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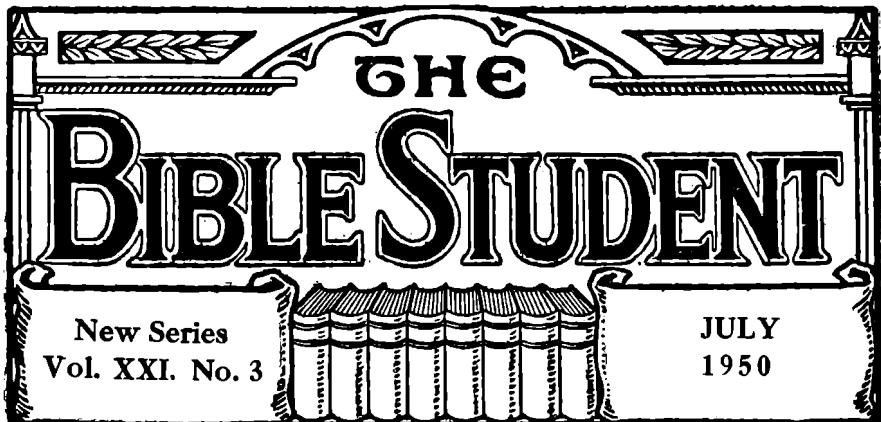
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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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*Editor:* A. McDONALD REDWOOD

# NOTES ON HEBREWS

BY W. E. VINE, M.A. (Lond.)

Analysis of Chap. 7: 1-10

## The Priesthood of Christ illustrated by Melchizedek

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### *Introduction*

The narrative of Melchizedek as recorded in the book of Genesis is unique. The details of his history were so chosen that both by what is omitted and what is narrated he might prefigure the Lord Jesus Christ in His High-Priesthood. The record is so extraordinary that some have supposed that he was the Son of God Himself; but the supposition is unjustifiable. The Apostle states that he was "made like unto the Son of God," that is to say, that the history was so framed that the details were made to correspond beforehand to facts connected with the Priesthood of Christ. Moses could no doubt have written a great deal more about Melchizedek, but writing by Divine inspiration he withheld everything save that which would serve the purpose intended.

There are three main parts to chapter 7: (i) Verses 1 to 10: this presents Melchizedek as an historical person, (a) as to his greatness as a king-priest (1-3), (b) as to his superiority to the

Levitical priesthood, because of his superiority to Abraham (4-10); (ii) Verses 11 to 25: this presents Christ as the antitype of Melchizedek, (a) as being not of Aaron's tribe (11-14), (b) in the absolute dignity of His own Person (15-19), (c) as made by a Divine oath (20-22), (d) as having an unchangeable Priesthood on our behalf (23-25); (iii) Verses 26-28: this presents His superiority as High Priest in character (v. 26), qualification (v. 27), appointment, as being Son of God (v. 28).

#### Verse 1

*For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High,—* These are the first three of a series of facts narrated concerning this person, his name and his royal position. The first two are interpreted in verse 2, the third is dwelt upon at some length. The introductory "this" is emphatic, drawing attention to matters particularly prominent in him. He is presented in the Genesis narrative in a manner which marks the details, those inserted and those withheld as being Divinely planned to foreshadow the Person of Christ, and as Divinely inspired in the record.

*who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him,—* He came forth to act in his twofold capacity on behalf of Abraham. He came with regal authority, and acting in priestly ministry. He "brought forth bread and wine," elements anticipative of those which our great High Priest has appointed for us. This priestly act on the part of Melchizedek was Divinely preparatory; for the king of Sodom was coming with his Satanic proposal, the representative of the carnal prosperity and luxury of the world that lies "in the evil one." But a preceding and preventative arrangement had been made, and Abraham had been strengthened to resist, and repudiates the offer. The means of power and victory are conveyed in the two facts that the king-priest "met" Abraham and "blessed him."

#### Verse 2

*to whom also Abraham divided a tenth of all—* Abraham was at the zenith of his fame. His prowess had been great, his victory notable. His fellowship with God and God's provision for him prepared him for a spiritual victory. That he gave a tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek was indicative of his desire to please God and maintain the fellowship he enjoyed. The payment of the tenth was a recognition that as a matter of fact the whole belonged

to God. Further it was an acknowledgement of the Divine character, position and ministry of Melchizedek's priesthood.

*being first, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;*—So both the personal name and the geographical were chosen in order that, as king of righteousness and peace, he might set forth anticipatively the character of the sovereign power of Christ.

Both the association and the order of the mention of righteousness and peace are significant. The peace that God imparts He gives on a righteous basis. Thus David sang: "The mountains shall bring peace . . . and the hills in righteousness" (Psa. 72:3). When in the coming day "Israel shall be saved and Judah shall dwell safely," it is because God "will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as King and deal wisely and shall execute judgment and justice," and His name shall be Jehovah Tsidkenu, "The Lord is our righteousness" (Jer. 5:6). Thus will be fulfilled to the nation the words of the Psalmist, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth springeth out of the earth; and righteousness hath looked down from Heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before Him and shall make His footsteps a way to walk in" (Psa. 85:10-13). Then "the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence for ever" (Isa. 32:17).

But what will then be true in the natural realm has already taken place in the spiritual. At Calvary God provided a basis of righteousness by which He could deal in mercy with men, bringing them into the enjoyment of peace with Himself. By reason of the death of Christ righteousness and peace have already kissed each other. That which is yet to be fulfilled in Millennial blessing, when on the same righteous basis peace will be granted to the world, is now realized in the experience of those who receive Christ.

This association of righteousness and peace is strikingly shown in the Epistle to the Romans. The Divine purpose in the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ was 'to shew God's righteousness' . . . "that He might Himself be righteous and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God" through Him (Rom. 3:15, 26; 5:1). Thus the work of righteousness is peace. . . . Peace is never granted

at the expense of Divine righteousness. Hence the significance of the emphasis in the order in Heb. 7:2.

#### Verse 3

*without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God,*—That is to say, nothing is recorded in the Genesis narrative concerning these details. Nothing is mentioned as to the beginning or the length of his life, nor are we told of his death. Remarkable character though he was, he is brought before the reader with striking suddenness. As suddenly, too, the narrative concerning him ceases. All this is notably unlike the genealogical lists given elsewhere in the book of Genesis, as, for instance, the narrative of Abraham's parentage in the twelfth chapter.

Thus it is that the record makes him "like unto the Son of God." There can be no beginning or end to Him who is Himself the Beginning and the End. That he was "made like" the Son of God indicates that Melchizedek was not actually Christ Himself.

*abideth a priest continually.*—As the object in view in the Genesis account is to foreshadow the abiding character of the Priesthood of Christ, we do not hear of the cessation of the priesthood of Melchizedek. That there was a cessation would be certain, but the historical fact is withheld, to foreshadow the abiding character of Christ's Priesthood.

#### Verse 4

*Now consider how great this man was, to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth out of the chief spoils.*—If it could be demonstrated to Hebrews that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham, then the superiority of Christ, the Antitype of Melchizedek, must be clear. Under the law the levitical priests received tithes from their fellow descendants of Abraham, but the Levites, being children of Abraham, virtually paid tithes to Melchizedek when their father Abraham did so. This itself illustrates the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over the Levitical.

The word *akrothiniōn*, "chief spoils," primarily denoted the top of a heap, and hence came to mean firstfruit offerings, and in war the choicest spoils. It is used here only in the N.T.

## Verse 5

*And they indeed of the sons of Levi that receive the priest's office they have commandment to take tithes of the peoples according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though these have come out of the loins of Abraham:*—Again, secondly, inasmuch as Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and the less is blessed of the better, and the Levites were children of Abraham, the priest who blessed Abraham must be greater than the Levitical priests. That is the second point. And now, while the whole tribe of Levi has a right to tithes (Num. 18:28–30; Deut. 14:22, 27–29), the writer does not mention this, as he is concerned only with the priests, the most honoured part of the tribe of Levi. But, while they were entitled under the Law to receive tithes from the other descendants of Abraham, they were inferior to Melchizedek, and therefore again Christ's Priesthood is superior to theirs. The payment is an acknowledgement of the superiority of the rank of him who receives them.

## Verse 6

*but he whose genealogy is not counted from them (i.e., Melchizedek) hath taken tithes of Abraham, and hath blessed him that had the promises.*—The verb *genealogeō* means to reckon a descent; it is here used in the Passive Voice, and used here only in the N.T. The verb *dekatōō*, lit., to tithe, and so to take tithes (*dekatos*, the tenth) is used here and in verse 9, and in the Septuagint, in Neh. 10:27. The two verbs "hath taken tithes" and "hath blessed" are in the perfect tense, not merely describing past events (which the aorist tense would do) but indicating the permanent effects of the acts in establishing for ever the superiority of Christ's Priesthood. Upon Abraham God had bestowed a dignity and honour unprecedented in giving him the promises, with all that these meant for the earthly nation, his descendants. But the writer will now show, even in this respect, his inferiority to Melchizedek.

## Verse 7

*But without any dispute the less is blessed of the better.*—For *antilogia*, lit., a gainsaying, see 6:16 and 12:3. It is used elsewhere in Jude 11. The less does not here refer to a moral or even religious character, which the writer has not in view, but to rank

or office. Abraham is called a prophet (Gen. 20:7), but he was neither king nor priest. The two adjectives are of the neuter gender and are used thus as abstract nouns: a literal rendering would be 'inferiority is blessed by superiority'.

#### Verse 8

*And here men that die receive tithes; but there one, of whom it is written that he liveth.*—This is the third point demonstrating the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood and therefore that of Christ. The first had to do with ancestry, the second with genealogy; the third has to do with deathlessness. With regard to the statement "he liveth," the writer is not occupied with the natural life of men, but with the duration of the priestly function. The "here" refers to the Levites, and their continuance in succession; the "there" refers to the passage which gives the record of Melchizedek. Again, the difference is between the succession of one priest after another, a brief and mutable condition, and the way in the passage in Genesis is so framed that the absence of any mention of his death depicts him as living, and this in order to typify the unending continuance of Christ's Priesthood. It simply depicts an enduring interminable time of priesthood. Perfection therefore could not be through the Levitical priesthood.

#### Verse 9, 10

*And so to say,*—a phrase which the writer uses so as to soften a statement which he thinks his readers might regard as somewhat strange or staggering.

*through Abraham even Levi, who receiveth tithes, hath paid tithes; for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him.*—The point is not that Levi was not yet born when Melchizedek met Abraham, but that in a certain sense Levi then existed and paid tithes in Abraham to the king of Salem, thus acknowledging in this particular way his (Levi's) inferiority to Melchizedek. And this is the great fact to be grasped by his readers concerning the priesthood of Christ.