

## **“Melchizedek: Who Art Thou?”**

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Melchizedek is an enigmatic figure! If it were not so, then we would not be having this discussion of whether he is a type of Christ or an instance of Christophany. After all, the historical figure appears in only two Bible texts (Genesis 14:18-21 and Hebrews 7:1-10) and no more. Yes, there are four texts that mention the phrase in “the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6; 5:10; 6:20). Nevertheless, his entrée is as mysterious as his sortie. So, we are prone to ask, “Melchizedek: Who Art thou?”, and yet, how do we answer that question?

In this paper, we will propose to do the following. First, we will briefly explore the history of interpretation with regard to the identity of Melchizedek will be explored. Second, a method will be put forth by which the question regarding the identity of the person of Melchizedek will be answered. Third, the method will be applied to the Melchizedekian texts. And fourth and finally, conclusions will be drawn from this application and possible objections will be dealt with.

### ***The History of Interpretation***

The vantage point of historical interpretation can help answer the perennial question, “Who is Melchizedek?” This brief foray into the exegetical wilds will provide a sense as to how Melchizedek has been understood by previous generations. So first, notice the strangely hostile attitude of rabbinic authors toward the person of Melchizedek. According to Jewish interpretation, the priesthood of Melchizedek was essentially Levitical and was communicated by him to Abraham and so down to Levi.<sup>1</sup> The fact that rabbinic authors attribute the absence of his lineage to his being the son of a prostitute is remarkable, but perhaps even it pales in comparison to the belief that since the tithe paid by Abraham was merely the spoils of war, it was not the sign of homage from the lesser to the greater.<sup>2</sup>

Leaving the mysterious hostility of the rabbis behind, travel to the caves of Qumran, where in Cave 11, a fragment appropriately named 11Qmelchizedek is found. In an article titled, “Melchizedek as a Messiah at Qumran,” Paul Rainbow points out that Melchizedek may or may not even be central to this or other Qumran texts, but it happens to be the portion that was preserved.<sup>3</sup> Eric Mason observes in his, “Hebrews 7:3 and the Relationship Between Melchizedek and Jesus,” that the name “Melchizedek” is a proposed reading in three small fragments from the Caves 4 and 11.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Edgecombe Hughes, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977), 245.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Paul Rainbow, “Melchizedek as a Messiah at Qumran,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 179.

The manuscript fragments are from what is called the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*.<sup>4</sup> These texts are songs accompanying thirteen Sabbath offerings, and the officiants are angels with priestly roles.<sup>5</sup> Melchizedek is here presented as a priest in a text “largely concerned with invoking and describing the praise of angelic priests in the heavenly temple.”<sup>6</sup> According to Mason, the implication is that Melchizedek is a heavenly angelic priest in the service of God.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the Qumran sect identified Melchizedek as the angel Michael or an angelic “Prince of Light.”<sup>8</sup> According to Qumran, Melchizedek is, in the final analysis, an eschatological figure and likely angelic.

However, as interesting as this reading is, a problem arises when the Qumran scrolls or any other Second Temple source are made the spectacles for interpreting the Scriptures. The problem can be stated in this way: when the Bible is given penultimate authority, and any other text or source is made the principium, or the basic lens, through which we see and understand the Scripture, then there is something more authoritatively basic than the Bible. This foundational error, by and large, is what has happened in the New Perspective on Paul. Therefore, as intriguing as Qumran is for us, it cannot be made the basis for our understanding of Melchizedek.

The same problem is true of the Levi section of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. This piece of pseudepigrapha suggests that Melchizedek was nothing other than Levitical or pre-Levitical in his priesthood.<sup>9</sup> However, a feature that distinguishes the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* and for that matter, Josephus or Philo, from the Qumran texts is that they betray no interest in Melchizedek as an eschatological figure, as in the Qumran fragments.<sup>10</sup>

However, and not surprisingly, by the mid-second century, Christians began to interpret the figure of Melchizedek through a Christological lens. For example, Justin Martyr, a mid-second century Christian apologist used Melchizedek for polemical purposes in the Jewish-Christian debate, “as one whose priesthood, fulfilled by the advent of Christ, is universal in scope, though with a predilection for the Gentiles.”<sup>11</sup> Now, one might wonder how Justin could have spun Melchizedek as a Gentile king, a concept one need not ponder for very long.

Justin’s argument turns on the supposition that Melchizedek was uncircumcised, and so, he was a priest to those who were uncircumcised.<sup>12</sup> Particular significance is then attached to the fact that the circumcised Abraham paid him tithes and was blessed by him. From this point, Justin argues that Christ, in whom the priestly order of Melchizedek is fulfilled, was intended to be the

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<sup>4</sup> Eric F. Mason, “Hebrews 7:3 and the Relationship between Melchizedek and Jesus,” *Journal of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research*, vol. 50 (2005): 50.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Carol A Newsom, ed., “Shirot ‘Olat Hashabbat,” in *Qumran Cave 4. VI: Poetical and Liturgical Texts, Part 1* (eds. E. Eshel et al.; DJD XI; Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 173-401 and plates XIV-XXXI, esp. 205, quoted in Mason.

<sup>7</sup> Mason, “Hebrews 7:3”, 51.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>9</sup> Hughes, *Hebrews*, 239.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 240

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

priest of the uncircumcised or the non-Jew – though even the circumcised can find Him by faith.<sup>13</sup> The difficulty with Justin’s view is that Melchizedek met Abraham, who himself was uncircumcised!

However, by the mid-third century right on through the Counter-Reformation, it was held that Melchizedek’s provision of bread and wine on the occasion of his encounter with Abraham foreshadowed or anticipated the institution of the sacrament.<sup>14</sup> For the medieval church and those of the Counter-Reformation, this view held a great deal of significance. The Reformers, however, rejected the understanding that the bread and wine were anything more than – bread and wine.

Luther and Calvin both penned fiery words of opposition aimed at what they thought was an encroachment of Melchizedek upon the person of Christ. In fact, there was an increasing tendency to understand Melchizedek as an angel, the Holy Spirit (by the Gnostics), or even Christ himself. To these attempts at identification Calvin responded in His commentary on Hebrews (7:3), writing, “It seems not to be worth one’s while to refute the delirious notions of those who dream that Christ himself, or the Holy Spirit, or an angel, appeared at that time; unless indeed one thought it to be the duty of a right-minded man to dispute with Postillus and such fanatics ...”<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Method of Identification***

In light of the history of interpretation, it seems that the question of Melchizedek’s identity is best answered by systematic theology. Why? Well, what, in essence, is the systematic theological enterprise? In other words, what types of questions does systematic theology ask, and what sort of answers to those questions does it offer? Put simply, systematic theology asks: What does the Bible *as a whole* teach about X (be it God, man, sin, Christ, etc.). In this case, the question is “who is Melchizedek?” or “What does the Bible teach about the person of Melchizedek?” That is a question quite simply that is best handled by systematic theology.

Of course, systematic theology does not exclude disciplines like exegesis and Biblical theology. Rather, systematic theology takes the ripened fruit of these disciplines and incorporates them into the final product. But thinking about the relation of exegesis and Biblical theology to the discipline of systematics, they must be understood as preliminary or spadework. So, there are a couple of theological tools that needed in our tool belts in order to rightly answer the question: “Who is Melchizedek?”

### ***The Analogia Scripturae***

The *analogia scripturae* or the analogy of scripture, which is to be distinguished from the analogy of faith, helps to semantically clothe the view that Scripture is its own interpreter. In other words, clear passages of Scripture are brought to bear on less clear passages. In his “The Analogy of Faith in the Study of Scripture,” Henri Blocher provides the historical background for the way in which this phrase has been understood.<sup>16</sup> However, the concern here will be to

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, & John Owen, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Bellingham, Washington: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 158–159.

<sup>16</sup> Henri Blocher, “The ‘Analogy of Faith’ in the Study of Scripture,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 5 (1987): 17ff.

understand the theological presuppositions that undergird the principle of the *analogy of Scripture* and for a very important reason: in order to know who Melchizedek is, it will have to be the Scripture that determines his identity and function.

So, the first assumption is that Scripture is an inspired revelation from God with a unified message. In other words, Scripture is consistent with itself; all that it teaches is coherent. Behind the diversity of Scripture (i.e., human authorship, historical era, etc.), there is an overarching, fundamental unity in its theological content and redemptive proclamation. And this unity follows from the fact that Scripture, at its core, has a single, divine author.

This first assumption leads to a second. As Blocher states it, Christians must express a commitment to the “validity of canonical enclosure”<sup>17</sup> or what can be termed a “theological-canonical hermeneutic”. The canonical approach suggested here is quite unlike that of Brevard Childs. So, what is meant by a theological-canonical hermeneutic? By theological is meant that the divine origin, meaning, and intention form the most basic theological categories for understanding Scripture. The Bible means what God says it means. By canonical is meant that the texts of the OT and NT, in their finished form, as they exist today. In other words, the Bible in our hands is God’s finished book and it is indeed His book.

This leads to the third implication. The Bible has an organic character. Consider three implications of this truth. First of all, any passage of Scripture is to be read in the context of the particular book of the Bible in which it appears, and in the context of the human author, and historical circumstances of the book in which God spoke. Second, any passage is to be read in the context of the total canon of Scripture available up to that point in time. God’s speech is progressive and develops (or unfolds) in history. Third, any passage is to be read in the context of the entire Bible as the Word of God. God intended from the beginning that His later words should build on and enrich earlier words so that, in some sense, the whole Bible represents one long process of communication from one author.

In other words, it is necessary to work out of the view that says that the hermeneutical understanding develops the analogy antecedently – in other words, a given text is interpreted by what has gone before. However, given the primacy of the divine author, the analogy subsequently must not be neglected – in other words, subsequent or successive texts for the purpose of interpretation must be used. By way of example, if one is preaching Isaiah 55, one must use Acts 13:34 in one’s interpretation. Why? Because to preach Isaiah 55 as if Acts 13 did not exist would be to operate, at least functionally, as if there is not a single author over the whole. Thus, the Bible in all its parts, and it alone will be able to answer the question of who is Melchizedek.

### ***Good and Necessary Consequence***

The principle of good and necessary consequence is related to the analogy of Scripture, but with some difference. For example, whereas the analogy of Scripture often works with more than one text of Scripture, the principle of good and necessary consequence is often concerned with only one text and the implications that can be drawn from it. However, the logical implications which are drawn from a text must be both *good* and *necessary* in order to be binding on the believer.

Or, as Old Testament professor C. J. Williams put it in his article “Good and Necessary Consequence in the Westminster Confession,” “The qualification good surely means that any biblical deduction must be in harmony with other Scripture .... The second qualification is that

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 32.

such deductions must be ‘necessary’... or ‘beyond a reasonable doubt.’<sup>18</sup> Or, as another well-known theologian put it, a good consequence is Biblical or consistent with other Biblical texts, but a necessary consequence is one that is required by the text.

The problem is that a textual implication may be good, but it may not be necessary. For example, R. C. Sproul gives us an example of this sort of thing in his book *Knowing Scripture*. According to Sproul, he has read numerous references, “to the state of angelic beings as being sexless.”<sup>19</sup> But Sproul asks in his best Lt. Columbo, “Where does the Bible say that the angels are sexless?” The passage brought to bear as an answer is Mark 12:25. Here, Jesus says that in heaven, there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, but we will be like the angels. According to Sproul, this implies that angels do not marry, but does it imply that they are sexless?<sup>20</sup> According to Sproul, it may well be that the angels are sexless, but the fact is, the Bible does not make that claim. What is more, Sproul asks, is it not possible that angels could remain unmarried for other reasons than that they are sexless? His answer is emphatic; of course, it is possible. Consequently, the inference of angelic sexlessness may be a good inference, but it is certainly not a necessary or required inference.

So, with a method of interpretation and tools that force us to deal with the text of Scripture, we are ready to take a look at the text itself and attempt a systematic theological answer to our question, “Who is Melchizedek?”

### ***Applying the Method***

As noted earlier, systematic theology is not exegesis, nor is it Biblical theology, but it deals with the culmination of those and other disciplines. Therefore, in order to rightly answer the systematic question, which is, “Who is Melchizedek?”, some spadework must be done. In other words, let the Scriptures speak of Melchizedek: what do they actually teach about this seemingly mysterious figure.

### ***The Melchizedek Texts***

Though the phrase “the order of Melchizedek” appears seven times in Scripture, including Psalm 110, the person of Melchizedek appears only twice: first in Genesis 14 and later in Hebrews 7. So, what do these two texts explicitly teach about Melchizedek?

According to Genesis 14, we learn that Melchizedek was an earthly king. He was, in fact, the king of Salem (which some scholars take to be the city of Jerusalem before it was, in fact, Jerusalem). And when he met Abraham, who was returning from the battle of the kings, he brought the patriarch bread and wine. However, Melchizedek was not simply and only an earthly king over an earthly city, he was also a priest of God Most High. Whatever one makes of the name of God in this text, it seems highly likely that it refers to the one living and true God. Even Abraham uses this very name to describe God in v. 22 of Genesis 14. Consequently, in the person of Melchizedek is found both an earthly king and a priest of God.

It is on the basis of the priesthood that Melchizedek blessed Abram. The blessing is simple and yet comprehensive. “Blessed be Abram of God Most High ... and blessed be God Most High” (Gen.14:19,20). This blessing is followed by the statement, “He gave him a tenth of all”(v. 20b). The implication is, of course, that Abram gave a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek, and

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<sup>18</sup> Anthony Selvaggio, ed. *The Faith Once Delivered* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2007), 178-179.

<sup>19</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1977), 75.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

using the analogy of Scripture, Hebrews firms up this implication (Heb. 7:4). That is the sum of what we learn about Melchizedek in the book of Genesis. He was an earthly king and an earthly priest in an earthly city called Salem.

Now, someone may say, “Well, there are other things that we may learn about him. For example, as you said, we learn that Melchizedek brought out the bread and wine. Of what does that remind us? It reminds us of Communion, of course! And so, we learn more than you are letting on. This must then be a covenantal meal foreshadowing Christ’s institution of the Lord’s Supper.” Well, ponder that for a minute. Is that interpretation confirmed by the analogy of Scripture? In other words, are there antecedent or subsequent texts that would confirm or not confirm this interpretation of the bread and wine in this passage? No, there are not. Not even the author of Hebrews mentions the bread and wine!

But an objector may counter by saying, “Well, what about good and necessary consequence? May we not establish that the bread and wine indicate communion by the principle of good and necessary consequence?” And after all, this person is an astute objector. He has read Richard Muller’s *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* and knows that good and necessary consequence is neither the analogy of Scripture nor the analogy of faith. No, this person knows that the principle of good and necessary consequence “assumes that individual texts of Scripture can be examined in terms of the ‘causes ... effects, adjuncts, comparisons, [and]contraries’ of things taught in the passage.”<sup>21</sup> So, for example, Muller says that an examination of Hebrews 1:8-10 “leads by way of examining the issue of causes and effects, to the conclusion that Christ is truly God.”<sup>22</sup> So, says this objector, why not infer this interpretation from Genesis 14 alone?

It may well be that the bread and wine were elements in a covenant meal. It may be. However, the fact is that the Bible does not say so. In fact, it is actually possible that the bread and wine could have been nothing more than a metonym or a single thing, like a meal, expressed by some of its parts, in this case, bread and wine.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the inference of the bread and wine being a covenant meal may be a good inference, but it is certainly not a necessary or required inference. In other words, there is nothing in the text that demands this interpretation, good though it may be.

So, once again, it seems that from Genesis 14, we are left with a picture of an earthly king who is also an earthly priest of the true God, the God of Abram. And this earthly priest-king blessed Abram and he blessed God Most high. What is more, he refreshed the patriarch with food and wine, and also, as a priest, received from Abram a tenth of the spoils. We are left with a picture of an earthly king and an earthly priest in an earthly city called Salem.

But this brings us to Hebrews 7. And here again, in verses 1-2a, we are introduced to the earthly historical figure of “Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils ... ” Do not miss what the author is doing at this point!

Here the author of Hebrews is simply summarizing Genesis 14:17-20. He is bringing to mind the historical and earthly priest-king who blessed Abraham and received a portion of the spoils. It is that simple. But why does the author begin with the historical? Because what he is *not* doing needs to be understood. He is not developing an allegory which has little concern with the

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 2, Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 497.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 232.

historical character of the Old Testament text. As R. T. France writes, “Words, names, events, etc. are used, with little regard for their context, and invested with a significance drawn more from the allegorist’s own ideas than from the intended sense of the Old Testament.”<sup>24</sup> The author of Hebrews is not working with allegory but history.

However, beginning with verse 2b, we find a change from the previous verses. That author of Hebrews, having grounded Melchizedek in history, proceeds with Messianic sensitivity to examine the name of Melchizedek, and of Salem, his kingly domain, with exegetical care. A translation of Melchizedek is “king of righteousness” and Salem is “peace.”

Now, what is the author doing? He is helping his readers to think Christologically. Righteousness and peace are two ideas that descend like a messianic hammer! Why? In the first chapter of Hebrews, Jesus is described with the words of Psalm 45. He is the one who loves righteousness and hates lawlessness – the opposite of peace. The author is helping us to see that he is tying Melchizedek into our Christology.

But the author does not stop there. In verse 3, Melchizedek is described as being “without father, without mother,” which is then further clarified in the next apophatic or negative statement. Melchizedek, unlike the rest of those in Genesis – a book built of the phrase “the book of the generations of”, is himself “without genealogy.” In other words, the statement “without genealogy” explains what it means to be “without father and without mother.” The author of Hebrews is bringing the historical fact of Melchizedek’s missing genealogy in a book built on genealogies to bear upon the argument that he, led by the Spirit, is constructing. So, what is the argument?

Before getting to that argument, a little more background is in order. In verse 3, the author also describes Melchizedek as having “neither beginning of days nor end of life.” Now, just think about this statement in light of the first verse and a half. The author has rooted us in the historical. In other words, he is writing about an earthly person who ruled and shepherded the people of Salem. He is concerned with a king and priest who had an earthly father and mother, though his genealogy was not recorded in Genesis. So, the opening historical context, which roots us in Genesis 14, demands that the language of verse 3 be considered figurative. And the very next phrase clinches this interpretation. This earthly king and priest was “made like the Son of God.” In other words, it is the figurative language that builds a bridge from Melchizedek to Christ or to put it in the language of the text, *makes him like the Son of God*.

Consider the impact of this observation. In Greek, the word ἀφομοιῶ means “to make like or similar”, and Hebrews 7:3 is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. What is more, this word is a perfect passive participle. And according to Peter O’Brien, it is what is called a divine passive, implying that Melchizedek was not simply made to be like Jesus because of the human’s author’s creativity or insight brought to bear upon a theological construct. No, this earthly king was divinely made like the Son of God.

But more than that, the passive participle is also in the perfect tense (an action completed in the past with ongoing effects), *the* tense that stresses the idea that not only *did* God make Melchizedek like the Son of God, but that he stands before us presently and permanently as one made like the Son of God, which is exactly what the next phrase affirms, “he remains a priest perpetually.” How? He remains a priest perpetually by virtue of the typological language that the Spirit used to liken him to Christ.

Now, it is clear what the author of Hebrews is doing. He is telling us that Melchizedek was a Spirit-inspired type of Christ. Now, a type can be recognized by at least two indicators: an

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<sup>24</sup> R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity, 1971), 40.

historical and a theological correspondence between the type and the antitype. In this case, the historical correspondence is the priesthood and the theological correspondence is eternity, or more to the point, eternal mediation. But again, the typology was not imposed by the creative genius of the author of Hebrews. Rather, as the human authors are carried along by the Holy Spirit, they unveil the meaning inherent in the real events and people themselves, because the Author of all things made types to be the types that they are.

Another way to state the matter is given by Lane Tipton, formerly the Charles Krahe Chair of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. He writes,

The Old Testament Scriptures are christomorphic. They demand on their own terms that Christ alone fulfill them, supplying in themselves the objective reality to which Christ must conform in his death and resurrection. This is the force of Christ's statement that all of the things written about him in the Old Testament 'must be fulfilled.' In this light, then, we can discern the christomorphic dimension to the Old Testament, given the strong objective sense in which Christ *must* fulfill what is contained within them.<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Tipton's statement bears directly upon our text. If the historical figure of Melchizedek was made to be a type of Christ, then Melchizedek must fulfill his aim and so point to Christ. Viewed in this light, Melchizedek need not be, nor can he be, Christ himself, but rather he is a type that must find his fulfillment in the Christ after whom he was likened by virtue of typological Spirit-inspired language.

So, what is the point of the argument? The point of comparing the figurative language of Melchizedek to that of Christ is to point up the eternity of Christ Himself in order to distinguish Him from the temporally conditioned Levitical priesthood. We see that very thing in verse 28 of Hebrews 7: those who are priests after the flesh are weak and die, but not so Christ. The comparison between the Spirit-inspired literary and typological eternity of Melchizedek and the ontological eternity of Christ was to put Christ's indestructible life on display. He is a priest forever, and who lives even now to intercede.

One more thing needs to be added at this point. There is a danger in making the aim of the argument too complex. Why? Think about it. Going beyond the simple comparison of the literary eternity of Melchizedek as compared to the ontological eternity of Christ, the text will raise more questions than it is able to answer. For example, to say that Melchizedek is Jesus and so without father and mother and genealogy we find ourselves in a difficult situation. Why? Because Jesus had an earthly mother and an adopted earthly father, a heavenly father, and two genealogies! So, in this regard, Jesus and Melchizedek are very dissimilar.

### ***Conclusions & Possible Objections***

Applying the analogy of Scripture to the question "who is Melchizedek?" shows we discover that the mystery is not all that great. By comparison, both texts (Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7) understand Melchizedek to be an earthly figure; however, the New Testament author led by the Spirit came to understand that the record of this man's temporal life was made to be typological of Christ. So, the author introduces him as the earthly king that he was, and then begins to uncover the literary typology.

Second, understanding that, when we bring the principle of good and necessary consequence to bear upon these verses, primarily verse 3, the position that asserts Melchizedek to be the pre-

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<sup>25</sup> John R. Meuther and Danny E. Olinger, eds., *Confident of Better Things* (Willow Grove, Pennsylvania: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), 190-191.



incarnate Jesus will not stand up to scrutiny. More specifically, one may say that the statement, Melchizedek “remains a priest perpetually” teaches that Melchizedek possesses eternity and is therefore the pre-incarnate Christ, but, the fact is, the Bible says the very opposite. Verse 3 quite simply says that Melchizedek was made *like* the Son of God. Consequently, the inference that Melchizedek is the pre-incarnate Christ is not a good inference, because it stands in contradiction to the very Scripture from which it is taken. And if it is not a good inference, it certainly cannot be a necessary or required inference. What is more, so long as the phrase “made like the Son of God” stands, this inference, however formulated, is not an inference that is beyond a reasonable doubt. As C. J. Williams put it, “Biblical inferences that are merely possible or conceivable are not the stuff on which to build the doctrine and practice of the church.”<sup>26</sup>

Third, related to the previous, in chapter 1, the author of Hebrews deepens our understanding of the glory and supremacy of the person of Jesus Christ, so that his readers might hear Him. Now, two things are stated about the person of Christ that bear on the discussion. Both of them are found in verse 3. It says, “*And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature ...*” Theologically, this text makes two wonderful claims about Jesus. In his book, “*The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*,” Geerhardus Vos summarizes it nicely. Vos writes, “*In theological language, then, the expression ‘the effulgence of his glory’ assures us of the Son’s being homoousios [the same substance] with the Father, and the expression ‘the very image of his substance’ assures us of the Son’s being the monogenes [the unique and only Son] of the Father.*”<sup>27</sup> In other words, the author of Hebrews does not want any misunderstanding of his message. He wants to come through loud and clear. This Jesus is not *like* God. He is supreme in person *and* authoritative in word, because He *is* God. Jesus is of the very substance of the Father, and the unique and eternal Son of the Father, being equal in substance and the same in glory.

So, what is the necessary conclusion? Simply, the author of Hebrews knows how to affirm that Jesus is exactly the same in substance as the Father. So, do not miss the fact that he specifically tells us that Melchizedek was made like the Son of God. The point is obvious: Melchizedek is not the same as Jesus but was only made like Him through Spirit-inspired typology. Thus, this right-minded explanation should put to bed the notions of the fanciful.

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<sup>26</sup> Selvaggio, *The Faith Once Delivered*, 179.

<sup>27</sup> Vos, Geerhardus. *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. J. G. Vos (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1956), 83.