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Jesus also made another sacrifice that was pleasing to God. We read in Hebrews 5: 7: “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears”. His life was a continual offering of prayer and praise to His Father. This is the real meaning of the incense that Aaron offered to God. Incense is only a shadow. The reality is prayer and praise.

We who follow in the steps of our master cannot offer our lives as sacrifices for sin. For one reason we are not spotless as Jesus was; and for a second reason the sacrifice of Jesus was a sufficient sacrifice for all people and for all time, and needs never to be repeated. However we can and must obey Paul’s words to the Romans: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” We can also offer to God the sweet incense of prayer and praise.

If we present ourselves to God as living sacrifices, and offer him continually our prayer and praise, we too can be priests in the order of Melchizedek.

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The Melchizedek Priesthood



HIGH PRIEST IN ROBES AND BREASTPLATE.
—Lev. viii. 8.

Holy Spirit. This was the power through which Jesus performed his priestly ministry. In everything he did he was led by the Holy Spirit.

This was the way for Jesus the Chief Priest, and it is the same for the priests that follow him. After his resurrection Jesus came to his disciples and said, “Peace be with you. Just as the Father has sent me, I also send you.” And after he said this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20: 21.) Shortly after this, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples in great power. They were totally transformed and became equipped for the ministry to which they were called.

Earthly priesthoods, whether Levitical or so-called Christian, have failed in every imaginable way because they have only worked by human strength. The Melchizedek priesthood succeeds because it works by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Priestly Sacrifices

In all religions priests claim and aim to be mediators between God and man. Levitical priests were responsible for bringing offerings and sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. The book of Leviticus describes the various offerings in detail. They offered both animal sacrifices and incense to God.

Roman Catholic priests also claim to bring offerings to God. They claim that every time they perform the mass they offer up the body and blood of Christ. Priests in other religions also bring offerings and sacrifices on behalf of the people. What then did Jesus offer?

In Hebrews 7: 27 we read “Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.”

When John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he uttered the words, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

John had a deep and wonderful revelation that Jesus was the fulfilment of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Those sacrifices were in themselves of no value. They were only shadows of the one true sacrifice that Jesus made when he offered himself to die on the cross.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

myrrh, aloes, and cassia. From the luxurious palaces comes the music of stringed instruments that makes you happy.”

In Revelation 1: 13 John saw: “in the midst of the lampstands was one like a son of man. He was dressed in a robe extending down to his feet and he wore a wide golden belt around his chest.”

Though to human eyes it was said of Jesus that “He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him” (Isa 53: 2), his spiritual clothing was glorious beyond all our imagination.

If Jesus, the chief priest, wore such clothes, what do his fellow priests wear? Again their priestly garments are not visible to human sight.

Psalm 132 verse 9 gives us the answer: “Let your priests be clothed with righteousness; and let your saints shout for joy”. Visible white robes look good and clean to human eyes, but the inward white robes of righteousness are what please God and qualify us to be true priests. We can never by our own efforts reach God’s standards of righteousness. Isaiah rightly wrote: “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”. But we can be righteous through Jesus. When Adam and Eve discovered that they were naked, they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. But later we read that “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” These garments of skin are a picture of the Lamb that was slain to cover our nakedness with his righteousness. Paul told the Romans to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 13: 14), and that is the only way we can be suitably clothed to serve as priests in the order of Melchizedek.

Anointing with Oil

After he had dressed Aaron and his sons in their special priestly clothes, God told Moses to anoint Aaron with oil. “You are to take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him” (Exod 29: 7).

When John baptised Jesus he did not then anoint him with oil. Instead “the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming on him” (Mat 3: 16). And God proclaimed: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Mat 3: 17). Oil is of no value in itself. Its value lies in what it symbolises which is the

Who was Melchizedek?

Melchizedek is not one of the top twenty well-known characters of the Old Testament! We find his name mentioned just twice. We have this brief narrative in Genesis chapter 14: 18-20: And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a 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, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tenth of all. We then find a further enigmatic reference to him in Psalm 110 verse 4: The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

On the strength of this brief material you would not expect Melchizedek to find his way into the New Testament; but you would be wrong! There is far more about him in the New Testament than in the Old! The author of the letter to the Hebrews had a powerful revelation on the subject.

How could Jesus be High Priest?

This unknown author wrote this letter for the purpose of explaining who Jesus was, and what he had accomplished by his life, death and resurrection. In chapter 1 he compared Jesus to the angels, and showed him to be superior; in chapter 3 he compared Jesus to Moses; in chapter 4 to Joshua, and then in chapter 5 to Aaron. In each case Jesus was greater. After this the author came to a problem. There were two great offices in ancient Israel: the office of king and the office of high priest. The king always came from the tribe of Judah and the high priest always came from the tribe of Levi. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, and was descended from King David, and this qualified him to be king. Obviously he could not also come from the tribe of Levi. How could he then qualify to be high priest?

This author may well have lain awake at night trying to solve this problem. He had grown up with the knowledge that only Levites could be priests, and he knew that Jesus was not a Levite. Then God gave him the revelation. He remembered the words of Psalm 110: The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest for ever, in the

order of Melchizedek.” This was another priesthood! Could Jesus be a priest of this Melchizedek priesthood?

What was this other priesthood? And who was this Melchizedek? Levitical priests were everywhere. Everyone knew about them - just like Roman Catholic priests today in some countries or maybe the Brahmin priests in India! But why were there no Melchizedek priests? Or were there?

The answers to his questions were in Genesis chapter 14. Let’s look at it again. We read that Abraham met Melchizedek when he was returning from a battle in which he rescued Lot. **And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a 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, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tenth of all.**

This author saw firstly that Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High or El Elyon as he is in Hebrew. He also saw that Melchizedek was superior to Levi, because Abraham was an ancestor of Levi and Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek. In Heb 7: 4-7 we read: **Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. So clearly the Melchizedek priesthood was superior to the Levitical priesthood.**

The problem was solved! Jesus has become a high **“priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”** (Heb 6: 20)!

More Priests

Jesus is the high priest in the order of Melchizedek, but is he the only priest? Clearly not! You cannot have a high priest unless there are lower priests as well. The Greek word translated high priest is *αρχιερευς* (arch-iereus). The Greek word *αρχη* (*arche*) actually means *beginning*. The words archangel and archbishop are derived from it. So *αρχιερευς* literally means *first priest* or perhaps *chief priest*. Clearly

reality of course this act had no value in itself. Water, whether used in baptism or in any other way, can only make the body clean, but can never change the heart. Its only value lay in what it represented. It was only the earthly shadow of a heavenly reality.

In Matt 3: 13 we read that **“Jesus came from Galilee to John to be baptized by him in the Jordan River”**. Understandably, John was reluctant to baptise Jesus. He rightly felt unworthy. In verse 14 we read **‘But John tried to prevent him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” So Jesus replied to him, “Let it happen now, for it is right for us to fulfil all righteousness.”’** Jesus knew that this ceremony must take place to fulfil the law, even though he himself had no need of washing. God chose John for this occasion because he was the son of a priest and a Levite.

The priests that follow Jesus must walk in the same pathway. Firstly and fundamentally they must be washed from their sins. No outward cleanness can replace this. Jesus said to Peter: **“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me”** (John 13: 8). John in Revelation saw a vision of those who had **“washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!”** (Rev 7: 14).

Priestly Garments

After he had washed Aaron and his sons God told Moses to **“take the garments and clothe Aaron”** (Ex 29:5). These garments are described in great detail in the previous chapter (28). Levitical priests, like Roman Catholic priests, wore special clothes. God commanded Moses, **“Make holy garments for Aaron your brother for dignity and for honour”** (Ex 28: 2). The whole of the remainder of that chapter describes those clothes. Did Melchizedek also wear special clothes? The Bible gives us no information. What about Jesus? Did he wear special clothes? The answer is yes; but they were not visible earthly clothes. No doubt his earthly clothes were much the same as those of anyone else of his time. His special clothes were heavenly and invisible to human eyes.

In Psalm 45: 6-8 we read this wonderful description of Jesus and his clothing: **“Your throne, O God, is permanent. The sceptre of your kingdom is a sceptre of justice. You love justice and hate evil. For this reason God, your God has anointed you with the oil of joy, elevating you above your companions. All your garments are perfumed with**

the prince of peace. He was perfectly without sin and he came to fulfil the priestly function of making peace between man and God. In Hebrews 7: 16 we read that Jesus “has become a priest not by a legal regulation about physical descent but by the power of an indestructible life.”

I must briefly mention here that the Mormons claim to have a “Melchizedek” priesthood. However it is not the Melchizedek priesthood described in the Bible. Unlike the Roman Catholics, the Mormons use titles and terminology that are taken from the Scriptures. However they are much closer in spirit to Roman Catholicism than they are to the true Melchizedek priesthood. They are another man-made system full of pomp and high-sounding titles, but emphatically not the priesthood of which Jesus was the first chief priest.

Consecration of Priests

In chapter 29 of Exodus we read about the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests. This was a very special occasion.

The ceremony was made up of four parts:

- Washing with water
- Putting on the priestly garments
- Anointing with oil
- Offering of sacrifices

We will see that this ceremony had no value in itself. It was only an earthly shadow of a heavenly reality. God had something far greater yet to be revealed when the time came.

We will now consider each of these and see how they are fulfilled firstly in Jesus the Chief Priest of the new order, and then in the priests who follow him.

Washing with Water

In Exodus 29: 4 God gave Moses the instruction: “You are to present Aaron and his sons at the entrance of the tent of meeting. You are to wash them with water”.

The first necessity for these priests was that they must be clean. Before they could put on their priestly garments they must be washed. In

you cannot have a first or chief priest unless you have further subordinate priests. Added to this it would not be an order of priests unless there were more priests to follow. The obvious implication is that Jesus was not the one and only priest of the Melchizedek order. Rather he was the first and chief priest of a new order of priests.

Who are these further priests? The writer to the Hebrews only writes about Jesus, the chief priest of the Melchizedek order; but Peter had a further revelation on the subject. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet 2: 9). God has called us also to be priests; and not only that, but like Melchizedek and like Jesus to be royal priests as well.

Differences in the New Priesthood

What then were the essential differences between these two Biblical orders of priesthood? And, we may ask, how do other priesthoods such as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and the Hindu Brahmin priesthoods compare with them?

We will now look at different aspects of these priesthoods.

A Heavenly Priesthood

One fundamental difference between the Melchizedek priesthood and the Levitical priesthood underlies all the other differences. The Melchizedek priesthood is a heavenly priesthood. The Levitical priesthood, like all other priesthoods, was an earthly priesthood. Hebrews chapter 8 makes this contrast: in verses 1 and 2 we read that Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.” In verse 5 we read that the Levitical priests “serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven”. A shadow is a perfect copy of its original. It has exactly the same shape, but it totally lacks any substance or reality. It is like a photograph. It shows you exactly what its original looks like, but of course it is lifeless and cannot perform any real function or action.

God instructed Moses to ordain the Levitical priesthood to demonstrate the meaning of being a priest. God made it to be temporary in nature and he never intended it to last for ever. Its purpose was to show the meaning of priesthood. It was a part of the old covenant, which God made with the people of Israel who were his earthly chosen people.

Selection of Priests

How were the Levitical priests chosen?

The Levitical priesthood, like the Hindu Brahmin priesthood, was restricted to one particular tribe or caste and was passed from father to son. Only members of the tribe of Levi could be priests. The first Levitical priest was Aaron. God instructed Moses to appoint him as High Priest. We find the first mention of this in Exodus 28: 3: “Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so that he may serve me as priest.” The priesthood then passed on to Aaron’s sons and their descendants. The Brahmin priesthood in India is passed on in a similar way.

This system has an obvious weakness. The first high priest, Aaron, was a faithful and righteous man. No doubt, many Levite priests followed Aaron’s example in being good and righteous men. Sadly others did not. Even the first generation of subsequent priests, his own sons Nadab and Abihu died when they offered “strange fire” before the Lord (Lev 10: 1). Good fathers do not always have good sons. Much worse was to follow. Caiaphas was chief priest in the time of Jesus. It was he who advised the Jews that Jesus must die and handed him over to Pilate for trial and execution. However it could be said that unknowingly he was acting as chief priest and offering up the Lamb of God!

The monarchy had similar problems. King David, the first of his dynasty, is perhaps the most famous king in history. He was beloved of the Lord. His son and heir Solomon was also good; but subsequent generations were not. Finally the wickedness of his descendent Manasseh brought God’s judgment on the Jewish people. The kingdom of Judah came to an end, and the Jews went into captivity in Babylon.

No system based on human heredity is adequate for the kingdom of God! Only divine heredity can bring about his kingdom.

The Roman Catholic priesthood has similarities. They together with the Orthodox and Anglican churches make much of the fact that they have apostolic succession. In other words the office of pope and the priesthood, they claim, have been handed down from man to man with unbroken succession from the apostle Peter who was originally ordained by Jesus. All subsequent high priests and ordinary priests are only valid if they can trace their ordination through previous bishops to Peter.

This system has had even worse problems! Peter himself was chosen and appointed an apostle by Jesus himself and lived a wonderful life of service to God. But that is far from true of the popes and cardinals of the Roman Catholic church who claimed that they were his successors. Throughout history popes have committed every imaginable sin. And it is all too obvious from the news of recent years that many present day Roman Catholic priests have been little better. They have proved by their immorality they are not ordained by God. Without doubt many individual Roman Catholic priests have been righteous and sincere men, and caring pastors of their flocks, but this is in spite of, not because of, the system to which they belong.

The Melchizedek priesthood has none of these problems. It is also a hereditary priesthood, passed from Father to Son, but in this case the father is God, and the first son is Jesus! And as Paul points out Jesus is “the first of many brethren”.

Melchizedek himself, unlike many people in the Old Testament, had no genealogy. He had no recorded earthly father or mother. He had no recorded birth or death. In Hebrews 7: 3 the writer describes him as “Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest for ever”. In other words in two ways he is a type or picture of Jesus. Firstly he did not inherit the priesthood from his father, as did the Levitical priests, but received it directly from God. Secondly, his priesthood lasts for ever.

Melchizedek also shows us the qualifications for the job. In Hebrews 7: 2 we read about Melchizedek: “His name first means king of righteousness, then king of Salem, that is, king of peace.” (In Hebrew Melech means king and tzedek means righteous.) We see these qualifications perfectly in Jesus. He was the king of righteousness and