

JESUS OUR HIGH PRIEST

Last month we wrote briefly about the priesthood of Christ. The word *Christ* means “anointed one” and being the Christ he is also a priest because he was anointed by God (Acts 10:38). In this article we focus on the subject of Christ being our High Priest. We are introduced to the fact that Christ is “a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” in Hebrews 5:10. The writer then says “concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing” (Heb. 5:11). However he did not abandon his subject because of this. After pointing out their failures and instructing them concerning the faith, he continues on the subject of the priesthood of Christ being after the order of Melchizedek (chapter 7) and concludes with this statement: “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 true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man” (8:1, 2). Nothing is preached in the church today about the priesthood let alone “Melchizedek.” Even in churches where the Bible is preached there is more preached about the cross and Christ’s death than about his resurrection and his ascension to become our high priest. There is an obvious inattention given to the subject by the theological elite who purport to be training men for the ministry. The religious world focuses on subjects that aren’t even mentioned in the Bible and they preach and teach them constantly. Men have written volumes, debated endlessly and even established whole denominations and movements on subjects that cannot be found in scripture, such as: *the trinity*, *the rapture*, and *the immortal soul*, yet Christ a high priest after the order of Melchizedek is unknown and never mentioned by the average cleric today. Melchizedek is mentioned 8 times in two chapters of Hebrews, 2 times in the Old Testament; the priesthood of Christ is mentioned numerous times, that being the primary subject of Hebrews, more space is given to Christ being a priest after the order of Melchizedek than is given to the subject of baptism. There is more said about the priesthood of Christ in Hebrews than there is said about the Lord’s Supper in all the New Testament; yet we have become dull of hearing and don’t know anything about Melchizedek and Christ, and will probably say it is not important anyway.

Genesis 14:17-20 is the first mention of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7:1-3 tells the story in these words: “Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, 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, was by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and also king of Salem, which was 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.” (There is no other mention of him until Psalm 110:4 where God swore that Christ would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek). He is not saying this man appeared on earth without parents, and he is not saying he’s still living, or he has no beginning and no end. These verses simply say that as far as his priesthood is concerned, there were no priests before him

and we know of no priests after him. He did not come from a priestly family. He stands alone as a priest in the Old Testament. He was not of the usual order of priests. This says Christ is totally outside the Jewish system. His priesthood and who he was and what he did and what he does today is totally outside of and has absolutely nothing to do with the Jewish system. It is a miracle that God could bring into the world the Messiah through such a reprobate people as the Jews, and accomplish what he did totally outside of this people that were supposed to be the prepared people and were supposed to usher in the Messiah and present him to the world. God did not designate Christ as being a part of this system as far as the priesthood was concerned. God chose a Gentile priest, one outside the call of Abraham, one outside Israel. So as far as the priesthood of Christ is concerned and his ministry, there is no connection with the system of the Old Testament. Jesus said: “No one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment...nor do men put new wine in old wineskins...” (Matt. 9:16, 17). He didn’t come to bring the kingdom into being and simply tack it onto what was already there. Paul said it was apart from the Law and the Prophets that God established His righteousness. The Law and the Prophets testified of him (Rom. 3:21-22), but it was apart from all the priestly system of the Old Testament.

The Jews did not believe the *man* Jesus could be the Christ. Most of the religious world today do not believe the Christ could be a *man*. The Apostles were careful to emphasize that the Christ was a man. Peter on Pentecost asserted: “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a *man* attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know –this *man*, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you fastened to a tree, by the hands of godless men and put him to death” (Acts 2:22, 23). (See Acts 5:30). Paul stated: “For since by man came death by a *man* also came the resurrection of the dead” and “the first man is from the earth, earthy, the second *man* is from heaven (I Cor. 15:21, 47). He further stated: “there is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the *man* Jesus Christ.” (I Tim. 2:5). Jesus had to be a man, not as some say a “God-man,” in order to become a high priest. If Jesus is God he could not be a high priest. God does not mediate between Himself and man. Jesus cannot be God and High Priest at the same time, and since he is High Priest, then he cannot be God. Priests are taken from among men (Heb. 5:1). Hebrews 2:17, 18: “Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 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.” The only difference in Jesus and other men was he did not have the sin nature inherited from Adam. Jesus was a man as God intended man to be. Being the son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, he had no sin. In Luke 1:35 the angel Gabriel told Mary “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason the holy child shall be called the son of God.” This is spoken in reference to the human nature of Christ, and this passage proves that one reason why Jesus was

called the son of God was because he was begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Alexander Campbell wrote in *The Christian Baptist (May 1827)*: “The names Jesus, Christ, or Messiah, only-begotten son, son of God, belong to the founder of the Christian religion, and none else. They express not a relation existing before the Christian era, but relations which commenced at that time. There is no Jesus, no Messiah, no Christ, no son of God, no Only-begotten before the reign of Augustus Caesar. Jesus is called the son of God, not because of an ‘eternal generation’ (which I conceive to be nonsense), but because he was born as the angel described to Mary.” He was a perfect human being as Adam was before he sinned. (Adam was in the Old Testament the only man said to be a son of God (Luke 3:38) but Christ, the last Adam is “bringing many sons into glory” (Heb.2:10) and now because of the priesthood of Christ all who are redeemed are “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). All men are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) because they have inherited the nature of Adam. Jesus in his human nature did not inherit the sinful nature of Adam. The doctrine that Jesus had a *dual nature*, that is he was “fully man and fully God” was formulated at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. (From L. D. Davis: *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787) Their History and Theology*). The emphasis in the book of Hebrews is that Jesus was in all respects a *man*. To say Jesus was 100% man and 100% God is 200% wrong.

The writer says: “For every high priest is taken from among men” (Heb. 5:1). To become a high priest, Jesus was established with an oath. God didn’t just pick him out and say “you are a priest,” God did not just designate him as a priest, Jesus was established with an oath. When God swears about something, even if He swears by Himself as He did in this case, and when He takes an oath, it must be important. He must mean what he says. Hebrews 7:20, 21: “And inasmuch as it was not without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to him, ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, thou art a priest forever.’” In chapter 6:17-20 he speaks of the oath: “in the same way, God desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order by two unchangeable things (His Word and His oath) in which it is 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. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, hope both sure and steadfast one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” God wants us to understand and know the significance of the priesthood of Christ and that priesthood being after the order of Melchizedek.

Because as high priest, “he having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time sat down on the right hand of God...for by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” This means “Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more; now where there is forgiveness of these things there is no longer an offering for sin” (Heb. 10:12, 14, 17, 18). This is one of the most important subjects in the New Testament because it tells us that by one offering he paid the price for all sin for all time...he once for all offered himself. There is nothing else we have to do but accept what he has done for us. We cannot add to it in any way. There is nothing we can do to make us any better in the sight of God than what we are already. There is nothing

we can do to make God love us any more than He already loves us. There is nothing we can do to make us any more forgiven than what we are already in God’s eyes. Because all that was taken care of in Christ, not in us.

Concerning his offering as our priest the writer goes back to what happened in the Old Testament when the high priest went into the Holy Place once a year on the Day of atonement to make an offering for Israel’s sins. The sins of Israel piled up for a whole year. On the Day of Atonement, once a year, the high priest would go into the holy place and make an offering for himself and for the sins of the people. He would take the blood of animals and offer an atoning offering that would take care of their sins for the past year. When he came out they could start out fresh because when he came out they knew their sins committed during the past year were forgiven. This was a solemn occasion. And so the question becomes: when in the life of Israel or in the life of an Israelite, could they know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were being forgiven or that they were forgiven? All year long their sins piled up and they had no forgiveness. The only time they could be sure they were forgiven was while the priest was in the Holy Place making the sacrifice for them. While the priest was inside the Holy of Holies they knew and could be assure their sins were being forgiven. But when the priest came out, it all started over again. The Hebrew writer’s point is: that when Christ went in the Holy of Holies, heaven itself (Heb. 9:24) he didn’t come out. As long as Christ is in the Holy of Holies, in heaven itself, “now to appear in the presence of God for us” we can be assured of our forgiveness. Jesus did not, as the priest in the Old Testament, go into the Holy Place, offer a sacrifice and come out. “And not taking the blood of goats and calves, but taking his own blood, he entered the Holy Place once for all having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of calves and goats and the ashes of heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ cleans your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:12, 13). That is the meaning of the cross. Instead of giving all its attention to the cross the religious world should get beyond the death of Christ and consecrate on the living Christ, our High Priest. He is in the Holy of Holies and as long as he is there, the Christian has assurance of forgiveness. We can walk in victory. We don’t have to walk in condemnation. We have the way open and can find grace in the time of need (Heb. 4:16).

All we have said thus far is available to the believer because “Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant” (Heb.7:22) and “He has now obtained a more excellent ministry by as much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant” (Heb. 8:6). We have access to Heaven itself because Jesus as Priest guarantees it by his present ministry (mediating) for us. We can “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16) and since “we have confidence to enter the holy place “Heaven itself” (Heb.9:24), we are exhorted to “draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22). Christians have always had a fascination with heaven, so much so that many sermons and scores of our best loved hymns seems to glorify death because it is the our means of “going to heaven.” Fundamentalist sing “When we all get to heaven.” The fact is we are already there in Christ. We don’t have to die to go to heaven we can enter the Holy Place “heaven itself” (9:4) any time. Christ has fulfilled his promise of John 14: 3: he prepared a place for us.