

## THE NATURE OF YESHUA IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES AND HEBREWS

Melchizedek's birth, genealogy, and death to make the point that his priesthood continues on, concurrent with the fact, as Bruce notes, that "Historically, Melchizedek appears to have belonged to a dynasty of priest-kings in which he had both predecessors and successors."<sup>199</sup> The Talmud identifies Melchizedek as being a descendant of Shem or from "the priesthood from Shem" (b.*Nedarim* 32b).<sup>200</sup> Melchizedek would historically have lived and died a normal human's life, but his work and priesthood continue on, now permanently present in the activities of Yeshua.

The author of Hebrews makes a correct statement by indicating that the Levites have a Torah-commanded responsibility to collect a tithe from among their fellow Israelites (Hebrews 7:5). The Levites had the responsibility of taking a part of the tithe of the Israelites, and then giving "one-tenth of the tithe as a gift to the LORD" (Numbers 18:26, NJPS). Yet as our writer states it, "this man [Melchizedek] who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises" (Hebrews 7:6, ESV). The point made is that Melchizedek had a legitimate priestly service, outside that of the Levitical priesthood established for Ancient Israel.

The author of Hebrews further observes, "beyond all dispute the lesser is always blessed by the greater" (Hebrews 7:7, NEB). While Abraham was greater in wealth and means than Melchizedek was, Melchizedek was greater in position than Abraham, as the one receiving a tithe is always of a higher position or office than the one giving it. So, as important as Abraham would surely and rightly have been for any within Hebrews' audience, Melchizedek would be, interestingly enough, a little more important.

The tithe "is collected by men who die" (Hebrews 7:8, NIV), but as our author observes, there is "one whom scripture affirms to be alive" (REB). The CJB/CJSB renders this as "in the case of Malki-Tzedek, it is received by someone who is testified to be still alive." Stern actually asserts in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* that "Malki-Tzedek is testified to still be alive,"<sup>201</sup> yet this is an improper assumption based on our author's theological methods. *The Oxford Study Bible* (REB) likewise makes this mistake, indicating "The Levitical priests are mortal, Melchizedek is not."<sup>202</sup> Melchizedek can only be "still living" in the sense of how the priestly office that he occupied during the time of Abraham continues on in the present ministry of Yeshua. In view of what has just been stated about the lesser being blessed by the greater (Hebrews 7:7), our author's point is to significantly highlight the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood, even though it is easy to not think that much of it.

### HEBREWS 7:28

**"For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever."**

In comparison to Yeshua functioning in exaltedness at the right hand of the Father, "The high priests appointed by the law are men in all their weakness" (Hebrews 7:28, REB).<sup>203</sup> The human priests required for the Levitical priesthood are mortal, have a fallen sin nature, and could only offer animals for sacrifice. *This is especially true given the First Century circumstances by which the corrupt party of the Sadducees controlled the priesthood.* In contrast to this we see the

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<sup>199</sup> Bruce, *Hebrews*, pp 159-160.

<sup>200</sup> *The Soncino Talmud. Judaic Classics Library II.*

<sup>201</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 680.

<sup>202</sup> Victor P. Furnish, "Hebrews," in M. Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, and James R. Mueller, et. al., *The Oxford Study Bible*, REB (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1525.

<sup>203</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.

Divine Son of God who offered Himself up for the sins of men and women, who continually intercedes before the Father in Heaven on their behalf. On *Yom Kippur* the priests would have their sins atoned for *before* the offerings were offered on behalf of all the people (m.*Yoma* 8:8), to make sure that the priests were in right standing with God before interceding for the people. Yeshua, in stark contrast to this, is always in right standing with His Father.

Too many of those who read and interpret what our author is saying often think that he is demeaning the Levitical priesthood and its occupants. He is not, and this trend has actually been significantly changing in contemporary Hebrews' scholarship. As deSilva remarks,

"Attention to classical rhetoric leads to a promising solution. Encomia (speeches in praise of some person and his or her achievements) regularly included comparisons between the subject of the speech and other persons of renown....The author of Hebrews selects the levitical priests as material for *synkrisis* for a number of reasons. They provide the 'type' or 'pattern' from which the priestly activity of Jesus beyond the heavens can be credibly 'constructed.' They are a revered part of the work of God in the past, and their limitations can be used to highlight the surpassing honor of Jesus and value of having this Jesus as one's mediator of divine favor."<sup>204</sup>

Some holding to a low Christology, believing Yeshua to be a created being or entity, could provide Hebrews 7:28 as proof: "For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever" (NRSV). It is entirely incorrect to take the "made perfect forever" as being "created perfect forever." The issue of *ton aiōna teteleiōmenon* (τὸν αἰῶνα τετελειωμένον) involves the character of the Messiah, with the passive perfect participle *teteleiōmenon* also legitimately rendered as "perfected" (American Standard Version, HCSB).

The analogy made in Hebrews ch. 7 is not one between "the Law and Christ" as too many interpreters have concluded, but rather of the Levitical priesthood given in the Torah for Israel and the Melchizedekian priesthood which preceded it. Yeshua the Messiah can serve as High Priest because He occupies the office of Melchizedek. The priesthood of Levi has been temporarily put aside until it is reinstated in association with events subsequent to His Second Coming. Yeshua's priesthood has been established by "the promise of the oath...[appointing] a Son, who has been perfected forever" (HSCB). The oath that the Father has made (Psalm 110:4) cannot be revoked, and we would not want it to be revoked as Yeshua is serving before Him in Heaven, ever interceding on our behalf. It is His service as High Priest in Heaven that is able to introduce the New Covenant into the lives of the redeemed, which our author will proceed to explain in Hebrews ch. 8.

## HEBREWS 8:1-2

**"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."**

Hebrews 8:1 opens with the statement, "Now this is my main point" (NEB). What readers consider or identify as the "sum" (YLT) of the author's argument is of key importance for a correct interpretation of what he will proceed to say.<sup>205</sup> The author of Hebrews plainly says, "Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven" (Hebrews 8:1, NLT). Evans, among Christian

<sup>204</sup> deSilva, 263.

<sup>205</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*.