

# ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

## PART 23

### KINGDOM PROPHECY, PART 4

The Priestly role of the King is the subject of biblical prophecy; He will be the perfect High Priest both now and during His Messianic reign. Samuel predicted the Aaronic priesthood would be removed from the line of Eli and given to a faithful priest. This is a reference to Zadok who was the faithful priest to David, the High Priest to Solomon for a time, and who will be the head of the Levitical priests in the Kingdom. Whether or not that means he will be the Levitical high priest during the Kingdom is not specified but he will be the priest from whose line the priests descend. The Levites from lines other than Zadok will be restricted to duties other than the priesthood which will be Zadok's alone. Ultimately, Samuel's prophecy is about Christ Jesus who will be the superior High Priest. The King has been declared to be a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

1 Samuel 2:35 <sup>35</sup>'But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always.'

"A worthy, faithful priest would be raised up. This prophecy is connected with Samuel and later with Abiathar of the house of Eli, who was deposed from the high priesthood during Solomon's reign to make room for Zadok. However, the prophecy is comprehensive and goes beyond Samuel and Zadok and embraces in the farthest sweep its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, who in Israel's Kingdom blessing will be the King-Priest and at last exemplify in Israel the perfect harmony between the kingship and the priesthood." [Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 367]. "Yet the Lord would not terminate the office of priest altogether for He would raise up ... a faithful priest whose line of succession (house) would be firmly established and who would minister before His anointed one (i.e., the king) forever. In human terms this was fulfilled when the priesthood was taken from Abiathar, a descendant of Aaron's son Ithamar, and given to Zadok, descendant of Aaron's son Eleazar. But in the ultimate sense the 'faithful Priest' and 'Anointed One' are One and the same, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is both Priest and King." [Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 435].

Many theologians believe the Levitical priesthood was completely done away in the cross work of Christ Jesus, but as noted there will be Levitical priests in the Kingdom from the line of Zadok. Dr. Ross, in his commentary on Psalm 110:4, wrote, "The only way that a descendant of David [referring to Christ] could become the official priest was for the order of Aaron to come to an end, which happened at the death of Christ according to New Testament teaching." [Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, Volume 3*

(90-150), p. 3:354]. It would be more accurate to say the order of Aaron has been set aside during this dispensation but will be reinstated during the Kingdom. That would be in keeping with a dispensational understanding of God's program for Israel. The only way to understand this is through the use of literal hermeneutics. When the hermeneutics of prophecy are through allegorical, spiritual, and theological interpretations, the plain meaning of the words is lost and therefore God's plan for history is misunderstood and even denied.

Jeremiah 33:17–18 <sup>17</sup>“For thus says the LORD, ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; <sup>18</sup>and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to prepare sacrifices continually.’”

This Scripture clearly says there will be priests serving the Davidic King in the Kingdom. A number of other Scriptures do not mention priests but they do refer to Kingdom offerings and sacrifices both of which imply a priesthood. But Christ the Priest is not a Priest according to the Aaronic order of priests; He is a priest of an order that is apparently unique to Him. The Bible never reveals the relationship between the order of Melchizedek and the order of Aaron in the Kingdom. Whatever the relationship will be, it will be harmonious and edifying for everyone in the Kingdom.

Psalms 110:4 <sup>4</sup>The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”

The Lord is a priest forever and as the Mediator of a better covenant, the New Covenant, which, while ratified in His blood (Mt. 26:28), will not be fully implemented with Israel until the Millennial Kingdom begins. He will be the preeminent High Priest in the Kingdom when the Messianic promises are fulfilled.

Hebrews 8:6; 9:11, 15 <sup>6</sup>But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.... <sup>11</sup>But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come; ... <sup>15</sup>For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Zechariah made it very clear the King will also be the Priest.

Zechariah 6:13 <sup>13</sup>“Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.”

“And the counsel of peace shall be between them both, that is, discussion and consultation eventuating in concord and agreement that will be the result of the

*kingship and the priesthood being united in one Person.* In the Kingdom age disagreements and discord that had so often arisen in Israel, where the office of priest and king had been preserved in rigid separation and held by fallible men, will vanish. The Messiah, as the King-Priest, will thus produce peace, for in His glorious and all-righteous person He not only will comprehend all administrative and judicial functions, but also all of the ecclesiastical and spiritual ones." [Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, pp. 1999-2000].

Christ is the Priest now and He will continue to be the Priest forever; He cannot be separated from the eternal redemption He purchased with His own blood.

Hebrews 8:1 <sup>1</sup>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,

Hebrews 9:12 <sup>12</sup>and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Now, He is a Priest on the Father's throne, and when He is on His own throne He *continues* Priest, simply because His great sacrificial act, performed once for all, ever stamps Him as a Priest—a successful and acknowledged High-Priest. Gratitude, love, reverence, honor, blessing, salvation—all regard Him as *the* Priest, and so long as these endure the priesthood of Jesus remains reality. When He tendered His priceless offering, when He ascended to heaven and interceded for man, this only indicates that He is the worthy Priest who shall come again—for His work as Priest ever remains, and is inseparably connected with His official station. As Priest He secures for us 'eternal redemption' and not a mere temporary deliverance, and, therefore, it becomes this Priest, as such, and thus recognized, ever to remain in immediate relationship with this redemption." [George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, prop. 155, obs. 4, 2:602-603].

What does it mean to be a priest according to the order of Melchizedek [מֶלְכִּיֶזֶדֶק]? There is very little said about this king/priest but the author of Hebrews elaborates on what it means for Christ to be a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Abram met this king after the war of kings in which he rescued Lot.

Genesis 14:18–20 <sup>18</sup>And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. <sup>19</sup>He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; <sup>20</sup>And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.

Who was this king/priest named Melchizedek? He was the king of Salem, meaning "peace," whose name means "king of righteousness" or "the king is righteous." Salem is the place that became known as Jerusalem. He was a priest of the one, true, Creator

God. He blessed Abram and in return the patriarch rendered to him a tithe of the spoils of the war. This is an acknowledgement that Melchizedek was a priest of God and as such he was not only a fellow-worshiper of God, but he was Abram's superior by virtue of his priesthood in the service of God. This is also an indication that people other than Abram were believers. Job, who is thought to have lived at the time of Abraham, is another example proving that God has had people throughout history who have believed in Him. Several factors seem to make Melchizedek a type of Christ. He ruled in Jerusalem where the Temple and the priesthood would be located. He was king and priest as Christ will be King and Priest. He was not in the line of Aaronic priesthood just as Christ is not in the line of the Aaronic priesthood.

The author of Hebrews went to great lengths to explain the concept of the priesthood.

Hebrews 5:1–4 <sup>1</sup>For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; <sup>2</sup>he can deal gently [μετριοπαθέω] with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; <sup>3</sup>and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. <sup>4</sup>And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

There are four identifying characteristics identified here for the office of priest.

First, he must be a human being. In order to represent man to God, the priest must be a man. Every high priest must be a man; no exceptions. Christ, as the God-man, is fully human and therefore eligible to be appointed to the position.

Second, he must offer gifts and sacrifices to God on behalf of man because of man's sin.

Third, because he is a man, he is acquainted with the weaknesses of the flesh. He can be gentle and compassionate because he has experienced the same kinds of things those people He represents to God have experienced including the temptation to sin. This does not mean that he approves of sin; it simply means that he can identify, through his own personal experiences, with human weakness. "The word [μετριοπαθέω] essentially denotes a happy medium between two extremes and is translated as 'curb his emotions' by Koester. A priest would need to avoid personal feelings of impatience or disgust with the sinner while interceding with God on the sinner's behalf. Since the high priest, as a man himself, could err in two extremes, irritation and indulgence, a balance between the law and love, between Stoic indifference and exasperated anger, is needed." [David L Allen, *The New American Commentary*, p. 316]. Priests had to offer sacrifices for their own sins in order to be purified, but Christ Jesus is perpetually pure and has no need to offer sacrifices for Himself.

The priests were condemned by the Lord for their callous treatment of people. They certainly did not deal gently with the Jewish people. Instead, they imposed impossible legalistic burdens on people that they themselves were unable and unwilling to bear. Peter also addressed this issue concerning Gentiles coming to faith when he referred to the Law, administered through the Aaronic order of priests, as a burden they couldn't bear; therefore, why would they expect Gentiles to bear it in the dispensation of grace?

Matthew 23:1-4 <sup>1</sup>Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; <sup>3</sup>therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. <sup>4</sup>"They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

Acts 15:10 <sup>10</sup>"Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?"

No priest could be appointed of his own desires and volition. He had to be appointed by God. Korah attempted to appoint himself to the priesthood and God killed him for his efforts (Num. 16:1-40). King Uzziah tried to usurp the duties of the priesthood and God struck him with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

God the Son is uniquely qualified to be the High Priest and God has declared Him to be not only the anointed King/Son but He has also appointed Him to be High Priest. The author relates Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 one to the other. "[T]he future Conqueror is also a Priest of a special order. In this way the author united in the person of Christ the dual offices of Priest and King. In doing so the author was perhaps conscious of countering a sectarian position like that evidently current at Qumran, where both a lay, or kingly, Messiah and a priestly Messiah seem to have been anticipated." [Zane C. Hodges, "Hebrews" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 791].

Hebrews 5:5-10 <sup>5</sup>So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; <sup>6</sup>just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." <sup>7</sup>In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. <sup>8</sup>Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup>And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, <sup>10</sup>being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

This Scripture is the revelation that Christ is qualified to be the High Priest. He has met the requirements for the priesthood. This priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek and not according to the Levitical priesthood. Jesus was a true human being, He offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin, He understands human

weakness, and He was appointed by the Father to be a Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus was compared to Melchizedek who the Bible treats as a type of the King/Priest.

Hebrews 7:1–3 <sup>1</sup>For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup>to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. <sup>3</sup>Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like [ἄφομοιόω] the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

The first comparison is the fact that both are priest/kings. The “Mel” part of his name comes from the Hebrew for king, מֶלֶךְ, and “zedek” is a name indicating a Jebusite dynasty. The name could also mean “my king is Sedeq.” In Joshua 10:1, the king of Jerusalem is identified as Adoni-zedek which means “my lord is Sedeq.” This connects the dynastic name to Jerusalem. Some people want to connect it to another town named Salem which was near Shechem because there are some extra-biblical texts from the second century B.C. that call Jerusalem Rushalimum/Urusalim. [*Word Biblical Commentary*, Gen. 14:18]. The thinking seems to be that Jerusalem was never called Salem but that seems to be a stretch when the totality of the evidence is considered. I could not find any independent verification any town named Salem existed near Shechem. The name “Rushalimum” was found in the Egyptian Execration texts discovered in about 1850. Unger believes Salem is “perhaps the name of Jerusalem” based on Psalm 76:2 which seems to suggest Salem and Zion are the same place. That is a parallel Hebrew construction which serves to equate the two. Unger confirmed that Jerusalem was identified as Uru-salim in the Amarna Letters and it means “City of Peace” so the concept of peace has long been identified with the place now known as Jerusalem. Melchizedek’s name indicates he ruled in righteousness and peace. Isaiah predicted the Messiah would possess these same characteristics.

Joshua 10:1 <sup>1</sup>Now it came about when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai...

Psalm 76:2 <sup>2</sup>His tabernacle is in Salem; His dwelling place also is in Zion.

Isaiah 9:6–7 <sup>6</sup>For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Concerning the Amarna Letters, the Tyndale Bulletin had an entry confirming the mention of Jerusalem in them. These letters were discovered at Tell El Amarna in Egypt and date to 1400 B.C. "ú-ru-sa-lim appears in three Amarna letters, all written by ÌR- ħe-ba, the ruler of the city. This ruler is mentioned by Shuwardata, leader of Gath, in the context of leaders of Shechem, Keilah, Acco and Achshaph. In his own letters, ÌR- ħe-ba mentions Gezer, Ashkelon, Lachish, Ayyalon, and perhaps Beth Horon as regions which are to be located near ú-ru-sa-lim. All of these towns and cities suggest that the ú-ru-sa-lim of the Amarna letters is best located at or near the later city of Jerusalem. The associations mentioned do not allow for a location in Syria to the north of Palestine [which is a theory promoted by some theologians]. Again, the written evidence has a priority insofar as the existence of the site is concerned. Whether or not archaeological attestation has been found for Late Bronze Age Jerusalem at the City of David, the extrabiblical (as well as biblical) written evidence attests to its location in this region." [Richard S. Hess, "Fallacies in the Study of Early Israel: An Onomastic Perspective," *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (Nov. 1994): 345.

The second comparison reveals that in the same way Melchizedek blessed Abraham, Christ Jesus as our High Priest will be a blessing.

Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek which was an acknowledgement of his superiority over the patriarch. As a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is superior over all other priesthods.

Melchizedek was an independent high priest; he was not connected with any order of priests. "There is no mention of a mother, no mention of a father, and no mention of his genealogy. This does not mean that he did not have a mother, a father, or a genealogical record. Insofar as the Melchizedekian Order of Priesthood was concerned, ancestry was not important in establishing his claim to priesthood. The appointment to Melchizedek's Priesthood was independent of human relations. This was not true of the Aaronic Order (the Levitical Order) because unless a person could prove he was a descendant of Aaron, he was disqualified from the priesthood. This was stated by the Law in Numbers 16-17. When the Jews returned from the Babylonian Captivity, many claimed the office of priesthood. Some could not prove they were direct descendants of Aaron and these people were disqualified (Ezra 2:61-63; Neh. 7:63-65). For the Levitical Priesthood, genealogy was very important, but it was not important for the Melchizedekian Priesthood. Thus, there is no mention of the *beginning of days nor end of life*, there is no record of the birth or the death of Melchizedek. Both events occurred, but there is no record of them." [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews-James, I & II Peter-Jude*, p. 97]. Ancestry is immaterial for the priests according to the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek had a timeless ministry. The Levitical priests had time limits set on their ability to serve as priests which was from age twenty-five to age fifty (Num. 8:24-25). This means they had a definite, mandated beginning and a definite, mandated end to

their service. The Bible does not record any beginning or end to his ministry nor does it identify a successor to Melchizedek's priesthood. It is very interesting to note the comparison with the Son of God in that both are perpetually priests.

Also like the Son of God, he ministers to all people. He was priest to his people and he served as priest to Abram and his men. The Levitical priesthood was restricted in its ministry to Israel. The Melchizedek priesthood is universal.

The point of this is that Melchizedek and his priesthood is a type of the Messiah and His priesthood. Where Melchizedek is the type, Christ Jesus is the reality.

Many people believe Melchizedek was the pre-incarnate Christ and what Abram experienced was a theophany or, as some people call it, a Christophany. "Certain scholars have thought that Melchizedek was an appearance of the preincarnate Christ in the OT (technically called a Christophany). They argue this on the basis of Hebrews 7:3, which says that there is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. However, this statement is simply to be understood in the sense that his priesthood was not connected to any priestly family line. Melchizedek had a priestly office by special divine appointment, and was thus a type of Jesus Christ in his priesthood. The writer of Hebrews says that Melchizedek was one "resembling the Son of God" (7:3); this clearly indicates that he was not himself the Son of God. [Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, s.v. "Melchizedek," *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, p. 878.]

There are actually several different ways people have tried to identify or explain who what Melchizedek was. There are several variations on the concept that Melchizedek was a divine being. "A second century Gnostic text identified him as Jesus himself. A sect known as the Melchizedekians arose early in the third century AD. Composed mainly of Jewish converts, it affirmed Melchizedek was a heavenly being superior to Jesus since Jesus was a mediator of men, but Melchizedek was considered a mediator of angels. [This seems to reflect the high esteem in which the Jews held angels and which author of Hebrews addressed in chapter 1.] In the third century, according to Epiphanius (fourth century bishop of Salamis), Melchizedek was identified as the Holy Spirit by the Coptic heresiarch Hieracas. Others understood Melchizedek to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus." [David L. Allen, *The New American Commentary: Hebrews*, p. 409].

Another way that Melchizedek has historically been understood is as "an angelic being, perhaps Michael the Archangel. A third view suggested by some Jewish rabbis in the time of Jerome, was that Melchizedek was Shem, the son of Noah. Philo took Melchizedek to be an actual human high priest who represented *nous* (mind) in an allegorical fashion. Carmignac suggested Melchizedek is a symbolic name for the human Davidic Messiah. Kobelski regarded Melchizedek as a historical and a heavenly figure, but not an angel. He was superior to angels but inferior to the Son. Davila suggested he was a tutelary deity of the Davidic house along the lines of ancestral deification in West Semitic royal cults. A seventh view [the correct view] takes



Melchizedek to be a Canaanite king-priest of Salem (Jerusalem) who was a worshiper of the true God.” [David L. Allen, *The New American Commentary: Hebrews*, pp. 409-410].

All but the last of these is simply speculation with no basis in Scripture or they were developed to support some particular erroneous theological viewpoint. According to literal hermeneutics, there is no consideration that should be given to any thought that Melchizedek was an angel, the Holy Spirit, Shem, a heavenly being of some sort mediating for angels, or as an allegory representing whatever the allegorical theologian decides he is representing. Melchizedek was the king/priest of Salem who believed in the Creator God of the Bible.

There are a number of reasons to reject the concept of a theophany or Christophany. Melchizedek was not God and “made like the Son of God” isn’t saying that he was. The word is ἁφομοιόω and it means to be like, to resemble, or to be similar to; it does not mean it is the same thing even though in English we might consider that interpretive option. The Revised Standard Version and the Holman Christian Standard Bible both read “resembling the Son of God” and in English that renders the meaning less confusing. In Psalm 110:4, the Father is speaking to the One at His right hand and refers to Him as a perpetual priest according to the order of Melchizedek which differentiates between the two, the Son and Melchizedek. Christ is described as “better” than Melchizedek which also serves to differentiate them. I didn’t check every occurrence, but it seems likely that every Christophany is announced by “the Lord appeared” or “the Angel of the Lord” which was not present in reference to Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18. Finally, theophanies were temporary intrusions into time and space by God or God’s representative. Melchizedek was a man with a permanent abode and ministry in Jerusalem. Christ did not manifest Himself to Abram in a theophany and then leave time and space.

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