In consequence, the weakness inherent in human nature was inherent in this “carnal” system: being imperfect it could make nothing perfect, and was bound sometime to pass away and make room for that which being itself perfect could make perfect the obedient.

iii. The priesthood and its authorizing and controlling law stand and fall together; “for the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (ver. 12).

Here arise pertinent and serious reflections for to-day. There exist in Christendom orders of priests claiming to be “Christian,” as the Roman; Greek, many Anglicans, and others. In different degrees they adopt and practice various appointments, rites, and ceremonies, such as sacred buildings for worship, with a triple division (porch, church, altar), to which attach different degrees of sanctity, a priestly order, priestly vestments, sacraments, incense, etc.

By what authority do these priestly orders exist and under what law do they officiate? If they plead that they so order religion because God so ordered it of old in Israel, they seal their own condemnation, for

(1) That whole law of ordinances has been “disannulled” by God “because of its weakness and unprofitableness” (ver. 18), and it is wholly blameworthy to perpetuate what God has annulled; it is obviously an offence against Him as much as if magistrates should persist in administering a law which the king had abrogated.

This galvanizing of a ritualistic corpse, this dressing-up of a moribund system, must needs be even more weak and unprofitable, morally and spiritually, than was the original system while it still lived.

(2) In any case, only men belonging to the family of Aaron were appointed by God to administer that ceremonial law, and it was under penalty of death that any one not of Aaron's family presumed to draw near to act as priest (Num. 3:10). This penalty was exacted even from Levites, though they were of the same tribe as Aaron but not of his family (Num. 16:8-11).

But if these priests claim to act under Christ as High Priest, their condemnation is equally swift and sure, for

(3) The Son of God Himself does not, and may not, act under that Levitical law, not being of the family of Aaron, but of the tribe of Judah, "as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests" (vers. 13, 14).

Here again the Writer argues from a *negative*. As Moses did *not* connect priesthood with any tribe but that of Levi, no other tribe can put forth priests under the law of Moses. Well had it been if this rule of action had prevailed among Christians, and nothing had been introduced into their service and worship which is *not* found in the New Testament. And happy is the individual Christian who excludes from his life what is *not* justified by the Word of God.

Moreover, it is equally and emphatically fatal to their claim to act as priests under Christ that

(4) His priestly service is rendered only *in heaven*, for "if He were *on earth* He would not be a priest at all" (ch. 8:4), that is, a priest to administer that former ceremonial system.

The effect is, that these priesthods in question are plainly contrary to the will of God. Those who desire to offer worship fully acceptable to God should abandon such priest-ruled systems.

Thus the whole Levitical system and priesthood is effete and annulled, so that they who seek God are cast back upon that older and living priesthood of which Melchizedek is God's chosen example, and of this priesthood

7. *Christ is the Living and only High Priest.* In Him, and in Him alone, are realized all the requisite conditions and qualifications.

i. As the Son of God He is the original and proper holder of the Royal Priesthood.

ii. As the Son of Man risen, and glorified in heaven, He has been reappointed to that dignity which was His from the beginning of creation; but He is able now as man to understand and to feel with those He represents before God.

iii. This appointment by God the Father is superior to that of Aaron inasmuch as it was confirmed by an oath: "Jehovah sware, and will not change His mind, Thou art priest, etc." (vers. 20, 21, 22; Ps. 110:4).

iv. This office is exercised in heaven, even as that same Psalm (ver. 1) shows "Jehovah said unto my *Lord*, Sit Thou *at My right hand*."

v. Christ does not suffer from the transitoriness caused by death, for the sworn appointment is "Thou art priest for ever." He enjoys "The power of an indissoluble life" (ver. 16). His Divine nature is of necessity incapable of dying: His human nature was dissolved in death; the spirit, that element which animates the human body, He dismissed to His Father Who had given it (Luke 23:46; Eccles. 12:7); His body rested in the tomb; His soul, Himself, the Ego, went to the world of the dead (Ps. 16:8-11; Acts 2:25-28). But by resurrection this dissolution was reversed, and now the Son of God, Christ Jesus as to His humanity as well as His divinity, lives for evermore in the power of indissoluble life, "death no more hath dominion over Him" (Rom. 6:9).

vi. Because of this His priesthood does not have to be surrendered by Him and pass to another, but "because He abideth for ever, He hath His priesthood unchangeable," it resides continuously and everlastingly in His own person.

An Israelite might well have found much comfort by going repeatedly to the same priest, as one who from frequent intercourse had come to know the circumstances, temptations, struggles of the penitent. But there was always the liability that one day he would learn that his friend had died and could no more help him in his approach to the Holy One. The earthly priest could help only partially and for a time; but Christ "is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He *ever liveth* to make intercession for them" (ver. 25).

The expression “*to the uttermost*” is found elsewhere only at Luke 13:11. The Satan-afflicted woman “was bowed together, and could *in no wise* lift herself up.” This scarcely describes the condition with strict accuracy. She could not “*completely*” lift herself up, as the term is given in the Revised margin of Heb. 7:25. She was not so crippled as to lie on her back all the time, yet could only get about bowed down. What a picture of the devout Israelite under the law, and of too many believers to-day. The face ever downward, minding earthly things; no power to lift oneself up unto God; definitely hampered; Satan-bound. From this incompleteness of spiritual state, alive indeed, yet only half-alive, no human mediator can deliver; but even as Christ instantly made straight that bent back, so now as the Royal Priest He can “save *completely* them that draw near unto God through Him”; and those who seek Him habitually will find that through Him God, having begun in them His good work, “will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). And thus shall this Priest bring all those who obey Him to that perfect harmony with God which is the goal of creation, but to which Aaron and the law of ceremonies could do no more than point the way, but could not bring us there. Truly indeed “such a high priest became us”—He is exactly and completely suited to such helpless sinners as us; for He is “holy, guileless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (ver. 26). In nature, character, conduct, and position He is all that the holy God requires and all that sinful man needs; He is God’s “Son, perfected for evermore” as our Saviour (ver. 28).

8. *What, now, is required on our side* that we should obtain the fullest benefit from this Royal Priest? Are we not shown this by a detail concerning Abraham not noticed above? When did Abraham obtain the blessing of God’s priest Melchizedek? It was when he returned from “the slaughter of the kings.” Our Writer notices and quotes this detail (ver. 1) Not that Christians in this age are to slaughter kings or any other men; *now* our warfare is in the spirit realm; we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against wicked spirits (Eph. 6:12). As Abraham in his day waged war to the death against the then enemies of God and righteousness, so must we contend vigorously against the Devil and his works, no matter what the risk and cost. Then shall we learn the spiritual reality of Melchizedek bringing forth from His heavenly Salem the true bread and wine and pronouncing upon us the blessing which maketh rich and to which no sorrow is added. What this warfare involves will be seen from what the Writer says later.

This condition of inheriting the blessing belongs to the nature of the case. The Son of God was manifested on earth that He might bring to nought the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) and deliver his captives (Heb. 2:14,15); therefore one who wishes to experience that blessed deliverance must needs take sides with the Son of God against the Devil and his works, and such the Royal Priest will bless and succour to the full.

These shall find that Jesus has truly become for them the mediator of a better covenant than that of the law (ver. 22), which theme the Writer now proceeds to unfold and apply.

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