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HEBREWS: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY

**A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of New Testament Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity**

**by
James W. Mayer
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Introduction

The Epistle to the Hebrews from its first to its last chapter presents Christ as the High-priest of the New Covenant. Laying the basis for his central thought, the writer to the Hebrews proclaims Jesus Son of God, ruler of the universe (of which He is also creator), and purifier of man's sins, who, having completed His work of offering on this earth, sits now at the "right hand of the Majesty of God." (1:3). And once the author has exhaustively presented his grand theme he exhorts his readers: "Having such an High-priest, hold fast your confession." (4:4; 10:39; 11; and 12).

Significant is the fact that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the only book of the New Testament Scriptures which presents and clearly defines Christ as the High-priest of Christianity.¹ To say, however, that the early Christians, or, for that matter, the Old Testament believers who so patiently awaited the advent of the Messiah, had never before thought of the Messiah in the light of a great Priest or High-priest,

1. Adolph Saphir, The Epistle to the Hebrews, Second American ed., vol. I, p. 158.

would be an over-statement.²

Though John in his Gospel and epistles speaks of Christ's priestly work (1 Jon. 3:1), and St. Paul in his epistles even more carefully defines the Savior's work as having a priestly character (Eph. 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:5; and Rom. 8:34), it is noteworthy that the actual terms priest and high-priest are nowhere applied to Christ outside of the Epistle to the Hebrews.³ This Epistle uses the terms priest and high-priest no less than 32 times, whereas neither of these two terms is to be found so much as once in all thirteen epistles of the Apostle Paul.⁴

Psalm 110 had probably already been interpreted Messianically by the Jewish Rabbis. Yet even if "Thou art a Priest forever after the Order of Melchizedek" was generally thought to refer to Christ, the evident caution with which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews approaches the subject of our Lord's High-priesthood seemingly indicates that the concept was somewhat, if not entirely foreign to his readers.⁵ The writer does not jump immediately in medias

2. Vos points out that the sacrificial character of Christ's death was long before held in connection with Is. 53. Geerhardus Vos, "The Priesthood of Christ in Hebrews," in The Princeton Theological Review, vol. V, p. 423.

3. Saphir, Ibid.

4. F. W. Farrar, "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews with Notes and Introduction," in the Cambridge Greek Testament Series, J. S. Perowne, ed., p. xl.

5. In our opinion, formed on the basis of what such scholars as Weiss, Farrar, Dods, and Bruce say on the subject, the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews could have been none other than Jewish Christians. Bruce regards the entire Epistle as the first "Apology for Christianity," maintaining that the

res, but carefully works up to his grand conception of the Son of God and His Atoning work. Prof. Milligan enumerates the writer's various steps in preparing for and then presenting to his readers this "new view of Christianity":

At the same time its novelty and magnitude make the writer careful not to introduce it all at once, and it is instructive to notice how gradually he prepares his readers for it. Thus, though in his opening summary Christ's work as Priest is clearly pointed to in the words, "When He had made purification of sins," (1:3) the word itself is not used. And though it is abruptly introduced in 2:17, "A merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God," and again in 3:1, "The Apostle and High-priest of our confession, even Jesus," it is not dwelt upon until, by means of more familiar comparisons, the writer has raised the Hebrews' minds to a proper sense of the greatness of their Christian privileges.⁶

Bruce also speaks of what he calls the "bratorical tact" of the writer of Hebrews "in presenting in a stealthy, tentative way what he considers to be for his readers a difficult thought."⁷

Space does not permit us to compare at any length the Epistle's presentation of Christ and His Atonement with Paul's presentation of Christ's work. Let it suffice to say that the entering into the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf and

Epistle was occasioned by the influx of Gnostic dogma into the Jewish-Christian church or churches. We cannot but feel that the entire tone of the Epistle substantiates this view. Alexander Balmain Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews--The First Apology for Christianity, Introduction.

6. George Milligan, The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 103.

7. Bruce, op. cit., p. 182.

the session are dwelt on at length in Hebrews, whereas the resurrection, frequently discussed in the Pauline Epistles, is not even mentioned, but simply assumed. The Epistle to the Hebrews differs from the Pauline writings also in its presentation of Christ and His relation to the believer, and of the believer to God. Where Paul speaks of the believers as "finding their life in Him,"⁸ the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the believers as "securing access to the throne of grace through Him and in Him."⁹

Though we shall, in the succeeding pages, touch on the Priesthood of Christ as a Melchizedekian Priesthood, we shall not be able to dwell at any satisfactory length on the glorious picture of Christ as King-Priest—"King of Righteousness, King of Peace, and Priest of the most high God." (Heb. 7). Here again the writer of Hebrews' view of the person and work of Christ transcends that of any other New Testament author. Our discussion of the Melchizedekian Priesthood, however, will necessarily be limited to its implications regarding Christ as the Christian High-priest, and regarding the Melchizedekian High-priest as compared with the Aaronic priests of the Old Covenant.

Throughout our author's presentation of the Melchizedekian Priesthood we observe that he uses and quotes Scripture

8. Brooke Foss Wescott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, Second ed., p. 424.

9. Farrar, op. cit., p. xli.

in a most unique manner. Whether or not his exegetical procedure (particularly in chap. 7 mentioned above) bespeaks an Alexandrian influence is a matter we shall not discuss at length. We are not willing to go all the way with those who say that such concepts as ἀπαρχὴ ἀβραάμ (1:3) and ἑκεία (10:1) are most audible echoes of Philonic theosophy.¹⁰ On the other hand it is possible to establish a relationship between Hebrews and Alexandrian thought. Farrar suggests that the author's "Alexandrian and not Rabbinic exegesis arises from the fact that he is ignorant of Hebrew."¹¹ Whether the quotations of the Septuagint used by the writer of the Epistle indicate his ignorance of the Old Testament language, since they are not always verbatim reproductions of the original Hebrew, cannot be established with finality.

This problem of so-called 'misquotations' is fraught with no fewer difficulties than the problem of so-called 'factual errors' in the author's description of the Old Covenant tabernacle; also his alleged 'confusion' of the ceremonies of the Great Day of the Atonement with those of the daily temple sacrifices; and his use of ἡ διαθήκη in a 'two-fold' sense--in one case as "testament" (einseitig), in another as "covenant" (beiseitig). These problems will only be touched

10. Farrar seems particularly eager to press to the utmost this dependence on the Alexandrine Philosopher. Cf. F. W. Farrar, The Early Days of Christianity, Vol. I, p. 305ff., and F. W. Farrar, Messages of the Books, p. 436.

11. Farrar, Hebrews, op. cit., p. xliv.

on in the following pages. The excellence of our Epistle, the grandeur of the author's a fortiori argument, are in no way impaired by these difficulties.

In my sketch of the conception of the Christian High-priest found in Hebrews, I shall consider in the first part the person of Christ as suited to His High-priesthood, and in the second part Christ as performing the work of a High-priest. I shall stress the special emphasis of Christ as OFFERER and the OFFERING which He brings. A comparison of the Christian High-priest with the high-priests under the Old Dispensation will not be dealt with in a separate chapter, but will be drawn incidentally as the argument progresses.

PART I

Christ Has the General Qualifications of a High-priest

One who hopes to become a priest must meet certain qualifications. That the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is aware of this fact his argument clearly shows. In the first place, the writer of our Epistle frequently refers to the rules and regulations by which the Old Covenant High-priests were chosen (5:1-4; 7:5,12-14; 7:16,28). By alluding to these ordinances he makes it quite evident that choosing a high-priest in the Old Testament was serious business, and that anyone aspiring to the position of priest—and more so—of high-priest, must meet the numerous and high standards prescribed by Mosaic Law. But the writer points out the importance of the Aaronic Order only to show by contrast how much greater the Christian High-priesthood is.

We shall not discuss all the characteristics of the Christian High-priest's person. The attributes ascribed to Him in this Epistle are too numerous and too far-reaching to permit a discussion of all of them. We shall therefore limit the following chapters to a brief resume of a few of the major qualifications, which, in the reasoning of the

author of the Epistle to the Hebrews qualify Jesus as the
"Apostle and Great High-priest of our confession." (3:1).

I. Christ is Fit to be a Priest - For He is a Son

And I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things are made...

All the theology contained in the opening phrases of the Nicene Creed is likewise contained in the first two chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The author of Hebrews, with the end in view of presenting Christ, the greater Mediator of a better Covenant, begins by establishing the foundation on which he will base all successive arguments. Except he first shows Christ "a Son of God,"¹ "the effulgence of the glory of God,"²

1. According to Dods and others, the anarthous $\nu\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$ "indicates the very nature of the person through whom the selection is made." Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in the Expositor's Greek New Testament, vol. 4, p. 249. So also Bernhard Weiss, Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie, p. 497: "Darum ist ihm $\nu\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$ ohne Artikel bereits ganz zum Nomen proprium (1:1; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28) oder, richtiger ausgedrueckt, zur spezifischen Wesensbezeichnung einer einzigartigen Person geworden." Cp. also Col. 1:15-21: almost a verbatim parallel to this entire section.

2. Luther's "Glanz seiner Herrlichkeit," concerning which he says; "Aber allhie ist der Sohn ein solches Bilde vaeterliches Wesens, dasz das vaeterlich Wesen ist das Bilde selbs, und, wenn sichs also ziemete zu reden, das Bild ist aus dem vaeterlichen Wesen gemacht, dasz es nicht allein dem Vater gleich und Aehnlich ist, sondern auch sein ganzes Wesen und Natur voelliglich in sich begreift." Luther's Werke, "Ein Predigt ueber die Epistel am Christtag, Heb. 1:1-12," Erlangen ed., vol. 7, p. 199.

the "express image of the essence of God,"³ and the "upholder of the universe,"⁴ his remaining discourse is worthless.

Christ is a fit High-priest of the New Covenant because He is a Son. The full implication of Christ's sonship is expressed in the same breath that first names Him "Son":

"BY A SON--WHOM HE APPOINTED HEIR OF ALL." (ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐβήκεν κληρονομοῦν πάντων) Christ a Son, and as Son, the rightful heir of all; Christ an heir, and as heir, bearing the name "Son of God." And because this is His name, He is as much superior to the angels "as the name He has obtained is more excellent than theirs."⁵

That is a bare outline of the author's thought progression. But only a bare outline! He proceeds to elaborate further on the greatness of this Son of God. He points out that this Son is superior to all creatures; that He, the Mediator of a New Covenant, is far superior to the prophets,

3. *χαρακτῆς* is translated in the R.S.V. by "the very stamp of His nature," a translation which included the imagery of the word: a stamp or die, and then the impression or image made by the die, leaving an exact copy of the original. Cf. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, in loc. cit.

4. Luther expresses the full import of these words by: "Hie spricht er, dasz er alle Ding trage. Traegt er alle Ding, so ist er nicht getragen, und etwas ueber alle Ding: das mussz Gott sein allein." Luther's Werke, Erlangen ed., op. cit., vol. 7, p. 201.

5. The writer emphasizes how great the preeminence of this son really is, by employing the construction *τοῦτον ὄντι ὄντι* (oratorical?) and at the same time the comparative *διὰ ποσῶτερον*. On the use of the comparative here, Dr. Gotlieb Luenemann says: "The Comparative *διὰ ποσῶτερον* ... serves, since even the positive *διὰ ποσῶν* would have sufficed to indicate the superior-

the angels,⁶ and Moses.

5 For to what angel did God ever say,
"Thou⁷ art my Son,
today⁸ I have begotten Thee?"⁸

Or again,

"I will be to Him a Father,
and He shall be to Me a Son?"⁹

6 And again, when He brings the First-born into the world He says,

"Let all God's angels worship Him."¹⁰

7 Of the angels He says,

"Who makes His angels winds,
and His servants flames of fire."¹¹

8 But of the Son He says,

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,
the righteous scepter of Thy kingdom.

Thou hast loved righteousness and hated
lawlessness;

therefore God, Thy God, has annointed Thee
with the oil of gladness beyond Thy comrades."¹²

10 And,

"Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the
beginning,

ity, the more emphatic accentuation of the signification of the word." "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, p. 400.

6. It is claimed that the revealers of the Old Testament were considered (by Jewish tradition) to be not only Moses and the prophets; but the angels as well. Thus Christ's superiority over the prophets has already been established in v. 1; His superiority over Moses will shortly be established; but His superiority over the angels must also be established if He is to be proved the preeminent Revealer. Cf. Luenemann, op. cit., p. 399.

7. *ἄγγελος* : Luther says; "Das Wort heute verstehen Etliche von der Zeit der Gnaden; ich aber will's viel lieber also verstehen: Heut hab ich dich gezeuget, dasz man verstehe, dasz dieser Sohn nicht geistlicher, sondern natuerlicher Weise gezeuget werde, und sei diesz die Meinung: Du bist mein natuerlicher Sohn, den ich heute gezeuget habe bei mir, da allzeit heut ist, und da weder gestern noch morgen, sondern fuer und fuer ein ewiger Tag ist, und der immer heut heisset. Am denselben Tage habe ich dich gezeuget, du bist wahrhaftiger, natuerlicher, und ewiger Gott." Luther's Werke, "Auslegung des Andern Psalms," vol. 38, p. 10.

8. Ps. 2:7.

9. 2 Sam. 7:14.

10. Deut. 32:43 (Sept.).

11. Ps. 104:4.

12. Ps. 103:25-37.

- 11 and the heavens are the work of Thy hands;
they will perish, but Thou remainest;
12 they will grow old like a garment,
like a mantle Thou wilt roll them up,
and they will be changed.
But Thou art the same,
and Thy years will never end."¹³
- 13 But to what angel has He ever said,
"Sit at My right hand,
till I make Thy enemies
a stool for Thy feet?"^{14 15}

In the first two quotations above, the author states the fact that Christ, already in the Old Testament, was proclaimed Son. This is a title too precious, too majestic to have been given to any angel, or to any earthly king.¹⁶ It is a title which designates the recipient of the name "heir of all things" (corroborated by the further quotations contained in vv. 7-9) and "creator of the world" (as expanded in vv. 10-12).¹⁷

As heir of all things the Son is not a servant in God's household--which is His own by inheritance. The angels were but servants. To them, as servants God paid high

13. Ps. 102:25-27.

14. Ps. 110:1.

15. The quotations from Scriptures above and hereafter are those of the R.S.V., except when otherwise designated.

16. Regarding the possibility of a historico-typical interpretation of this passage, Luther says: "...und (die Papisten) sagen, dasz dieser Spruch habe zween Verstand: einmal sei er von Salomon zu verstehen, als einer Figuren Christi; das ander mal von Christo. Aber wenn das zugelassen wird, dasz die Schrift nicht bestehet auf einem einfaltigen Sinn, so streitet sie schon nimmer." Luther's Werke, op. cit., Erlangen ed., vol. 7, p. 210.

17. Wescott, op. cit., p. 18.

compliments:¹⁸

Of the angels He says,
 "Who makes His angels winds,
 and His servants flames of fire."

It is however evident from the very context that the author only wishes to show that "that mutable and fleeting form of existence which is the glory of the angels would be an inferiority in the Son."¹⁹

But of the Son He says,
 Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,
 the righteous scepter is the scepter
 of Thy kingdom.

Angels are but creatures. The Son is a king whose throne is everlasting. No servant is He, but the ruler over servants. In 3:6, our author further calls attention to the fact that the Son (and hence also ruler) of the household, has greater glory than a servant in that household. Moses, though also great was only a servant in God's house.

We have thus far presented the truth that Christ as Son is heir of all. Considering the grand way in which our author develops it, this truth in itself becomes tremendous. Yet, as was stated above,²⁰ the author dwells on, and expands the idea of Sonship for a very definite purpose. He aims to show that Christ is a superior Mediator, a more excellent Priest through whom we have access to the Father. We must

18. Accepting Farrar's interpretation of this quotation. Farrar, Hebrews, p. 37.

19. Ibid.

20. Cf. p. 9.

never forget that Hebrews presents Christ as the Christian High-priest throughout the Epistle, and not only in two or three chapters²¹ dealing directly with the terms "priest" and "high-priest". No chapter--for that matter, no verse--is without its special contribution toward this end.²²

The extensive Christological arguments in the first two chapters of the Epistle, though in themselves incomparable in beauty and in scope, are nevertheless only exquisitely polished facets of a great diamond in the hands of our author. It is therefore necessary, that when we speak of Christ the Son as "heir of all things," we think of this truth interpreted in the light of Christ the High-priest.

Being heir of all things, having "all things placed under His feet," Christ is able to mediate with the Father on our behalf. For is He not Son in His own household? He is the King; He is the King who is Priest. Therefore as King-Priest He is already in His very person far superior to any revealers, to any mediators. We need not first see the superior work of Christ before we can visualize His superiority over angels, prophets, rulers, priests, and all things. We need only consider "Jesus the Apostle and High-priest of our confession." (3:1).

We have seen that Christ is a ruler because He is a Son.

21. Especially chapters 5, 7, 8, and 9.

22. Though we are not prepared to prove this statement, yet we feel that one cannot but become more and more convinced, in reading Hebrews, that this is correct.

The author of Hebrews extends this thought to an even wider sphere of the Son's activity.²³ In 1:10-12 (quoting Ps. 102: 25-27), we read that the ruler over God's household is creator of that household as well:

Thou, Lord,²⁴ didst found the earth from the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of Thy hands.²⁵

We may look upon the introduction of this quotation from the Psalms as serving a two-fold purpose. First, the writer, by quoting the above, verifies that which has been previously stated: that Christ is the ἁπαύλας τῆς δόξης καὶ ἡσάκεις ὑποτάξας ἕως αὐτοῦ. If there has, till now, been any question as to the probable meaning of the terms ἁπαύλας and ἡσάκεις as they are used in 1:3, there need no longer be. For, if Christ is the express image, and has the self-same essence as that of the Father, it follows that to Him may also be ascribed the work of the Father, which is usually thought of as being creation. The unity of the Son and the Father thus

23. The author had already referred to the Son's part in the creation in v. 7: "Who makes His angels etc...." It is here, however, that he quotes the Old Testament for the express purpose of proving what has been assumed in Ps. 104. The purpose of the earlier passage, as has been stated, was to show that the angels are creatures over whom the Son has complete control. Cf. also Luenemann, op. cit., p. 418.

24. "The word 'Lord' is not in the original, but it is in the LXX." Farrar, Hebrews, op. cit., p. 39. A rather complete resume of the various views held on this omission can be found in Meyer's Commentary. Luenemann, op. cit., p. 408.

25. "The Jews did not regard it (Ps. 102) as a Messianic Psalm and it is never so applied by any Rabbi." Farrar, Ibid. That it, however, is here introduced and used as Messianic by the author of our Epistle is a fact which is so obvious from the context as to hardly need mentioning.

having been alluded to, the writer of Hebrews finds it not the least unnatural to further show the Son's authority over all creatures by extolling a function which (in a manner of speaking) the Son has from His oneness with the Father.²⁶

The second, and more immediate purpose of our writer in quoting this Psalm is brought out by the context. As a ruler Christ is supreme. But He is a ruler because He was first the creator of all over which He rules. Not only does He rule over the angels, and all His household, but He is the very source and cause of their coming into being. As creator it is the Son who now limits the essential qualities of these creatures; it is the Son who appoints them their tasks. Therefore "let all God's angels worship Him," for He is their Maker, and He it is that bids them minister to Him and His (1:14).

"We have a great High-priest," great because He is the Son of God, the Ruler and Creator of the Universe! Could there be anyone more fit to mediate between God and us than God Himself! The ultimate purpose of the Epistle is served once again. The arguments concerning Christ the Son of God, the King-priest for man, will soon find their application.

26. Inasmuch as the author's purpose is to show Christ no less a being than God Himself, and inasmuch as this purpose becomes evident throughout the first chapter of his epistle, we feel that this inference is permissible.

For though the Old Testament priests failed to atone for sins, though Joshua failed to give the people rest, here is one, "made higher than the heavens", who will not fail!

THE SON OF GOD

It is a great truth that Christ was qualified to be our savior because He is the Son of God. Equally great, and equally significant is the fact that Christ is the Son of man. The Bible itself, "How can it be that God became man?" and finds the answer only in the truth expressed above: that Christ was first the Son of God. The Bible, "Why did He become man," and finds no other answer than the simple words, "He became man—for us."

For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the Pioneer¹ of their salvation partake through suffering.

That by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

In the first quotation the author reiterates the truth that God "upholds the universe by the word of His power." And, as to everything the author says of Him in the first

¹ Pioneer (Heb. 10:10) "with this word, which is better translated 'Pioneer', the writer sums up his conception of Christ as the great leader of humanity. The word is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in the earliest Christian epistle recorded in Acts." F. D. Scarborough, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 70.

II. Christ is Fit to be a High-priest for He is the Son of Man

It is a great truth that Christ was qualified to be our priest because He is the Son of God. Equally great, and equally significant is the fact that Christ is the Son of man. Man asks himself, "How can it be that God became man?" and finds the answer only in the truth expressed above: that Christ was first the Son of God. Man asks, "Why did He become man," and finds no other answer than the simple words, "He became man--for us."

For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the Pioneer¹ of their salvation perfect through suffering.²

That by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.³

In the first quotation the author reiterates the truth that God "upholds the universe by the word of His power." God, who is everything the author says of Him in the first

1. ἄρχηγός : (2:10; 12:2) "With this word, which is better translated 'Pioneer', the writer sums up his conception of Christ as the great leader of humanity. The word is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in the earliest Christian sermons recorded in Acts." F. D. Naerborough, The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 49.

2. Hebs. 2:10.

3. Hebs. 2:9.

chapter of the Epistle, chose to bring many sons to glory. It pleased God to save us by becoming man. "For surely it is not with angels that He is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham" (2:16).

Was it necessary for Christ to become man in order to accomplish the bringing of many sons to glory? Insofar as we are concerned, yes. This is, however, a matter which our author does not discuss. He simply says: "It was fitting for God,⁴ "it pleased God," to perfect their Savior in suffering. Beyond this the author does not go.

God chose to bring man to salvation by becoming man. The writer of Hebrews makes this choice the prime cause of Christ's humanity. He also tells us some of the purposes for which God came to earth. Because of man's apostacy from God, and because of the nature of the power of man's enemies, Christ chose to free man by extending Himself to man. The Epistle to the Hebrews states it thus:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same nature, that...

and the "that" which is for God the purpose, now becomes for us the blessed result:

that He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to life-long bondage. (2:14-16).

4. ἔπιτετευ : "it was befitting; not an expression of necessity, but of meetness and becomingness, in relation partly to the nature of God, partly to the ends He would attain."
Luenemann, op. cit., p. 435

God chose to become man, that by limiting Himself to man's nature He might raise up man; that by subjecting Himself not only to death, but to Him who had the power over death, He might overcome the forces of evil.⁶ We who see the victory over death as an accomplished fact might explain it in the words of Watson:

The Tyrants launched their attacks on Christ in His human nature as they could not have done otherwise, since He would have been beyond their reach. But they were powerless to overcome the divinity that was 'hidden' in His humanity, and their tyranny was therefore broken. The victory is God's, but it has been won where alone it could be won, in true and complete human nature.⁷

The writer of Hebrews sums up the glory of God's purpose in the words, "Therefore He had to be made like unto His brethren in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful High-priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people." (2:17). The main clause of this verse tells us that Christ had to be made like unto us in every respect. The author makes this clause the basis for two sub-clauses: He was made man in order that He might become merciful and faithful; He was made man (merciful

5. It is amusing to note how vividly Luther speaks of the conflict between Christ and the devil: "The devil has raised a banner on which is written: 'I am a god and prince of the world.' The devil had swallowed up in death all men, great and small; and he thought he had an excellent tit-bit in Christ. But this tit-bit disagreed with him as grass with a dog, and he was forced to yield up Christ as the great fish yielded up Jonah." Luther, as quoted by Philip Watson in Let God be God, p. 145f.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

and faithful) that He might make expiation for the sins of the people.⁸ If the first thought does not exist, the last cannot. For "only one who was Himself incarnate, true and perfect man as well as God, could truly represent God to man and man to God. And so it was that the Son, in the preparation for His priestly office, was 'in all things made like unto His brethren.'⁸

It is not within the scope of this paper to demonstrate how Christ was made "in every respect like us." It will suffice to say that such was the case. We are, however, interested in the fact that the author of Hebrews himself interprets this "in every respect" to mean not only that Christ assumed a human form, but that He also subjected Himself to the sufferings and trials of men. It is true that the very assumption of a human form was in itself a part of Jesus' suffering. But His suffering was more intense and more severe than that which man Himself must endure. In sum:

... Christ entered into such a vital and intimate union with humanity, that He became subject to the same conditions, the same Tyranny, under which men suffer. Indeed, it can be said that He became more truly man than any other, because He suffered more deeply than any.

The writer of Hebrews does not dwell at great length on a description of Christ's sufferings. He presents them vivid-

7. The subject of Christ's faithfulness will be discussed in the next chapter; and Christ's expiatory work will be considered in part two.

8. Milligan, op. cit., p. 78.

9. Watson, op. cit., p. 128,

ly enough, but always with the purpose of showing how Christ's sufferings perfect Him for the office of priest. In the words of the Epistle already quoted: "He had to be made like us in every respect, that He might become a merciful and faithful High-priest in the service of God."¹⁰

Since in this passage (2:18) the writer of Hebrews is quite obviously speaking of Jesus' understanding and compassion towards those who are tempted, we feel that the word $\xiλεήμων$ is here used in a similar sense as $\sigmaυμπαθηβαι$ (4:15), and $\muειβοπαθειν$ (5:2).¹¹ In 4:15 we are told that Christ's sympathy is a direct result of the fact that He Himself suffered. And in verse 16 of that same chapter, the author draws the logical conclusion: "Since Christ is sympathetic, come boldly to the throne of grace--and receive mercy."

The word $\sigmaυμπαθηβαι$ contains in itself an explanation of what the writer has in mind. The full color of this word, "suffering together with," and the feeling which arises from that suffering together with," is somewhat lost in its transfer to the English. The German "Mitleid" retains the full picture of one who suffers with another, and because He suffers,

10. $\xiλεήμων$ -- και πιστος : "It seems to be far more natural to take both these words as qualifying $\alphaσκεισθεις$ than to take $\xiλεήμων$ separately: 'that He might become merciful, and a faithful High-priest.'" Wescott, op. cit., p. 58.

11. "The Greek word 'merciful' speaks of that feeling of sympathy with the misery of another that leads one to act in his behalf to relieve that misery. The idea is that of a compassionate heart leading one to acts of mercy, the purpose of which is to relieve the suffering and misery of the object of that compassion." Kenneth Wuest, Hebrews in the Greek New Testament, p. 65.

understands. The word is here used of Christ in just that sense. Weiss ably explains the process thus:

Damit er aber ein mitleidiger Hohepriester sei, musste er in Allem (κατὰ πάντα) seinen Bruedern gleichgemacht werden (2:17), und dies konnte nur geschehen, wenn er in allen Stuecken κατὰ ἑμοίωσιν versucht wurde, weil er so allein Mitleid haben konnte mit ihren Schwachheiten.¹²

We gain another insight into the full meaning of the Savior's sympathy from 4:16. Here the author states that Jesus' sympathy moves Him to help us, and that His help is timely. He who suffered in that He was tempted by the devil to abandon His task of suffering and dying;¹³ He who suffered extreme spiritual agony in Gethsemane, (for: "Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death"); and finally, He who suffered shameful death on Calvary¹⁴ surely He knows our needs, sympathizes with them, and gives help when help is most needed!

The author tells us in 5:2 that even the Old Testament high-priests were able to "deal gently with the ignorant and

12. Bernhard Weiss, Lehrbuch der Biblischer Theologie des Neuen Testaments, p. 502.

13. The devil was concerned above all that Christ should not carry out His purposes. But we find no reason to say, with Vos, that "in connection with Jesus the Epistle never speaks of temptations in general." Cf. Vos, op. cit., p. 587f.

14. "In laying down His life, He came into contact with the whole sting of death; measured its length and breadth and intensity, the power of Satan, the wrath of God, the condemnation of the law. How clear it is from this passage what Christ suffered in death!" Saphir, op. cit., p. 154, on Hebs. 2:18.

the erring."¹⁵ The ability to bear gently (*μετριοπαθεῖν*) with sinners is applicable to Christ inasmuch as the writer goes on to prove Jesus the model High-priest who is far superior to all Old Testament high-priests. Bruce elaborates on the term *μετριοπαθεῖν* and applies the following to Christ:

Very remarkable is the word employed to describe, priestly compassion, *μετριοπαθεῖν*. It does not, like *συμπάθειν* in 4:15, signify to feel with another, but rather to abstain from feeling against him; to be able to restrain antipathy. . . Here it seems to be employed to denote a state of feeling towards the ignorant and erring balanced between severity and undue leniency. The model high-priest-- "hates ignorance and sin," but pities the ignorant and sinful. He is free alike from the inhuman severity of the Pharisee who thinks he has done his duty towards all misconduct when he has expressed himself in terms of condemnation regarding it, and from the selfish apathy of the world, which simply does not trouble itself about the failings of the weak. He feels resentment, but it is in moderation; disgust, but it is under control; impatience, but not such as finds vent in ebullitions of temper, but such rather as takes the form of determined effort to remove evils with which it cannot live on friendly terms. All this, of course, implies a loving heart. The negative virtue of patience implies the positive virtue of sympathy. The model high-priest is one in whose heart the law of charity reigns, and who regards the people for whom he acts in holy things as his children. The ignorant, for him, are persons to be taught; the erring sheep to be brought back to the fold. He remembers that sin is not only an evil in God's sight, but also a bitter thing for the offender; he realizes the misery of an accusing conscience, the shame and fear which are the ghostly shadows of guilt. All this is hinted at in the

15. "Two things may be affirmed of guilty men, they are ignorant and erring. Their ignorance consists in wrong ideas of God and of man's relations and obligations to Him. And having no proper conceptions upon these fundamental points, they are subject to stumble, fall, and run into every imaginable wickedness. A priest must be able to make allowances for their untoward circumstances, and to consider the difficulties of their situation and the infirmities which beset them. J. A. Seiss, The Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews, p. 120.

word *μετρίοτατην*, whereby instantaneously, the writer photographs the character of the model high-priest. 16

We have seen that our Savior is highly Qualified for His high-priestly office in that "He was not ashamed to call us brethren," and took it upon Himself to suffer even as man must suffer. "let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." We may be certain that He continues ever to be our Helper, for the love which first prompted Him to become man, still moves Him to extend His grace to us!

16. Bruce, op. cit., p. 177f.

III. Christ is Fit to be a Priest for He is a Priest after the Order of Melchizedek

In our first chapter we attempted to show that Christ is a great Priest because He Himself is God, and therefore is best suited to mediate before God on our behalf. In the second chapter we learned that Christ is a great High-priest because He is, while God, of the "same origin" (2:11) as man, and therefore in complete sympathy with man.

It becomes evident that, due to the fact that man fell away from God, someone would have to serve as mediator through whom God and man could once again be reconciled.¹ It also follows, that since man was unable to mediate on his own behalf, God Himself had to appoint a mediator, that by the substitutionary offering of God's mediator, man might gain access to the throne of grace.

God had, already in the Old Testament, appointed priests to mediate and to make offering for the sins of the people.

1. "Ein Priester heiszt ein solche Person, (wie ihn die Schrift malet), der da von Gott dazu gesetzt und Befehl hat, dasz er zwischen Gott und den Menschen handle, also dasz er von ihm ausgehe, und sein Wort uns bringe und lehre; und wiederumb, gegen Gott trete, und fur uns opfere und bete u." Luther's Werke, Erlangen ed., vol. 40, p. 149.

The Jewish priests offered sacrifices daily for the impurities of the people, and once each year (on the Great Day of the Atonement) the high-priest of Israel entered behind the veil of the tabernacle to sprinkle blood on the mercy-seat and thus expiate the sins of the people.

In this chapter we shall discuss the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews' argument that, since the Old Testament sacrificial system had failed, God appointed a New, a greater mediator over a New Covenant. The writer presents the superiority of this New Mediator by way of comparing Him to the Old Testament mediators who had failed. "That Jesus is the best possible priest is proved by showing that He is better than the familiar Levitical priest. The emphasis lies now on the inferior, unsatisfactory nature of the Levitical priesthood, now on the supreme, absolute worth of the Messianic Priest."²

Before discussing in detail the glories of the Melchizedekian Priesthood, that author shows that Christ is a superior High-priest because of the special call which He received to His priesthood. The Old Testament priests received no direct call from God,³ but were appointed (at least in later times) by the Sanhedrin. Both priests and high-priests had first to pass innumerable tests prescribed by

2. Bruce, op. cit., p. 363.

3. In my opinion, inasmuch as only Christ and Aaron received calls in the special sense of "direct call, sworn to by an oath", this statement does not disagree with 5:4.

the Sanhedrin before they could be appointed to their respective offices. Even after having been ordained, it was always within the power of the Sanhedrin to impeach them.⁴

Not so with Christ. We are told that "He was appointed to His office by Him who said to Him: 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.'" (5:5). In 6:13 the writer of Hebrews tells us that God, having no one greater by whom to swear, swore by Himself. True, this passage speaks of the promise made to Abraham. But in verses 19 and 20 the writer applies this oath to Christ. 7:20-23 is even clearer on this point: "And it was not without an oath, but this one was addressed with an oath, 'The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'"⁵

Therefore Christ, by virtue of the call He has received, is superior to the Old Testament priests. For He who said when He appointed Him: "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee," is the same that said, "Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

Christ's call is not only superior to that of the Old

4. Alfred Edersheim, The Temple, p. 95.

5. "Jesus assuredly undertook the office only as called of God. . . . During the days of His earthly life His behavior was such as utterly to exclude the idea of His being a usurper of sacerdotal honors. Allthrough His incarnate experiences He was simply submitting to God's will that He should be a priest. And when He returned to heaven He was saluted High-priest in recognition of His loyalty. Thus from first to last He was emphatically one called of God. Bruce, op. cit., p. 176.

Testament priests, but it is a different call, just as He is a different priest, and the covenant over which He mediates is a different covenant. Now this difference in priests and priesthoods likewise forms a point of superiority of the one over the other. If the first covenant-relationship between God and man had been thoroughly satisfactory, there would have been no need for a second, for a new relationship. The author argues this very point when he says: "Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood. . . what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than the one named after the order of Aaron?" (7:11f.) Hence one of the first marks of the Melchizedekian priesthood is that it is new.⁶

It is as if the difference between the two priesthoods then strikes the author of the Epistle with its full force, for He develops the main point of difference between the Levitical priest and the Messianic Priest: "For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests." (7:13f.) Thus it appears that a change has been made in the priesthood. But such a change could "only have been permitted for very im-

6. Milligan, op. cit., p. 119.

perative reasons."⁷ That Christ who was descended of the tribe of Judah, was permitted to "serve at the altar," must have been due only to the failure of the Levitical priesthood "in accomplishing the end of all priesthods, 'a bringing to perfection' and an intimate and close state of communion between man and God."⁸

When we consider the consequence of a change in the priesthood, both the difference between the old and the new, and the superiority of the new over the old, stand out in even sharper contrast. In 7:12 we read: "For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well." If the mediator of a covenant is changed, then, obviously a similar change must take place in the covenant itself. The writer evidently sees this fact to be so obvious as to need no further clarification. But he does tell us (7:16) just what that "change of law" in this instance is. "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."⁹

How closely the writer of Hebrews ties up the New Covenant with its Mediator! The Messiah institutes an entirely new order of things—not so much because He represents a change

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Bruce, op. cit., p. 269.

in point of outward descent, but because the Covenant which He mediates is founded on entirely new principles. "A better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God," (7:19) because the Christian High-priest is a priest "not according to legal requirements concerning bodily descent," but according to "the power of an indestructible life!" (7:16).

Christ's ascendancy over things pertaining to the law—His absolute freedom from legal requirements, makes Him a fit Priest of the New Covenant. In chapters 7, 8, and 9, the author of Hebrews develops Christ's complete superiority over the Aaronic priesthood, by introducing the Old Testament figure of Melchizedek, the King of Salem. The problems concerning the historical person of Melchizedek;¹⁰ the problems involved in the typological arguments used by the

10: "Some have thought this Melchizedek was Shem. As far as chronology is concerned there is nothing impossible in this hypothesis; for Shem lived not merely up to the days of Abraham, but even into a later period. Others have thought that this Melchizedek was a descendant of Japheth. Some again have supposed that he was an Amorite. But the Scripture purposely does not mention who he was. Genesis abounds in genealogies, and in full and minute genealogies; but the genealogy of this man is not given. . . . If he was Shem, then we know who his father was, and when he lived, and how old he was; and this is just the very point which the Holy Ghost does not wish us to know. Thus it has pleased God to leave this man that he should stand out in Scripture as a man without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life; as a man having a priesthood inherent in itself, of whom we do not know the parentage, of whom we do not know the successor." Saphir, op. cit., p. 370. Cf. also Luther's Werke, Erlangen-ed., vol. 40, p. 144.

writer of the Epistle;¹¹ and the seemingly strange exegesis contained in these chapters,¹² we shall not be able to discuss here. We shall confine ourselves to a discussion of the High-priest after the order of Melchizedek by a study of two of the greatest qualifications ascribed to Him in the above-mentioned chapters: He is a priest forever; He is a priest perfected in His office.

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, etc." (7:1ff.) With this allusion to a somewhat vague historical event, the writer of Hebrews introduces the basis for all the arguments contained in his next three chapters. Melchizedek, mentioned but twice in the entire Old Testament (and these references are short), is said to be a type of Christ in that He abides forever: "He is without father or mother, or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God He continues forever" (7:3).

We are not to assume of course, that Melchizedek had no

11. Many difficulties arise out of attempts to push the comparison between Christ and Melchizedek too far. It must also always be kept in mind that "Melchizedek is not first in possessing certain characteristics which the High-priest of the New Testament afterwards possessed. Christ is first. Melchizedek is compared with Him, not He with Melchizedek." Milligan, op. cit., p. 113.

12. Some commentators try to prove from the author's argumentum e silentio in 7:3, and from his peculiar use of the name "Melchizedek" in 7:2, that the writer was strongly influenced by the promoters of the allegoric method of interpretation.

father or mother.¹³ The writer merely points out that nothing, either of his ancestry, or of his successors, is told us in the Old Testament account. And because this is the case, Melchizedek is a type of Christ--who is Priest without beginning of days or end of life.¹⁴ Thus the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes it clear to his Jewish readers that the Melchizedekian priesthood finds its greatness in the very omissions of the Genesis account, as Luther also points out:

Dieselbige Epistel hat das auch gemerkt, dasz dieses Priesters Melchizedek also kurz gedacht wird, und Nichts von ihm gesagt, woher er kommen, oder wo er blieben sei, sondern weder Anfang noch Ende seines Geschlechts und Herkommen gemeldet; so doch von Aaron Alles mit Fleisz geschrieben, und sein ganzes Geschlecht von Abraham her klar, unterschiedlich abgerechnet; item, wie er zum Priesterthumb berufen und gesezt, ja auch wie er gestorben, und auf wen das Priesterthumb geerbet hat. Solches hat dieser heilige Prophet, auch angesehen, und das Woertlin, ewiglich Priester, daher gefuehret, dasz, gleichwie man dieses Melchizedek kein Vater und Mutter, Anfang noch Ende findet (nicht dasz er kein Vater und Mutter gehabt, sondern dasz davon nichts geschrieben wird): also sei Christus (welcher

13. "The mere circumstance that he was fatherless and motherless, supposing for a moment that it could be predicated of anyone not Divine, would have been insufficient to establish the writer's point; for this is not the manner of Melchizedek's birth, but the manner of his appearing in the priesthood. . . . The writer is concerned to find him not simply a legitimate, but an eternal priest. Milligan, op. cit., p. 115.

14. "Obwohl *πατήρ, μήτηρ, γενεαλογίας* in gewissem Sinn auch von Christus gilt--freilich nicht wie die Kirchenväter meinten, weil er seiner Menschheit nach ohne Vater, seiner Gottheit nach ohne Mutter und Stammbaum sei, sondern weil er nicht priesterlicher Herkunft war." Riggenbach, Der Brief an die Hebräer, in Zahn's Kommentar z. Neuen Testament, p. 183.

durch jenen fuergebildet ist,) wahrhaftig ein solcher Priester, der da nicht angefangen hat, noch auch ein Ende haben soll, sondern von Ewigkeit ist und in Ewigkeit belibt.¹⁵

The author exclaims, "See how great He is!" (7:4).

Established custom has it that the lesser person must pay homage to the greater. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, therefore Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. And as if this were not conclusive enough, the writer uses another argument: if he is a priest forever, he lives, and since he lives, "one might say that Levi Himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him." (7:9f.)¹⁶

Perhaps this argument seems a bit fanciful. In reality it isn't. The Jews, to whom the writer is speaking, were quite obviously wrapped up in the Levitical sacrificial system, and steeped in that same Pharisaical attitude that had cried out "Abraham is our father!" Here Abraham and the descendants of Abraham are decisively proved inferior to the great Melchizedekian Priest. The inferior party was, and still is, obligated to pay tithes to the Superior, for it is testified of Him that He lives forever!

15. Luther's Werke, Erlangen ed., op. cit., vol. 40, p. 145.

16. "An der Person Melchisedeks ist ihm nichts gelegen, sie kommt bloss nach ihrer typischen Bedeutung in Betracht. Ihr Verhaeltnis zu den levitischen Priestern ist nur erörtert worden, weil sich darin bereits ankuendigt, worauf es dem Verfasser letztlich ankommt, naemlich die einzigartige Erhabenheit Jesu als des Priesters nach der Ordnung Melchisedeks ueber die levitischen Priester (7:11-25) festzustellen." Riggenbach, op. cit., p. 191.

These ten verses of chapter seven, are, however, only one statement of a great thought recurring throughout the Epistle: Christ is the eternal priest.¹⁷ We find the following statements in the Epistle regarding the eternity of Christ as priest:

- Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. (1:8)
- they will perish, but Thou remainest; (1:11)
- Thou art a priest forever. (3 times: 5:6; 7:17; 7:21)
- having become a priest forever, (6:20)
- He continues a priest forever. (7:3)
- He holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever. (7:24)
- appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. (7:28)
- through eternal spirit He offered Himself (9:14)
- Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. (13:21)

These are only the quotations which specifically use words synonymous with eternity. There are many other phrases and statements in the Epistle which likewise point to Christ as the eternal priest. For example: the various references to the immutability of Christ (1:12; 5:20; 13:8),¹⁸ and to

17. "The epithet *αἰώνιος*, here, frequently recurs in the sequel. It is one of the great characteristic watchwords of the Epistle, intended to proclaim the absolute final nature of Christianity, in contrast to the transient nature of the Levitical religion." Bruce, op. cit., p. 191.

18. "With such a High-priest it was impossible any longer to associate the idea of change: rather in Him, in all the glory and permanence of His exalted state, men have the "surety" not only of a better Priesthood, but of a "better covenant." Milligan, op. cit., p. 124.

His "indestructible life," (7:15 and 13:5). We have made no mention whatever of the many passages which speak of the eternal character of the offering which Christ brought (7:27; 9:14; 9:25; 9:26; 10:9; 10:12; 10:14), of the eternal salvation He has procured for us (9:13; 9:15; 11:10; 11:16; 12:22; 13:14), of the eternal character of the New Covenant as opposed to the transitory character of the Old Dispensation (4:10; 7:20; 8:6; 8:13; 13:10; 13:20), or of the dozen or more passages which speak of Christ as performing His duties now, at the right hand of the Majesty of God. Well does the author of this Epistle say, "See how great He is!" Christ the superior priest--superior because He lives forever!¹⁹

Since Christ is eternal, since He is the priest that lives forever, we dare not forget that He lives even now, that even now He sits at the right hand of God. It is just this truth which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wants to present so conclusively to his readers that they will never have occasion to forget it. He is not content to assume that his readers will see this fact. When the Jewish Christians read this Epistle they had constant opportunity to observe that in Christ, whether before, during, or after His humiliation, "there is the same unbroken continuity through changes which to our eyes interrupt or

19. The concept of the living Christ is so overwhelmingly presented in this Epistle, that we cannot proceed to a discussion of His perfection before dwelling briefly on this subject.

limit His activity."²⁰

If these Jewish people thought that there was still something of worth in the old system of animal sacrifices, particularly since the priest of the New Covenant (even when they needed Him so badly) was apparently no longer present, how could they fail to be convinced by the author how mistaken they were! He sounds the first note proclaiming Christ the Ever-present, the continuous Now, in 1:3; other voices take up the theme in chapter two, and then, throughout the Epistle it grows, gaining in tempo and in glory, until the final verse of the body of the letter: "Christ forever and ever!" Not only is this theme repeated over and over again, but it is as though our author were writing a fugue in which the theme, receiving constantly varied treatment throughout the composition, breaks through again and again; and because of the "episodic material" interspersed, each statement of the theme is more significant than the foregoing, each appearance more magnificent.

Our Christian Priest lives now. When we think of Christ living in the present, it is almost impossible to divorce His present work from His person. The passages indicating Christ's presence sometimes speak of Him as the King who rules over all, sometimes of the Priest-king who has been crowned with glory and honor because He has forever brought satisfaction on our behalf, sometimes of the Priest who, in glory

20. Wescott, op. cit., p. 424.

and honor, continues His priestly work in the "city of foundations": interceding for us,³¹ preparing for us a final

6d/β/3 ατ 16 μ' 05 .²³ But our attention, whether focused on the New Covenant, or on the offering, is nevertheless always directed first to the person of the Great Priest. "We have a great High-priest who has passed through the heavens." "See how great He is--He lives!"

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of

31. "And Christ as King, having offered one sacrifice for sins forever, waits upon His throne for the complete establishment of a sovereignty which He has finally won. . . In these passages the two offices are placed in closest connection; and the session of Christ on the right hand of God's majesty is, with one exception (1:3) always connected with the fulfillment of priestly work." Wescott, *op. cit.*, 227.

32. Christ is present; this is stated in the following passages:

sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high	(1:3)
Sit at My right hand until	(1:13)
Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honor	(2:7)?
we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor	(2:9)
fall away from the living God.	(3:12)
While it is still "today"	(3:13; 4:7)
The Word of God is living	(4:12)
a great High-priest who has passed through the heavens	(4:14)
who have tasted the heavenly gift	(6:4)
where Jesus has gone as forerunner	(6:20)
we have such a High-priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne	(8:1)
Christ has entered. . . into heaven itself	(9:24)
we <u>have</u> a great Priest	(9:28)
Christ will appear a second time	(10:21)
the living God	(10:31)
must believe that He exists	(11:6)
to the city which has foundations	(11:10)
has prepared for them a city	(11:16)
that they might rise again to a better life	(11:35)
is seated at the right hand of God	(12:2)
Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the city which is to come.	(12:22)

the most high God,²³ met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. (7:1-3)

We have already discussed the part of this quotation referring to Melchizedek's timelessness and its exposition directly following these verses. The author, however, has more to say about this Melchizedek. He submits the very name "Melchizedek" to a very careful scrutiny, and from this examination gleans several important truths.

Melchizedek is "first, by translation of His name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace." What is ascribed to Melchizedek must also be ascribed to Christ of whom Melchizedek is only a type. Since this Melchizedek was king of righteousness, and then also king of peace, Christ is likewise king of righteousness and king of peace.

We feel, with Bruce, that the author very carefully completes the parallel between Melchizedek and Christ, applying this typology in 7:26. Ther (7:26) he says that we now have such a priest: "holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens." "it is not improbable . . . that the terms ὅσιος, ἄκακος, ἁγιαστος define "right-

23. "Dasz der Angeredete nur Priester, nicht aber Hohepriester genannt wird, tut der Beweiskraft der Stelle keinen Eintrag, da der Koenig, wenn er zugleich Priester ist, selbstverstaendlich die Wuerde eines Oberpriesters besitzt. Daher heiszt Christus (5:10; 6:20) auch "Hoherpriester nach der Ordnung Melchisedeks." Riggensbach, op. cit., p. 138.

eousness," that the phrase *κεχωρισμένος ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν* interprets "peace", and that *ὁ ἡλιότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν γενόμενος* indicates the significance of "king".²⁴ This priest is king in the highest sense of the word, for He rules over the highest of Kingdoms. His rule is not confined to the physical universe, but holds sway in the realm of the spiritual; it is not confined to a sphere wherein dwells imperfections, but rules over the kingdom of perfections. This kingdom of perfections might be called Salem, that is, peace, for where perfection rules over that which has been made perfect, there is also perfect peace.

The Epistle leaves absolutely no doubt concerning the fact that Christ is the perfect ruler and the perfect priest. Though we do not find nearly so many references to His perfection as, for example, to His eternality, the contrast between the old, corrupt, degenerate priesthood, and the new, righteous, blameless, holy, sinless priesthood occurs frequently. That Christ was in all things morally perfect can be seen by examining the following passages:²⁵

Thou hast loved righteousness and hated wickedness (1:9)

has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning (4:15)

24. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

25. We include here only those passages which we feel pertain directly to moral perfection. The passages which have reference to Christ's official perfection are listed below. We are aware that "moral" and "official" are but two aspects of the same thing: Christ is perfect.

- king of righteousness (7:2)
- holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners (7:26)
- offered Himself without blemish to God (9:14)

Since Christ is morally perfect, "He has no need, like those high-priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people." How weak, how useless those Old Testament priests appear when compared with this great High-priest who is free from every inward and outward stain. How futile it seems that a priest, who himself must first gain access to God, should gain forgiveness from that God for His people!²⁶

The picture of the hopelessness of these former sacrifices becomes even more apparent when we observe the official imperfection of the Old Testament priests in comparison with the official perfection of Christ. Our Lord is the perfect Priest not simply because He Himself is perfect, but because in addition to His moral perfection He perfectly fulfills the office of High-priest. This perfection is evidenced throughout the Epistle by the various references to Christ's perfect obedience to the will of God,²⁷ His constant

26. How aware of their sinfulness the Old Testament priests were, is shown by their laws of purification: "The high-priest of Israel, even though taken from among men, had, according to the later ritual, seven days before the Great Day of Atonement to remove from his own house to a chamber in the sanctuary that he might be separated for a time from sinful men." Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

27. The expressions "learned obedience," "perfected through suffering," present difficulties in interpretation into which we shall not be able to enter in this paper.

faithfulness to His calling, and His complete willingness to surrender to suffering and death on our behalf. We list the passages in that order:

Passages which speak of Christ's official perfection,

- pioneer of their salvation perfect²⁸ through suffering (2:10)
- and being made perfect, became the source (5:9)
- if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (7:11)
- for the law made nothing perfect; but a better hope is introduced (7:19)
- the word of oath. . . appoints a Son made perfect forever (7:28)

Passages which speak of Christ's obedience,

- He learned obedience through what He suffered, and being made perfect... (5:8)
- I have come to do Thy will O God (10:7)

Passages which speak of Christ's faithfulness,

- a faithful High-priest (2:17)
- He was faithful to Him who appointed Him (3:2)
- Christ was faithful over God's house (3:6)
- for He who promised is faithful (10:23)
- considered Him faithful who had promised (11:11)

28. "Perfect": "The adjective perfect in 5:14 and 9:11. The abstract noun perfection: 6:1; 7:11; The noun perfecter: in 12:2. The verb to perfect: 2:10; 5:9; 7:28; 9:9; 10:1; 10:14; 11:40; 12:23. The words are used not of moral perfection, but of the completion of a process. Their frequency is due to the writer's insistence on the absolute and final nature of the Christian Revelation. Christ, He says, was a fully qualified (perfected) priest (2:10; 5:9), through Him man can attain to a perfect worshipping relationship toward God.

Passages which speak of Christ's willingness:

He always lives to make intercession for them

(7:25)

offered up Himself (two times)

(7:25; 7:27)

to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (9:26)

Jesus Christ is the great High-priest of the New Covenant. His is a new priesthood; He is eternal; He is morally perfect and officially perfect. He is therefore the surety of a better covenant, and that better covenant is ours.

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 super-celestial glory and power in full and equal fellowship with His Father. Here at last is the writer's ideal priest! ²⁹

29. Bruce, op. cit., p. 280f.

PART II

The Work of Christ the Superior High-priest

In the next part of our paper we shall discuss the work of Christ the eternal, the superior High-priest. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews sees the person and the work of Christ as one closely knit unit. He sees Christ's offering as superior because the bringer of that offering is superior; and He who brings the offering is superior because He is the very offering that is brought!

Before proceeding to Christ's offering and the results and benefits of that offering, however, we must first briefly evaluate the Old Testament sacrificial system. Wherein lay the failure of the Old? Wherein lay the efficacy that it had? We shall discuss some of these problems presently.

I. The Failure of the Old Testament Offerings

Before considering the glory of the New Covenant and the greatness of Christ's offering in that Covenant, we must make a brief study of the Old Testament sacrificial system. The superiority and the efficacy of Christ's offering stands out in our Epistle with much greater force because it is continually contrasted with this Old Testament system.

God chose to redeem man, and to justify man before Himself through the shedding of blood. We are told that "every priest must offer gifts and sacrifices to God," (8:3) and, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." (10:22). It is quite clear in our Epistle that these Old Testament sacrifices were necessary for the purification of bodily filthiness, and for the atonement of sins. We do not question why, we must simply observe that it is so.

In reading the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are often so impressed with the grandeur of the New Covenant High-Priest and His offering, that we may be tempted to forget that the Old Testament system had a glory all its

own.¹ The Hebrews in the wilderness had ample occasion to observe that this system was instituted by a living and a jealous God: "A blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further message be spoken to them." (12:18,19). The care with which the laws concerning the preparation of the tabernacle were preserved--and carried out, shows further how this system was regarded by the Old Testament people.² The high-priest and the offerings he brought,³ were the only connection that the patriarchs and their successors had with the final realization of a hope which, according to chapter twelve of Hebrews, they were never privileged to see, except as foreshadowed by the pompous, richly clad priests and high-priests of Is-

1. The people to whom the author of Hebrews was writing were fully conscious of the glory of the high-priesthood. The author therefore emphasizes the short-comings of that system in spite of its glory, to direct the readers attention away from the system they were so fond of to Christ.

2. "The Learned Bengel says: 'While two chapters in Genesis are given to tell us how the world was created, there are sixteen chapters to tell us how the tabernacle was to be built. For the world was made for the sake of the church; and the great object of all creation is to glorify God in the redemption and sanctification of His people.'" Saphir, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 176.

3. The author seems to ignore the difference between the offerings of the common priests and the high-priest, and ascribes the sacrifices of the priests to the high-priest. Riggenbach attempts to explain the apparent "error" thus: "Dagegen kann der Verfasser das taegliche Opfer des Hohenpriesters mit dem jaerlichen des Versoehnungstages zusammenfassen; da das Brandopfer ja ebenfalls suehnende Wirkung besass und das Suehnebeduerfnis des Hohenpriesters sich auch dann bemerkbar machte, wenn er sein Opfer nicht in eigener Person darbrachte." Riggenbach, op. cit., p. 212.

rael.

This system was a glorious system because it held ever before the eyes of the people of Israel the fact that their God was a gracious God. With every purification ceremony, with every offering on the Great Day of Atonement, God's people realized again that Yahweh was their God, and that these sacrifices were their only means of direct communion (and communication) with that God.⁴ At the same time: "In these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year." (10:3). Every sacrificial offering reminded them anew that they had offended their God--that they were God's only because God so willed, and not because they had merited His mercy and goodness.⁵

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews points out that the very tabernacle, without and within, was a structure

4. "All sacrifices were either such as were offered on the ground of communion with God--the burnt- and peace-offerings; or such as were intended to restore that communion when it had been dimmed or disturbed--the sin- and trespass-offering." Edersheim, op. cit., p. 126.

5. "It is a requisite of the intelligent worshiper to have a clear understanding of his own character and relations. He must see his obligation to serve God. He must feel his disease before he will see his need of a physician. He must be conscious of his guilt and pollution before he can desire forgiveness and renovation. And he must then have some conception of the way in which he is to be pardoned and cleansed before he can feel quiet on the subject of his salvation. In meeting these necessities the ceremonial law was peculiarly efficacious. If not only told him in cold words that such was his character and condition, but it enacted the whole thing before his eyes. The oblations reminded him continually of his entire dependence upon God, and his consequent obligations to serve Him. The sacrifices and washings set before him his guilt and pollution, and the way in which he was to be pardoned and cleansed." Seiss, op. cit., p. 341.

of considerable glory. In 9:5 the author gives us a hasty description of what the outer tent and the inner sanctuary contained. We read of "the golden altar of incense, the ark of the covenant, covered on all sides with gold, containing a golden urn holding the manna. . . above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat."

The tabernacle, though beautiful and precious, was nevertheless only a "temple made with hands." The author makes that point very clear: beautiful, yes; but none the less worthless, for made with hands it will pass away. (8:2; 8:5; 9:11; 9:24).

Also the priesthood, with all its flowing robes of gold and purple, with all its sanctity and dignity, presents a somewhat pathetic spectacle. Through generation after generation we see high-priestssucceeding high-priest, priests replacing priests. The very limited tenure of the priestly offices indicates a weakness in this system. Coupled with the constantly changing order of priests is the constant renewing of sacrifices, the repeated (daily and annually) animal offerings for sin.⁶ Can there be no end to all this sacrificing? Surely not under such a system!

The former Testament made by God with the people of Israel could not "perfect" the relation between God and these people. The author insists over and over again that the

6. "Die Cultusordnung des ersetzten Bundes gehoert fuer ihn der Vergangenheit an; die Zeit, wo das Verderzelt noch Bestand hatte, ist eine vergangene (9:8; 10:19); mit dem Eintritt der vollen Suendenvergebung hat das Suehnopfer aufgehoeert." Weiss, op. cit., p. 491.

fact that a New Covenant has been established shows that the Old had failed. Great though it was, the ancient tabernacle was only a "copy of the original";⁷ involved and complicated as the old sacrifices were, they were mere "regulations for the body imposed until the time of Reformation";⁸ as necessary as the former offerings had become, their efficacy was but "a shadow of the true reality" yet to come. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all their successors "looked for an abiding city," they awaited the fulfillment of new promises already sworn by God to Abraham. In sum, the Old Testament sacrifices were intended to be no more than a type of that one great sacrifice which Christ was soon to make once for all.⁹

According to God's plan there was to be "no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood." (10:23). At the same time we are told that the shedding of animal blood, such as the blood of goats, calves and bulls, "could not perfect the consciences of the worshipers." (9:9). "For it is

70 *ἑκείνη* : "The word shadow here refers to a rough outline of anything, a mere sketch, such as a carpenter draws with a piece of chalk, or such as an artist delineates when he is about to make a picture. He sketches an outline of the subject which he designs to draw, which has some resemblance to it, but is not the very image, for it is not yet complete." Seiss, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

8. "The reformation here alluded to, was that grand re-modification and reconstruction of the church of God made by Jesus Christ during his stay on earth. When this grand reformation took place, the Tabernacle services became obsolete." *Ibid.* p. 242.

9. On the relation of the type to its fulfillment see the next chapter of this paper, p.

impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." (10:4). The shedding of blood in the Old Testament sacrifice served no greater function than to purify the worshipers from outward uncleanness. (9:13) This blood could not atone for the sins of the people. (10:1-4). Only on the Great Day of the Atonement was blood shed and sprinkled on the mercy-seat in the inner sanctuary that was efficacious for the remission of sins.¹⁰ But here too, we see that this offering for the sins of the people had to be made year after year.¹¹ There was no "once for all" remission of sins: "but into the second only the high-priest goes and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing." (9:5-8). "The way is not yet opened." The Jews were still far from being at one with God. Only a better sacrifice and a better covenant could perfect their relation to God. (9:23-28; 10:5-10.)

The reason for the failure of the Old Testament in ful-

10. "By this sacrifice of bullocks and goats the high-priest of Israel procured for himself and for the people an annual redemption. . . the blood of bulls and goats taken within the veil and sprinkled on the mercy-seat procured, not by its intrinsic value, but by positive Divine appointment, remission of certain offences against the Levitical religious system, with the effect of restoring offenders to right theocratic relations for the time being, so giving the people a fair start, as it were, for another year." Bruce, op. cit., p. 333.

11. "An annual, partial, putative redemption." Ibid.

filling the requirements of God is that this first arrangement was instituted by law. The law of God could work no life; under the law of God all the sacrifices Israel ever offered could not appease the wrath of God--which demands perfect obedience and perfect fulfillment of His statutes.

The author of Hebrews, however, never speaks of the failure of a covenant established by the law, without contrasting it with the covenant "founded on better promises." The second covenant abolishes the law (10:9); the second covenant is built not on the power of the law, "but on the power of an indestructible life." The New Covenant is founded on Gospel promises which do not (as the Old Testament laws) require something of the people, but which offer gifts procured entirely outside of us, once for all.

God was not pleased with sacrifices and offerings. The Old Testament, left to remain by itself, would be no more satisfactory now than it was then. But thanks to God, since He was not pleased with sacrifices and offerings, He prepared a New Covenant: "He prepared Christ a body" and sent Him to do His will, and "By that will we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (10:10).

II. Christ's Superior Work of Offering

"I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."¹ We have seen that there was a definite need for a new covenant relation between God and His people, inasmuch as the "old had become obsolete and faded away." And yet we should not consider the New to have been instituted only as a direct result of the failure of the Old, for the New was in actuality instituted long before the Old,² Its full revelation, it is true, was finally "spoken to us by a Son," but that

1. "Wahrend es naemlich in der LXX nach ganz ueberwiegendem Zeugnis der Hss. heiszt: *καὶ διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰουδα διαθήκην καινήν*, schreibt der Verfasser des Hebraeerbriefs vielmehr: *καὶ συντελέσω ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰουδα διαθήκην καινήν*. Die Ersetzung des Verbs *διατίθεσθαι* durch *συντελεῖν* beweist zwar an sich noch nichts, denn letzteres koennte auch vom Abschluss eines Bundes gebraucht sein; dagegen laeszt sich *συντελεῖν* dafuer nicht wohl gebrauchen. Der Verfasser scheint durch die Abaenderung des Wortlauts der LXX den Gedanken ausdruecken zu wollen, Gott werde in der kuenftigen Heilszeit nicht bloss ein neues Testament geben, das wie das alte Heilszusagen darbierte, wenn auch groeszere und wertvollere als dieses, sondern er werde das Neue Testament an der Heilsgemeinde auch zum Vollzuge kommen lassen, so dasz nicht mehr wie vordem die Untreue des Volks die Erfuellung der goettlichen Gnadenzusage verhindere. Die neue Gottesstiftung wird nicht eine blosser Wiederholung der alten sein. Riggenbach, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

2. Cf. Galatians 3:15-20, where we are told that the promises to Abraham came first; the law and all that pertains to the law was added later. But it is not a change, only an addition.

same Son who revealed Himself as priest had been appointed priest from eternity.

"Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee," and again: "Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." By placing these quotations in connection with each other, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews shows that the same God who appointed our Lord Son has also appointed Him Priest; and, when Christ was begotten as Son "today"--from eternity, He was at the same time appointed priest.³

As we have already pointed out, the Old Testament sacrificial system was but a copy and a foreshadowing of greater things to come. Since greater things were intended from the beginning, is it then entirely correct to speak of the failure of the Old rather than the incomplete and inadequate nature of that Testament? We feel that it is. The Old Testament offerings were failures because they were inadequate, but we must also remember that they were never intended to be any more.

In studying the superior offering of our Lord under the New Dispensation, we must remember that Christ's offering is effective for all time, including the Old Testament era. Whatever efficacy the offerings of the Old Testament High-priests had, they had insofar as they typified the greater

3. "The writer wishes to teach that Christ's priesthood is coeval with His Sonship and inherent in it." Dods, op. cit., p. 388.

offering yet to come,⁴ Therefore, from first to last, it is Christ's offering which atones for sins. Without the New Covenant which not only replaced but fulfilled the Old, God's plan of salvation would not have been carried out.

It seems to us that the whole Epistle to the Hebrews is intent on bringing out this fact: that Christ is THE PRIEST, and that His offering is THE OFFERING, aside from which all--from the time of the patriarchs to the end of the ages--are lost.⁵ Our author does not dispute that there must be priests (2:17f.; 5:1f.; 5:10; 7:11f.; 7:15; 7:21f.; 7:26;), and that these priests must have something to offer (5:1,3). He agrees that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (9:7; 9:18). He Himself speaks of the sanctuary, the inner shrine into which all priests enter to atone for the sins of the people (6:20; 8:1f.; 9:11,12; 9:24). But accepting these facts as essentially true, he applies them to Christ. Priests must offer, Christ offered; priests must be taken from among men, Christ was taken from among men; priests enter into

4. "Die alttestamentlichen Opfer waren daher, nach der Schrift aufgefasst, nur Abbilder des Opfers Christi. In ihnen wurde nicht die objective Sühne der Sünden vollzogen, sondern sie waren ein tatsächlicher Hinweis auf die objective Sühne, welche durch das Opfer Christi bewirkt ist." Dr. Franz Pieper, Christliche Dogmatik, bd. 2, p. 453.

5. "Auch die Gerechten des alten Bundes können an dem Heil dieser Zeit nur Antheil haben, sofern sie durch das Opfer des neuen Bundes vollendet werden (11:39,40; 12:23), das nach 9:26 offenbar rückwirkende Kraft hat, und so auch Glieder des neuen Bundes geworden sind." Weiss, op. cit., p. 494.

the Holiest of Holies, Christ entered into the inner shrine behind the curtain. "We have just such a priest!"

It is perhaps due to the writer's care in preserving the analogy between the Old Testament priests and their offering, and the New Covenant priest and His, that he limits our Savior's offering to the shedding of His blood at Calvary. St. Paul considers Christ's assumption of the human form, His endurance of the infirmities and sufferings of human life (and of His human life which was particularly fraught with pain), as part of the Savior's substitutionary work for the sins of the world. The author of Hebrews, however, views this phase of Christ's work simply as His preparation and grooming for the great offering which He must bring: Himself.⁶ Christ's entire life, from His birth to the final scene of "loud cries and tears" in Gethsemane, served (in the writer's opinion) as a period in which He was perfected by the Father to do the Father's will. He was "perfected by suffering" that He might have the strength and the ultimate submission of His will to the Father's to endure shameful death.⁷ He was perfected in sympathy by being made like unto us in every respect, that He might be our understanding priest at the throne of God after His death.⁸

6. Cf. Milligan, op. cit., p. 133.

7. We do not say that Christ's suffering on this earth was not also part of His vicarious satisfaction. We say only that the writer of Hebrews does not present that aspect of Christ's humiliation.

8. See p.

Thus viewing Christ's priestly work, our author is able to lead his readers to a grand climax. He is able to show them the true greatness of the Savior's offering, and he is able, by preserving the analogy between the Old and the New, to speak the language of his readers throughout. Christ shed His own blood for the remission of sins.⁹ It is necessary that the shedding of blood take place, for no covenant is ratified without the shedding of blood. See Jesus, who did not offer the blood of some domestic animal, perfect though it may have been, but who offered His own blood once for all.¹⁰ See Jesus who died, for a testament is of no effect until the testator has died.¹¹

9. "He must therefore have something to offer; for the very duty of a priest is to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin. But what is that which He offers? It is not any such sacrifice as the Levitical priest offers, inasmuch that, were He on earth, He could not be recognized as priest at all. What then can it be? It cannot certainly be the blood of bulls and goats. The daily scene of slaughter that took place before the door of the tabernacle would be utterly out of place in the celestial sanctuary. You cannot imagine such sanguinary work going on up yonder. The sacrifice that is to make even heaven pure must be of a very different character. . . . Can you not guess what it is? It is Himself, offered without spot or stain unto God." Bruce, op. cit., p. 292.

10. Bruce says in connection with 7:27: "That sacrifice was Himself. The great thought comes in here for the first time. Once struck, as Delitzsch says, the note sounds ever louder and louder." Bruce, op. cit., p. 283.

11. "Die volle Sündenvergebung war ja erst im neuen Bunde verheissen, als dessen Mittler der messianische Hohepriester die fuer alle Zeit gueltige Erloesung erfand, die er durch sein eigenes Blut beschaffte (9:12). Darum deutet ja 9:15 durch das so nachdruecklich vorantretende *ἑαυτὸν γινόμενον* an, dass der intendierte Zweck des neuen Bundes erst erreicht werden konnte, wenn ein Tod eingetreten war, und dies wird 9:16f. dadurch begruendet, dass ein Testament erst durch den Tod des Testators definitiv rechtliche Gueltigkeit erlangt." Bernhard Weiss, Der Hebraeerbrief, p. 53.

See Jesus, who is in every respect a priest, whose offering is a priestly offering, whose death is a sacrificial death.¹²

But why should Christ's blood, why should His sacrifice of Himself be so superior? For several reasons. Christ was begotten the Son of God from eternity, and as a Son He was appointed a priest to mediate in His own household for the sins of the people. The very fact of His Sonship, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, makes Him a Ruler of His own household and One with the Father. Surely a Son who offers Himself must be far more acceptable to the Father than the sacrifices of animals offered by appointees!

We have also seen that Christ was a Son and a Priest "without blemish". The Old Testament believers had to furnish animals for sacrifice without blemish and without spot. The law provided regulations for the selection of the best of their flocks for sacrifices. And yet, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews clearly shows, these sacrifices were only animal sacrifices, the blood shed and sprinkled was only animal blood. They may have been perfect animals, but their perfection was but a physical perfection. Christ on the other hand, sinless and morally spotless in every re-

12. "The sacrificial character of the death of Christ was a common article of faith long before. This was held in connection with Isaiah 53:10-12. Now it is precisely in Isaiah 53 that the servant of Jehovah figures not merely as the passive lamb of sacrifice, but also as He who actively and freely pours out His soul unto death (v. 12) or even, according to the rendering, made His soul an offering for sin (v. 10)." Vos, op. cit., p. 433.

spect, offered His own body on the tree.¹³ Being sinless, Christ also had no need to offer sacrifices first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people (7:27,28), as was necessary for the Old Testament priests in their weakness (5:2; 7:27). The sins He took with Him into death were not His own, but those of the world before and after the historical fact of His death.

This sinlessness of the Lord who is both Offerer and Offering also signifies His complete obedience to the will of the Father. "Lo, I have come to do Thy will O God." (10:7). God's will was that He should provide, with the bosy prepared for Him, the perfect sacrifice--the eternally effective offering on behalf of sin. Therefore, in fulfilling the will of the Father, Christ offered Himself; and His offering, being the will of the Father, was acceptable once for all.¹⁴ The superiority and the superior acceptability of Christ's offering due to the singleness of purpose of both Father and Son, can be readily traced throughout the Epistle.

We marvel constantly at the great love of God, who, being sinned against by man, makes restitution for those

13. Bruce, op. cit., p. 338.

14. "But Christ offered Himself agreeable to an eternal arrangement between the Father and Himself. That such an arrangement was made is clearly intimated in Scriptures. In that gracious transaction between the persons in the Godhead, Christ engaged to offer Himself for the sins of mankind, and the Father engaged to accept of that offering as a complete satisfaction for the sins of those in whose behalf it should be presented." Seiss, op. cit., p. 248.

sins by Himself becoming both Priest and Victim¹⁵—that "by one offering He might forever perfect the sons of men." (10:14)

This great love of God, this voluntary self-sacrifice, brings out another point in which His offering is superior. Thus far we have discussed Christ's offering as being superior only because it is Christ who is offering Himself, and since Christ as Offerer is superior to all priests, and as Victim to all animals, His is the greater offering. In 9:14, however, we read that Christ offered Himself "through an eternal spirit." Just what is meant by this phrase has been much debated by many commentators. It is generally thought that "through an eternal spirit" has an ethical, rather than a metaphysical connotation.¹⁶ If we are to accept the view that Christ's offering of Himself through an eternal spirit signifies His free, loving, voluntary offering, we lift His sacrifice out of the realm of the flesh and blood sacrifices of the Old Testament.¹⁷ "The important thing in connection with the legal sacrifices was the simple fact that the blood was shed and sprinkled according to the rubric. The important thing in Christ's sacrifice was, not the fact

15. Of all the distinguishing features of the New Covenant, this is undoubtedly the most significant: that Christ was not only passive as those animals which were offered, but that He was the active agent in offering Himself. We are hereby reminded again that our salvation is wholly accomplished outside of ourselves, by the grace of God.

16. Some few say that Christ, even though He died, died only in spirit, and thus, through spirit was able to keep His life through death.

17. Cf. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

that His blood was shed, but the spirit in which it was shed."¹⁸ Perhaps this aids somewhat in explaining the superiority of Christ's offering over the Levitical sacrifices. Why is the blood of animals ascribed such a limited value, whereas the blood of Christ, shed (in a sense) in the same way, is ascribed transcendent qualities and unlimited virtue? Bruce answers:

Death, blood, in its own place, may have theological significance, but not apart from spirit. This is the new truth which by a wide gulf separates the Levitical from the Christian sacrifice. . . . It is not enough for him to say "Blood atones." We understand what that means in reference to Levitical sacrifices: blood was sprinkled on the altar and the mercy-seat, and so made persons and places ritually holy. Was Christ's blood literally sprinkled on the holy things in the "true" tabernacle? Is it sprinkled literally on human consciences? . . . In the phrase "through an eternal spirit," I see the evidence that the writer of our Epistle felt the pressure of the question and knew how to answer it. . . . Sacrifice and priesthood are perfected when priest and victim are one, and when the sacrifice is the revelation of spirit.¹⁹

Inasmuch as the writer of this Epistle explains the Old Testament sacrifices typically, and insofar as he applies the analogy of the shedding of blood to Christ's offering, I don't feel that we can entirely reject the thought that Christ's sacrifice is superior because His blood, being the blood of Christ, is superior. On the other hand, our fathers might well have added to the words "By His holy, precious blood," the further thought, "Shed voluntarily through His

18. Ibid.

19. Bruce, op. cit., p. 344.

spirit of love and beneficent intention for mankind."²⁰

This blood was shed through an "eternal spirit." The word *διώνυς* further elevates the sacrifice of Christ to a position far above the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament.²¹ That Christ's offering was made through an eternal spirit is wholly in keeping with, and directly resultant from, the eternal character of His person and the eternal efficacy of His offering--both of these truths (as we have seen) being presented at some length in the Epistle. The eternal character of His person made it possible that His offering might be eternally efficacious. That His offering was eternally efficacious is brought out in the Epistle by the constantly recurring *ἐφ' ἅπαντα*. Before entering into a discussion of *ἐφ' ἅπαντα*, however, we shall discuss the problem of the exact time of Christ's offering.

There has been much speculation on the part of theologians as to the proper placing of the death of Christ in the whole plan of the Atonement. Is the death, that historical shedding of Christ's blood, to be considered the sole work of offering on the merits of which the Savior now intercedes for us? Or does the presentation of His blood at

20. Ibid.

21. "The epithet 'eternal' suggests the thought: the act performed by Jesus in offering Himself may, as an historical event, become old with the lapse of the ages; but the spirit which found expression in Christ's self-sacrifice is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in its self-identity lends to the priestly deed imperishable merit and significance." Bruce, op. cit., p. 399.

the "inner sanctuary" in heaven constitute Christ's offering? Or again, does Christ's of Himself continue, in as sense, even now at the right hand of God? All three of these views are strenuously argued in various theological camps.

Professor Milligan tries hard to prove the last of these views by saying that since every priest must have something to offer, and since Christ's work at the throne of heaven is spoken of in the Epistle as a priestly work, therefore the Atonement is being repeated over and over again with each recurrent sin--and this by the repeated offering of the Lord's blood in heaven. In Prof. Milligan's own words:

There is thus no inconsistency between proclaiming the continuousness of Christ's offering of Himself in heaven, and the fact that that offering begun upon the cross was then complete, and can never be repeated. And we are led to the conclusion that the "somewhat" referred to in our text as offered by our Lord is Himself, or, if the expression be preferred, His own blood, His own life, presented to the Father in the obedience and submission of a life of perfect Sonship, from that moment when, identifying Himself with His people, and His people with Him, He enters the heavenly sanctuary, and begins to act His part as the heavenly High-priest. From that moment He is ever transacting with God on behalf of those who are one with Him, and so doing, His work is always the same, present living work.²²

We shall see that this view, taken by Prof. Milligan, very closely resembles the opinion that the presentation of His blood at the mercy-seat is the point at which Christ's sacrifice is efficacious. Those holding to the presentation

22. Milligan, op. cit., p. 145.

theory, as well as Prof. Milligan, argue that the efficacy of the Old Testament offerings was to be found in their being sprinkled on the mercy-seat by the high-priest who had entered into the Holy of Holies. The significance of the blood of the sacrifice was not that a death had occurred, but that blood was the symbol of life--and with this symbol of life sins could be remitted.²³ Christ's offering was also in this sense analogous to the Old Testament sacrifices, and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes it so when he speaks of Christ's acceptable presentation before the throne of grace.

And yet, these commentators forget that in order that the blood might be sprinkled on the mercy-seat, the victim from which the blood had come had to be slain. The Old Testament sacrifice was thought to be efficacious when sprinkled on the mercy-seat, but this act could never be separated from the immediately preceding one: that of the high-priest shedding the blood of the victim, and carrying that victim's blood into the sanctuary. If we insist that the analogy between Christ's sacrifice and that of the Old Testament be carried all the way, even to His present work of intercession, then we dare not forget this important fact: both the

23. "The Scriptural idea of blood is essentially an idea of life and not death. . . . The blood, in other words, represents the energy of the physical earthly life as it is. The use of the term in the Epistle to the Hebrews becomes first fully intelligible by taking account of this truth. The blood poured out is the energy of present human life made available for others." Wescott, op. cit., p. 293f.

shedding of blood and the presentation thereof are essential parts of the sacrifice.²⁴ For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin, and without the shedding of blood there would be no blood to present either in the inner sanctuary or at the throne of grace. Bruce is aware of the importance of the death of Christ as a sacrificial act:

The statement that through death Jesus became ipso facto author of salvation is not falsified by the fact that the essential point in a sacrifice was its presentation before God in the sanctuary, which in the Levitical system took place subsequently to the slaughtering of the victim, when the priest took the blood within the tabernacle and sprinkled it on the altar of incense or on the mercy-seat. The death of our High-priest is to be conceived of as including all the steps of the sacrificial process within itself. Lapse of time or change of place is not necessary to the accomplishment of the work. The death of the victim, the presentation of the sacrificial blood--all was performed when Christ called *τελειωται!*²⁵

How Prof. Milligan and others can hold to their view of a continued offering, even in the sense of a continued presentation of Christ's blood in heaven, is difficult to understand when we consider 9:25: "Nor was it to offer Himself repeatedly, as the high-priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own." The fact of Christ's single offering of Himself is brought out conclusively also by 10:12 and

24. "Wie der Hohepriester zuerst im Vorhof die Opfertiere schlachtete und dann deren Blut im Allerheiligsten Gott darbrachte, so hat Christus als das wahre Opfer zuerst auf Erden sein Blut hingegeben und sodann im Himmel sich selbst Gott dargebracht." Riggenbach, op. cit., p. 215.

25. Bruce, op. cit., p. 190.

10:14: "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God," and, "By a single offering, He has perfected for all time those who are consecrated."

In addition to the idea of a "single offering," a "onetime sacrifice," the author of this Epistle speaks of a sacrifice for all time. We read,

Consequently He is able for all time to save (7:25)
those who draw near to God through Him.

He did this once for all when He offered up
Himself. (7:27)

He entered once for all into the Holy Place,
taking not the blood of goats and calves, but
His own blood, thus securing an eternal re-
demption. (9:12)

But as it is, He has appeared once for all
at the end of the age to put away sin by
the sacrifice of Himself. (9:26)

We have been consecrated through the offer-
ing of the body of Jesus, once for all. (10:10)

But when Christ had offered for all time a
single sacrifice for sins; (10:12)

In these passages we see the "all time," the eternal efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. The recurring idea of $\epsilon\varphi\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\lambda\acute{\alpha}\xi$, meaning literally "once for all time," "not to be repeated," gains, from the context in which it occurs a meaning which not only signifies finality, but all-inclusiveness, and completeness.²⁶ Christ's sacrifice, being once for all, not only was sufficient to the end of the ages, "but extended over

26. Cf. Milligan, op. cit., p. 126.

the children of Adam living before the historical events of 29 or 30 A.D.." ²⁷ His offering, because it is the offering of Himself, "secures an eternal redemption." This means that His offering, and the efficacy and benefits of His offering, are beyond time; for time is a limitation peculiar to this world. Once for all, ample for all, extending to all, Christ's offering transcends all previous offerings. ²⁸ How different is this High-priest from the high-priests of the Old Dispensation who came to the Holiest of Holies year after year with the blood of ever fresh sacrificial victims! How different from those priests who, thus coming year by year, were nevertheless aware that the heap of the people's sins was "accumulating in spite of their faithful ministrations!" ²⁹ How different this Christ and His offering, for He makes full expiation for the sins of the people of all time: once for all!

27. Bruce, op. cit., p. 371.

28. We find, legitimately I think, all of this contained in the grand thought: $\epsilon\phi\alpha\pi\alpha\chi\epsilon\iota$.

29. Ibid.

III. Christ's Offering Completed, He Lives to Make Intercession for Us

The Epistle to the Hebrews seldom speaks of the ἐφάρταξ offering of Christ apart from His entrance into glory. The two thoughts are already closely associated in the introduction: "Having made purification for sins, He sat down at the right hadn of the Majesty on High;" "But we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death;" (2:9)--and so throughout the Epistle.

Christ's offering, though made on this earth, was, technically considered, not complete until it was presented at the throne of grace. This does not mean that the presentation of His blood was an event outside of and apart from His death. In Christ's death both the sacrificial offering of Himself, and the presentation of that offering occurred simultaneously.¹ Nor do we necessarily have to think of Christ's presentation of Himself and His blood in heaven, as having been presented in the same way as the animal blood was presented.² It will suffice to place the emphasis where the

1. See the quotation from Bruce on page 64.

2. Does our author, in comparing the Christian High-priest's offering with that of the Old Testament priests', think, or want his readers to think of Christ's blood as (literally)

author of our Epistle places it: not on the manner of presentation of flesh and blood before God, and not on the particular time when this might have happened, but on the fact that Christ was accepted and glorified, having been made perfect forever. And because Christ's offering was accepted, it was able to procure an eternal redemption for all.³

The author considers Christ's session at the right hand of God as a declaration of the Savior's success. His offering on this earth is the "key which opens the door to the inner sanctuary"⁴--for Him, and through Him, for us. "But when Christ appeared as a High-priest of good things to come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (9:11f.). "He opened for us a new and living way, through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, since we have a great Priest over the house of God!" Christ was accepted into the heavenly sanctuary, a King over His own household by virtue of the sacrifice of Himself for us!⁵

sprinkled in the heavenly sanctuary? Or does he speak in a figure of speech when he states that "Christ took His own blood with Him into the heavenly sanctuary?" Bruce says emphatically, "No such crude idea ever entered the writer's mind. . . . Flesh and Blood, whether of man or of beast, are of the earth, earthy, and belong to the realm of shadows." Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

3. Cf. Milligan, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

4. Bruce, in *loc. cit.*

5. Saphir, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 379.

Christ is a priest forever. He did not make satisfaction for man's sin and then sit down on His throne to rest in glory. "He continues a priest forever." The priestly work which He now does is also on our behalf.⁶ We dare not forget that our author is more concerned with showing his readers how the Savior continues as priest now, than with reminding them of the history of His priestly work on earth. "We have a great High-priest who has passed through the heavens; we have a great High-priest who lives even now to make intercession for us at the throne of grace." We have a great High-priest, who, interceding for us at the throne of God, is able to give timely help, is able to understand our frailties and our sins both of ignorance and of error. We have a great High-priest who is able to accomplish all this because the Father, by crowning Him with glory and honor, has shown that His offering is acceptable once for all!

Do you still look for a Levitical priesthood that will offer sacrifices under your very noses? Do you look for shining robes, for smoking altars, for long prayers, for continued shedding of blood? Will you continue to seek a priest to enter into the Holy of Holies on your behalf?

6. "Die Bedeutung Christi erschöpft sich mit seinem Tode nicht. Als der Erhöhte ist er der Vertreter und Hohepriesterliche Fuersprecher der Gemeinde (7:25), aber das kann er nur sein als der, welcher den Tod hinter sich hat und in seiner Person den Ertrag seines auf Erden vollbrachten Werkes zusammenfasst." Riggenbach, op. cit., p. 266.

You have here a Priest who has rent the veil separating you from the Holiest of Holies. You have here a Priest who through His blood has gained for you " a new and living way into the sanctuary."

Faith, not the stench and smoke of repeated animal offerings, must be your assurance that you are one with God. The testimony of the Holy Spirit in your hearts is the conclusive evidence of unseen hope. Follow the example of your forbears who unlike you, though they never saw the hope of eternal life fulfilled, continually awaited and earnestly sought an abiding city. God has seen fit to give us something better. God has seen fit to perfect our consciences from sin by the offering of one Man.

Thus the closing chapters of the Epistle serve to apply the inspired presentation of the Great High-Priest. "You have not come to what may be touched," but you have come to faith in the Abiding City; you have realized the fulfillment of all that the patriarchs hoped for. "See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking!" (12:25).

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. . . We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high-priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to consecrate the people through His own blood. Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing abuse for Him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. (13:8, 10-14).

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