

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

asked the sons of Zebedee, *Can<sup>1</sup> ye drink the cup which I drink?* asks now, *Can ye descend into this abyss?* Trembling we reply, in words which shock us by their audacity, but which are really words of faith, *We can.* As of old to the early disciples, the Master confirms the daring reply: *Ye shall.*<sup>2</sup> And supported by the everlasting arms, step by step, we safely descend the awful path. Sometimes the Master points to the heights of earthly success, and asks, "Can ye climb that perilous path?" Himself has taught us the reply. Grasping firmly the guiding hand, we mount the marked out path. And whether we descend or rise, as men describe the lot of men, our life is one long march of triumph; for *in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

---

### THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

#### XIII. THE PRIEST AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHISEDEC (CHAP. VII. 11-28).

THE didactic significance of this section is, that in Jesus Christ as the Priest after the order of Melchisedec the ideal of priesthood is realized. The truth is established by the method of comparison. That Christ is the best possible Priest is proved by showing that He is better than the familiar Levitical priest. The emphasis of the passage lies now on the inferior, unsatisfactory nature of the Levitical priesthood, now on the supreme, absolute worth of the Messianic Priest.

Having demonstrated the superiority of the Melchisedec priesthood over the Levitical, by setting forth the personal

<sup>1</sup> Mark x. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ver. 39.

dignity of the priest of Salem as attested by the history, the writer proceeds next to make use of the text from the 110th Psalm for the same purpose. From this famous prophetic oracle he draws no less than three arguments in support of his position. The first infers the inferiority of the Levitical priesthood from the mere fact of another priesthood being promised (vers. 11-14); the second infers its transient nature from the eternal duration ascribed to the new order (vers. 15-20); the third emphasises the fact that the new order of priesthood, in contrast to the old, is introduced with an oath, implying the transcendent importance of the one as compared with the other (vers. 20-22).

The first of these arguments, stripped of all adjuncts, is expressed in these terms: "*If then perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there that a different priest should arise after the order of Melchisedec?*" The remaining matter of vers. 11-14 is of the nature of explanatory comment. On two points the writer deemed it necessary to offer explanations: on the term *perfection* (τελείωσις); and on the expression, *the order of Melchisedec*, as implying the origination of a new, different (ἕτερον) type of priesthood, not to be called after the order of Aaron (οὐ κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Ἀαρὼν λέγεσθαι). The parenthetical clause, "for under (rather, upon) it the people received the law" (ver. 11), is his comment on the word τελείωσις. The purpose is to justify the demand of perfection from a priesthood laying claim to finality. It is assumed that a priesthood worthy of and destined to perpetuity must make men "perfect," in the sense of bringing them really near to God, establishing between them and God a true, unimpeded fellowship by the removal of sin. It is further assumed that if perfection in this sense was possible at all under the Mosaic law, it was so in virtue of the Levitical priesthood, seeing that thereon, undeniably, as a foundation,

the people was legally constituted as a people in covenant with God. On both grounds, because it is the function of all priesthoods to perfect the worshipper as to conscience, and because of the central position occupied by the Levitical priesthood in the Mosaic law, it is held to be reasonable to demand of that priesthood, conceived of as laying claim to finality and refusing to be superseded, nothing less than "perfection." To the advocates of Levitical finality is offered the alternative: either perfection or supersession. To the plea, "Our time-honoured priesthood may be permanently useful in its own place, as part of a greater whole, though it come short of what you call perfection, and aspire not to a virtue which can rightfully be ascribed only to the whole legal system," the stern reply is, "No; it must be all or nothing." And from the oracle in the Psalter it is inferred that it is not capable of being all. By that oracle it is, as matter of fact, superseded; therefore it cannot have been able to provide "perfection." Such is the inexorable logic of the Christian apologist.

Here again we have occasion to note the affinity between our author and the Apostle Paul. Paul said, The law must be everything in salvation or nothing. To the Judaistic compromise, law *and* grace, he replied by an "either—or." Either the law *or* grace, choose your alternative. The same "either—or" reappears here in an altered form. Either perfection must come by the Levitical priesthood, the soul or kernel of the law, or it must pass away as unprofitable, and give place to a different order of priesthood, which can perform the task for which it has been found incompetent.

We come now to the writer's comment on the expression, "the order of Melchisedec." He regards it as involving a *legal revolution*. It means the origination of a different type of priesthood, to be called after Melchisedec, not after Aaron; and it involves therefore change in the law in at

least one point: a priest for the Israel of God who does not belong to the Levitical tribe—a mark of the Messianic priest inferable from prophecy, and verified as a matter of fact in the history of Jesus (vers. 13, 14); this one apparently minute change implying many more. But why insist on the revolutionary effect of the introduction of the new order of priesthood? Would it not have been more prudent in the apologist of Christianity to have concealed or minimised the legal change that was to accompany the advent of the Messianic priest? Such timid, time-serving apologetic did not suit the temper of New Testament writers. Jesus boldly claimed to have brought to the world “new wine,” and all New Testament writers accentuate the innovating effect of Christianity, the writer of our epistle not least. He has the courage to look the revolutionary character of the new religion straight in the face. And his courage is true wisdom. For, in the first place, there is the undeniable fact to be reckoned with, that Jesus Christ sprang out of Judah, “as to which tribe Moses spake nothing about priests.” The only way to deal with such a fact is to find a broad principle that covers and justifies it: such as that the priesthood is the foundation of the legal system, so that a change in the priesthood prepares us to expect manifold change in the law. Then the bold proclamation of this principle, while accounting for the evident fact, at the same time serves admirably the main purpose of the argument, which is to show the radical defectiveness of the Levitical priesthood. Men think twice before they make any change in an existing state of things which involves a political revolution. They bear with innumerable abuses loudly calling for reform, because they fear that if one stone of the building (not to speak of the foundation) be removed, the whole edifice may come tumbling down. What then may be inferred from the fact, that God, by the mouth of a prophet, declared His intention to inaugurate a new

priesthood that should supersede the old, and by consequence abrogate the whole legal system whereof it was the foundation? Surely this, that in His view, and in very truth, the Levitical priesthood was hopelessly insufficient, incapable of fulfilling the ends for which a priesthood exists, fit only to foreshadow the true priesthood by which perfection might come, and by its defectiveness to prepare men for thankfully embracing the "better hope," no matter with how much innovation on existing usage it might be ushered in.

It is probable that the "evident fact," that our Lord did not belong to the tribe of Levi, appeared to Hebrew Christians an insuperable objection to His claim to be a priest. We cannot therefore but admire the tact with which our author virtually turns it into an argument in support of that claim. It is not difficult to construct such an argument out of his rapid hints. It is to this effect. In the 110th Psalm, the rise of a new order of priesthood is predicted. This change is revolutionary; it involves the upsetting of the whole Mosaic law, whereof the Levitical priesthood was the foundation. Any amount of innovation may be looked for under the new order of priesthood. We need not be surprised if we find that the Messianic priest when he comes does not belong to the tribe of Levi; on the contrary, we ought to regard that circumstance as a matter of course, for a descendant of Aaron would not be a suitable person to inaugurate an entirely new order of priesthood.

This is one use to which our Lord's descent from Judah might be put, that, *viz.*, of showing that in so far as He did not trace His descent to Levi His history corresponded to what the oracle in the Psalter would lead one to expect. There is another service which it could be made to render, and which possibly it did render to some of the Hebrew Christians as they reflected thereon. It

might help to cure inordinate fondness for the religious ordinances of the old dispensation by suggesting a process of reasoning backwards thus : Jesus is the Christ : we all believe that ; but Jesus is descended from David, not from Aaron. Yet is He a priest, according to the oracle. But a priest not connected with the tribe of Levi, what an innovation, what a revolutionary transgression of the law that is ! It is no light thing to set aside, virtually to disannul, a law given thousands of years ago to our fathers. If such a momentous step was necessary, what an unsatisfactory affair must the Levitical system of priests and sacrifices, after all, have been ! Why then cling to such poor, beggarly elements when that which is perfect is come ?

The second argument drawn from Psalm cx. to prove the inferiority of the Levitical priesthood is stated in these terms : *And it is yet more abundantly evident, if, according to the similitude of Melchisedec, there ariseth a different priest, who hath become priest, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an indissoluble life. For He is witnessed to that "Thou art a priest FOR EVER after the order of Melchisedec."*

The thing that is said to be evident here is, not that which is declared to be evident in ver. 14, but the general thesis which the writer is engaged in establishing ; viz. the unsatisfactory character of the Levitical priesthood, making change of the priesthood, and consequently of the whole law, necessary. The use of a different word (*κατάδηλον* instead of *πρόδηλον*) puts us on our guard against supposing that the reference is still to the fact that our Lord sprang out of Judah ; and possibly points to a different kind of evidence, that which comes through logical inference, as distinct from that supplied by facts. The writer means to say, that the argument he now proceeds to state makes it even more evident than the one previously advanced that by the Levitical priesthood perfection could not and never

was intended to come.<sup>1</sup> And the justice of the affirmation becomes apparent when we consider the drift of this new argument. The emphasis lies on the expression *for ever* (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). The writer views the phrase as at once signalling the peculiar excellence of the new order, and dooming to decay and death the old order for its weakness and unprofitableness. From the mere fact that a new order is instituted he has already inferred that the old order was inadequate; and now from the *eternal* character of the new order he infers with, if possible, even more cogency the transient nature of the old.

The terms in which, under this new point of view, the two priesthoods are contrasted are very forcible. They transcend the limits of the argument, and suggest thoughts which an expositor must refrain from expatiating on, lest the connected chain of reasoning be lost sight of. There is a double contrast hinted at in ver. 16: first, one between *law* and *power*; and next, one between a *fleshly* commandment and an *endless* life. The former distinguishes the Levitical priesthood, as resting on positive law, from the Messianic, as resting on spiritual fitness and energy. The Levitical priest was law-made, without reference to spiritual qualifications; the Messianic Priest becomes a priest because He hath inherent spiritual fitness for, and therefore inherent right to, the office. The latter contrast distinguishes the Levitical priest as liable to death from the Messianic Priest as one over whom death has no power. For the epithet *fleshly* (σαρκίνης),<sup>2</sup> applied to the commandments regulating

<sup>1</sup> Many commentators think that what is declared evident in ver. 14 is the change in the law. But it is not the mere fact of change, but the *need* for it, created by the defect of the Levitical priesthood, that the writer has in view. So Bengel: "*Patet, scilicet illud quod versu 11 asseritur (nullam consummationem factam esse per sacerdotium leviticum).*"

<sup>2</sup> This is the true reading, not σαρκίης as in T.R. Adjectives in *vos* denote the material of which anything is made. Thus we have, in 2 Cor. iii. 3, οὐκ ἐν πλαξίν λίθιναις ἀλλ' ἐν πλαξίν καρδίαις σαρκίνας: "not on stone tablets, but on tablets consisting in fleshen hearts." The adjective σαρκικός expresses a moral idea, for which the word "carnal" should be reserved.

appointments to the priestly office, points to the fact that all the conditions had reference to the corruptible body. A man's fitness for office was determined by physical considerations. He must be the son of this or that father; without blemish in his body, and so forth. It was altogether an affair of physical descent and fleshly qualities. And just on that account it was transient, not merely in the individual, but in the kind. A priestly order whose existence was based on the properties of corruptible flesh must share the fate of its unstable foundation. Of it, as of the flesh with which it is so closely associated, it was written, "Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return." All flesh is grass, and a priesthood based on fleshly requirements must of necessity fall before the scythe of Time, while the priesthood of spirit and righteousness, like the word of God, and all things Divine, liveth and abideth for ever.

Just such a thought is it that our author finds in the 110th Psalm. The oracle uttered there sounds to his ear as an echo of the voice from the wilderness. He hears in it the death-knell of the priesthood of Levi and of the whole law with which it was connected, and at the same time the Divine fiat which calls into being a new dispensation. Hence the sentences which follow (vers. 18, 19), wherein the writer states what he takes to be the practical effect of the solemn announcement in the psalm. The rendering of these verses in the Authorized Version totally misses the sense; it is perhaps the greatest and most serious of many failures occurring in the epistle. What is really said is this: "There takes place (through the oracle in the psalm), on the one hand (*μὲν*), a disannulling of the commandment going before, on account of its weakness and unprofitableness (for the law perfected nothing); and (there takes place through the same oracle), on the other hand (*δὲ*), the introduction thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw

nigh to God." In short, the text from the psalm is to our author a bell, which with solemn tones rings out the old order of things, and at the same moment rings in the new; rings out the priesthood of Levi and the Levitical sacrifices, and rings in the Christ that is to be and that sublime sacrifice of Himself which once offered shall possess eternal worth and undying virtue. As he listens with devout attention to the solemn peal, he feels as if it said to him: "The priesthood of physical descent is weak and unprofitable. It must pass away, so must the whole ritual law; for it is all alike weak and useless; it makes nothing perfect, it fails of its professed end throughout. But be of good cheer; Christ is coming; another and a very different Priest shall arise, one who is really and perfectly holy, and of regal dignity, and whose priesthood rests on personal merit, not on fleshly descent. He will make all things perfect. What the old law could not do, because of its weakness, He will do effectually. Place your hope in Him; for He will meet all your need, sanctify you, bring you nigh and keep you nigh to God."

"A BETTER HOPE, THROUGH WHICH WE DRAW NIGH UNTO GOD." If one were to attempt by typography to indicate the great, salient thoughts of this epistle, these words would certainly have to be printed in capitals. They contain the dogmatic centre of the epistle, setting forth Christianity as the religion of the better hope by comparison with the earlier religion; absolutely as the religion of good hope, because the religion through which men for the first time enter into intimate fellowship with God. This, as has been indicated in the introductory paper, is the distinctive conception of the Christian religion, or of the good which came by Jesus Christ, contained in our epistle. In the synoptical gospels the *summum bonum* appears as the kingdom of God; in the fourth gospel, as eternal life; in Paul's epistles, as the righteousness of God; in the Epistle to the

Hebrews, as free access to, unrestricted fellowship with, God. The thing is one, though the names and the view-points are diverse; and under any of the four aspects Christianity is well entitled to be called the religion of good hope, the religion that absolutely satisfies the highest hopes and aspirations of mankind. Corresponding to the four phases of the good He brings are the functions of the Saviour. He introduces into the kingdom of God as the Son of God and Son of man: He communicates eternal life as the Logos; he makes men partakers of the Divine righteousness as their federal Head; He brings them nigh to God as their great High Priest, the aspect under which He is appropriately presented in this epistle.

The third argument taken from the text in Psalm cx. to prove the inferiority of the Levitical and the incomparable superiority of the Messianic priesthood rests on the fact that the new order is introduced with an oath (vers. 20-22). By a lengthy parenthesis (ver. 21) pointing out the difference between the two priesthoods in the matter of the oath, the statement of the argument is rendered elliptical but not obscure, for the meaning obviously is: "Inasmuch as not without an oath He was made priest, by so much more must the constitution in connexion with which He exercises His sacerdotal functions be superior to the old."

The principle of the argument is, that God doth not swear oaths idly. When He says, "I have sworn, and will not repent," the matter on hand must be supremely important, and of an enduring nature. The new priesthood must be one of whose institution He will never have any cause to repent. It is implied that the old priesthood was one of which God had cause to repent. The oracle insinuates that God had found the Levitical institute after trial unsatisfactory; and as if weary of its law-made officials, and of their daily task of butchery and bloodshed, He swears a solemn oath saying: "As I live, I will bring this fleshly

system to an end. I will ordain a new Priest not of Aaron's line, who shall perform His work in a very different way, whose character and service shall be to Me an everlasting delight, and whose merit shall benefit sinners time without end."

But it is noteworthy that in connexion with this final argument from the psalm, based on the oath, it is not so much the inferiority of the Levitical priesthood that is insisted on, as the inferiority of the dispensation under which they served. What is said is not, Because He is made a priest with an oath, therefore He exercises a superior kind of priesthood; but, Because He is made a priest with an oath, therefore He is become surety of a *better covenant*. It is now not the men of the olden time, but the whole system of things with which they are associated, that is found wanting, the very fundamental constitution of the Israelitish commonwealth, by which it was made a people of God. The writer waxes ever bolder as he advances. First the priesthood is condemned; then the law creating and regulating it; then the covenant, which gave birth, not merely to the priesthood, but to the very people for which it transacted in holy things. The introduction of this reference to the covenant at first surprises us. We partly understand it when we observe that, in the next section of the epistle, the covenants old and new become a leading subject of discourse. It is another instance of the skilful interweaving of a new theme into the one about to be dismissed. But we understand the new turn of thought fully only when we perceive that it fitly belongs to what goes before. When we attach due importance to the great idea expressed by the words, "*Through which we draw nigh to God,*" this becomes clear. By the covenant at Sinai Israel became a people related to God, theoretically near to Him. But only theoretically. Israel was nigh, yet not nigh, not merely because of her sin, but through the very ordinances

that were designed to express and maintain the intimacy; witness the Levitical priesthood, the veil, and the inaccessible holy place. Thinking of this, our author feels that the Sinaitic covenant, which brought Israel nominally near to God, was a poor, disappointing thing, a failure, like all else belonging to the old religion. It might have cost him an effort to say so, had not Jeremiah with prophetic liberty said it before him. But, encouraged by Jeremiah's famous oracle of the new covenant, he does say so, by implication, by speaking of Jesus as the surety or guarantor of a *better* covenant. It is for him a better covenant, because it does really what the old covenant did only in name, *viz.* brings men nigh to God. And he calls Jesus "surety" (ἔγγυος) of the better covenant, because it is He who prevents it also from being a failure like the old. There is literary felicity in the use of the word, as playfully alluding to the foregoing word ἐγγιζόμεν. There is more than literary felicity, for the two words probably have the same root, so that we might render ἔγγυος *the one who insures permanently near relations with God.*<sup>1</sup>

We have now to notice the last of the five arguments adduced to prove the inferiority of the Levitical priesthood, as compared with that of the Priest after the order of Melchisedec, which turns on the contrast between *many* and *one*. It is to this effect. The old priesthood was im-

<sup>1</sup> On the word ἔγγυος, Passow remarks: "Probably of the same origin with ἔγγυος, ἐγγύη, from γυῖον = lying to the hand." Referring to the view that ἔγγυος forms a *paronomasia* with ἐγγιζόμεν. Bleek expresses doubt on account of the distance between the two words, and thinks it more probable that ἔγγυος is used out of regard to the similarity of sound between it and γέγομεν going before. The question has been much discussed among commentators, whether Jesus is surety for men to God (so the old theologians of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches), or for God to men (so Schlichting, Grotius, and others), or both (so Limborch, Baumgarten, etc.). The question really cannot be decided. The word occurs here only in the New Testament, and all that can be certainly taken out of it is the general idea that Jesus insures the stability of the new covenant and of the close relations between God and men which it establishes. All beyond has to be read into it.

perfect in this, that it was exercised by many priests in succession; the new is perfect in this, that the office is held in perpetuity by one Person, who continueth for ever, and therefore hath a priesthood that doth not pass from Him to another (*ἀπαράβατον*: vers. 23, 24). To appreciate the full force of the argument, it is well to remember that even under the Levitical system the importance of having a continuous priesthood was felt. To such a feeling may be ascribed the fact that Aaron and his sons were consecrated simultaneously. Some think that this simultaneous consecration is alluded to in the text, when it is said that "they indeed have been made many priests." There can be no doubt, at all events, that one end served by simultaneous ordination was to provide for the office being continuously occupied. From the nature of the case this was desirable. If there was need for a priest at all, there was need for one at all times; the office must abide without intermission, though the official might change. It is interesting to notice in this connexion, that Eleazar was invested with the office of high priest before Aaron his father died. Moses took both father and son up to Mount Hor, and stripping the sacerdotal garments from the father put them on the son, whereupon the first occupant of the office breathed out his life.<sup>1</sup> Such precautions might serve after a fashion to secure for Israel an unchangeable priesthood. But if it were possible to have one priest never dying, and performing efficiently his duties perennially, that were obviously a more excellent way. If not only the priesthood, but the priest were continuous, that were the ideally perfect state of things. Our author here informs his readers that such is the actual state of things under the priesthood of Jesus. He, because He abideth for ever, hath the priesthood unchangeably.

The New Testament Priest was not exempt from death.

<sup>1</sup> Num. xx. 28.

He too, like Aaron, ascended a hill to die. But that fact is not in contradiction to the doctrine enunciated. He did not require to hand over His office to another, for death was not to have power over Him. He died as one possessing the power of an indissoluble life, taking death up as an element into his life, through which its power, instead of being destroyed or impaired, was rather enhanced. He rose again, and after forty days ascended another hill, not to die, but to be translated to the celestial sanctuary, there to abide a Priest for ever.

So we come back, at the close of the argument, to the point from which we started: the Priest after the order of Melchisedec, superior to the Levitical priests in all respects, but especially in this, that He is a Priest for ever. And by an easy transition we pass on to the natural consequence of Christ's unchangeable priesthood. "Whence also He is able to save perfectly those that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to intercede for them" (ver. 25).

Noticeable here are the terms in which Christ's power to help men is described. He is able to *save perfectly* all who seek to attain the end of all religion, close fellowship with God. In making this statement, the writer has in view what he has said of the Levitical priesthood, *viz.* that perfection came not by it. He here says in effect, Perfection does come by Jesus. But he does not say this in so many words. He prefers to vary the phrase, aiming at the greatest possible breadth and strength of statement. "Perfection," *τελείωσις*, narrows the range of benefit, pointing chiefly if not exclusively to the pardon of sin. Therefore for this word is substituted the more general and comprehensive *σώζειν*, suggesting the idea of salvation in all its aspects. Then the root idea of *τελείωσις*, reaching the end, is thrown into the adverbial phrase *εἰς τὸ παντελές*, which may be rendered "perfectly," "completely," "to all

intents and purposes." Thereby is ascribed to Christ the power of conferring a salvation uniting in itself all possible "perfections," accomplishing all manner of devoutly to be wished beneficent ends: pardon of sin, spiritual renewal, defence against temptation to apostasy, maintenance of Christian fidelity, even unto death. It has been discussed whether *παντελής* contains a reference to time. Such a reference is very natural in connexion with the asserted unchangeableness of Christ's priesthood; and for us who live so far down in the Christian centuries, it is an inevitable homiletic use of the text. But as the writer expected the consummation soon, the temporal reference must, to say the least, have had a very subordinate place in his mind. His aim was to ascribe the highest degree of saving power to Jesus, in contrast to the impotence with which he had previously charged the Levitical priesthood. The law, he would say, the Levitical priesthood, completed nothing, not even the cancelling of guilt; Christ completes everything that enters into the idea of salvation, as most comprehensively conceived. Thus understood, this text favours the broad construction I put upon the title "the Sanctifier," given to Jesus in chap. ii. 11, as including sanctification in the ethical Pauline sense, as well as the narrower sense of "justification," in which it is sometimes used in this epistle.

Noticeable further in the remarkable sentence now under consideration are the means or method by which Christ is represented as perfectly saving those who through Him approach God. He saves by *intercession*, for such doubtless is the meaning of the word *ἐντυγχάνειν*. In classic usage it signifies to meet with. In Acts xxv. 24 it is construed with a dative, and a genitive governed by *περί*, and signifies to deal with one concerning a matter. Here, as in Romans viii. 26, when it is compounded with *ὑπέρ*, it means to intercede, or more generally to transact on

behalf of. That the notion of intercession, speaking for, is mainly intended appears from what follows, the object of which is to point out that Christ, in consequence of His perfection, does not need to offer sacrifice, or to do anything more than intercede, in contrast to the Levitical priests, who, by reason of their infirmity, had to offer up sacrifices daily. The writer would say: "A word from Him is enough. As by His word of power He created and upholds all things, so by a word He can bring to bear all the resources of the Almighty for the complete and final salvation of His brethren." What power can be greater than this?

A word of intercession—nothing more is required; one who by a mere word can save is the sort of High Priest that meets our need—such is the import of what remains of this chapter (vers. 26-28). The Priest that suits us, that can perfect us as to our relations with God, that can bring us nigh and keep us nigh to God, is one perfectly righteous in all relations, "holy" towards God, benevolent towards men, free from any fault that might disqualify Him for His priestly office, separated locally from sinners by translation to the blessed region of peace, where He is exempt from temptation and eternally secure against moral evil, exalted to a position of supercelestial glory and power in full and equal fellowship with His Father, needing not to offer repeated sacrifices, or to do anything whatever in our interest beyond interceding for us. Here at last is the writer's ideal of priesthood. In determining the marks of the Melchisedec type, he omitted to say how far they satisfied the ideal, or to indicate what the ideal was. Here, at the close of the discussion on the new type, he supplies the lack by sketching in a few rapid strokes an ideal priest. Does the ideal answer to the type? is it drawn with the type in view, and in order to assign more definite values to certain terms left vague—king, righteousness, peace? It is not improbable that the beginning and the end thus

meet in the author's thought, and that the terms *ὁσιος*, *ἄκακος*, *ἀμίαντος* define "righteousness," that the phrase *κεχωρισμένος ἀπὸ τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν* interprets "peace," and that *ὑψηλότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν γενόμενος* indicates the significance of "king."

Thus far all seems clear; but what shall we say of the last trait in the picture of the ideal Priest, which represents Him as one who needs not to repeat sacrifice? Is this an element in the ideal to which there is no counterpart in the type? In determining the marks of the Melchisedec type, our author said nothing about sacrifice. He may however have thought of Melchisedec as offering no sacrifices, and have regarded this fact also as possessing typical significance. In so doing he would simply have been applying his method of determining the type by laying stress on the silences as well as the utterances of Scripture. If this suggestion be correct, then we must regard the statement concerning the non-repetition of sacrifice as a supplement to the doctrine of the type reserved for the close of the discussion, as the place where it could most fitly and impressively be introduced.

In the writer's mind this last feature is connected with those going before, and especially with those relating to the moral character of the ideal Priest, as effect with cause. Because He is "holy, harmless, undefiled," *therefore* He needs not to repeat sacrifice; and this is His crowning merit. To the Hebrew Christians it would probably appear a grave defect, rather than a merit, in the Priest after the order of Melchisedec, that He was not constantly occupied in offering sacrifices like the priests after the order of Aaron. The morning and evening sacrifices, and the great day of atonement annually recurring, what a comfort! And what a blank would be created were these swept away, and nothing similar took their place! Their teacher gives them to understand that they are mistaken,

and that the repetition of sacrifice in the Levitical system was due to the moral imperfection of the offerers. He does not mean to say that it was wholly due to this cause, for he elsewhere traces it to the nature of the sacrifices (chap. x. 1-11). But he does mean to say that it was due in part to this cause, and that is the point which he deems it needful to insist on here. The infirmity of the priest made it necessary that he should offer repeated sacrifices for himself, and because for himself, therefore for the people; for the priestly offices of sinful officials could not avail to remove the people's sins for ever, if indeed at all. On the other hand, the High Priest of the new, better order has no need to offer repeated sacrifices, either for Himself or for His people. Not for Himself, because He has been perfected both in character and in state for evermore.<sup>1</sup> Free from sin, even in His earthly state, when subject to temptation, though not free from sinless infirmity, and worthy even then to be described by the august attributes "holy, harmless, undefiled," He is now in a position in which sin is out of the question. Not for others, because He offered for sinners a perfect sacrifice once for all.

That sacrifice was *Himself*. The great thought comes in here for the first time. Once struck, as Delitzsch says, the note sounds on ever louder and louder. It comes in very relevantly here in connexion with an argument designed to prove that repetition of sacrifice was a mark of inferiority and weakness adhering to the Levitical system, and that the non-repetition of sacrifice was an equally sure

<sup>1</sup> The term *τετελειωμένος*, ver. 28, here, as in ii. 10 and v. 9, means to fit for office. The fitness in this case embraces two elements: a character rendered temptation-proof, and a position inaccessible to temptation. That both elements are included appears from the description of the ideal priest in ver. 26. The idea of "consecration" is foreign to the connexion of thought. The same remark applies to ver. 11. The rendering of Mr. Rendall, "seeing again that there was a consecration under the Levitical priesthood," seems to me to involve the argument in confusion.

mark of the superiority of the Christian dispensation. For the nature of the sacrifice in either case had an important bearing on the question of repetition or non-repetition. The ancient priest of Israel, himself morally stained, had to offer a brute beast physically faultless, a mere shadowy emblem of holiness; and such offerings being intrinsically worthless, he had to present them again and again by way of renewing an impressive spectacle. The High Priest of humanity offered *Himself*, and by the very act demonstrated Himself to be perfectly holy, presenting in His death an embodiment of exact, loving obedience to the Divine will and of self-effacing devotion to the well-being of man; and just because the offering was the very ideal of sacrifice realized, it needed not to be repeated. The offering was presented once for all, and stands there before the universe a thing perfectly well done, recognisable as an eternally valid and valuable act by all men of purged vision, whose minds are not blinded, as were those of the Hebrews, by long familiarity with and doting attachment to the beggarly elements of a rude ritual.

But how does this sacrifice "of nobler name" stand related to the "order of Melchisedec"? Does it lie within or without the type? On first thoughts it seems as if the answer must be "without." Not only does it take place on earth, while the Melchisedec priesthood belongs to heaven, where no sacrifice is offered *de novo*, but there appears to be nothing in the history of Melchisedec which would lead us to look for such a sacrifice. Neither by the utterances nor by the silences of Scripture does it seem possible to arrive at *self-sacrifice* as one of the notes of the Melchisedec type. By the silences we might rather arrive at the conclusion that there was, not merely no repetition of sacrifice, but no sacrifice at all, in the new order, and that its functions were limited to prayer and benediction. There is only one way of escape out of the difficulty, though it

may be doubted if it was in the writer's thoughts. We have seen that the non-repetition of sacrifice results from the moral attributes of the ideal Priest. Because He is "holy, harmless, undefiled," therefore He needs not to be continually performing new sacrificial acts. What if the one sacrifice be also the result of the same moral attributes? What if the whole truth be, "holy, harmless, undefiled," in one word, perfectly righteous, therefore *one* sacrifice and *only* one, and that sacrifice *Himself*? This would lead us to regard Christ's death as the natural effect of His fidelity to the interests of God and man in this evil world. And this is the simple truth. Whatever theological significance may attach to that death, this is the fundamental fact on which our theological construction must rest. The first lesson Jesus taught His disciples on the meaning of His passion was, that His cross came to Him through loyalty to duty, that He suffered for righteousness' sake.<sup>1</sup> In the light of this doctrine we comprehend why there was one sacrifice, and only one, and that one "Himself." There was one sacrifice, because the Holy One lived in an evil world, to which His holiness, even, yea, above all, His love, His brotherly sympathy with man, was an offence; and they cried in fierce intolerance, "Crucify Him." There was only one sacrifice, because after His death He was raised to the region of peace, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

By this train of thought it appears to be demonstrable that self-sacrifice enters as an element into the Melchisedec type. There can be no doubt at all that it is an essential feature of the *ideal* Priesthood. The highest possible priesthood is that in which priest and victim are one, and the only true sacrifice is that which results from character, and reveals, is offered through, the indwelling spirit. The proof of this is the Spirit of Christ witnessing in our

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 24.

hearts. There is no other proof. If a man does not see this for himself, typological arguments, whether from Melchisedec or from Aaron, will not help him. We see only what we bring. Another thing the man of open spiritual vision understands: that the real nature of Christ's sacrifice is to be learned from His life on earth. The perplexities arising out of the typological form into which the truth concerning Christ's priesthood is cast in our epistle have driven some to find His true sacrifice in a perpetual service of love and praise rendered by Him to God in heaven. It is rather to be found in His earthly career of heroic fidelity to God amid incessant temptation culminating in the crucifixion. There lies the pathos, the moral power, and the inspiration which helps us to live well. Thence we know anything we do know of the spirit of Christ's life in heaven. His spirit is "eternal"; the mind that is in Him now is the same mind that animated Him while He lived in this world. But it is the mind that *was* in Him that interprets to us the mind that *is* in Him. And it is the spirit of His earthly life that gives value to His heavenly life for God and for men. The temporal at once illuminates and enshrines the eternal. Without those sacred years lived under Syrian skies the eternal life of the High Priest of humanity would be for us an infinite void, whence issued no light to our minds and no comfort to our hearts.

The view here contended for seems to be that of the author of our epistle in this place. He speaks, not of a perpetual sacrifice in heaven, but of the sacrifice which Christ presented once for all "when He offered up Himself."<sup>1</sup> If he speak elsewhere of Christ offering sacrifice

<sup>1</sup> The question has been discussed whether τοῦτο (ver. 27, last clause) includes both the previous clauses: "First for His own sins, then for those of the people." Verbal interpretation answers in the affirmative, but the nature of the case requires a negative. The doctrine of the epistle being that Christ was ever sinless, the writer cannot have meant to represent Christ as offering a

in heaven, that is an apparent antinomy to be solved, but it must not be solved by denying that His death on earth was a priestly act.

A. B. BRUCE.

---

### THE SIXTEENTH PSALM.

#### I.

HERE is a psalm well worthy to be called, as the margin of King James's Bible translates the Jewish heading, a "golden" psalm. Golden indeed it is; it belongs to that Bible within the Bible which the Christian instinct teaches all of us to rediscover for ourselves, and in which the New Testament writers took such keen delight. In childlike faith these holy men of old found their Saviour in the 16th Psalm; and so may we, on the single condition that we do not disregard those laws of the human mind which God Himself made. Childlike faith must in us be coupled with manly reasonableness. The first believers practically rewrote the Psalter for edification, without thinking of its original meaning; they took every one of the 150 psalms into the shrine of Gospel utterances. We who come after them cannot give this particular proof of our belief in the divinity of the Old Testament revelation. In adapting the Psalms to the needs of edification, we who desire to consecrate our intellect to Christ must seek counsel of a criticism and an exegesis which are nothing if they are not psychological; that is, if they are not in full accordance with the laws of the human mind.

It is a noteworthy fact, that the latest German com-  
sacrifice for His own *sins*. Those who make *τοῦτο* include both have to take *ἀμαρτιῶν* in the sense of infirmities. So Ochlichtingius and Hofmann.