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Who Was Melchizedek?

Radio Sermons



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Introduction

"The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:4.

The name Melchizedek (Melchisedec) is recorded only twice in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, however, this name appears no less than nine times, all in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The place Melchizedek occupies in Biblical history is a remarkable proof of the inspiration and unity of Scripture, confirming that our Bible was written under the direct supervision of God the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Genesis has three simple verses about Melchizedek. One thousand years later in a psalm, a single verse appeared in which God Himself swears to His Son that He is to be a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Another thousand years pass, and an inspired letter is written in which that single verse from the psalm is the seed for a remarkable exposition of the whole work of redemption as revealed in Christ Jesus. Some of the outstanding characteristics of Christ's work are illustrated by the man Melchizedek.

The brief Biblical record of Melchizedek and Abraham had in view that which was to take place with the Son of God 2,000 years later. Then the Spirit of God revealed through the psalmist His purpose in the promise made to the Son in heaven. And the same Holy Spirit next guided the writer of Hebrews in his exposition. This is evidence indeed of the work of the eternal Spirit of God. God has prepared in the historical Melchizedek a wondrous prophecy of His Son, whose right to the priesthood lay in no earthly birth but rather in His being the eternal Son of God.

Contents

Chapter	Page
1. The Historical Record	1
2. The Prophecy	7
3. The Priesthood of Christ	11
4. Who Was the Melchizedek of Genesis 14?	19
5. Light from Hebrews 7	25
6. The Culture and Politics of Ancient Salem	30
7. "Made Like Unto the Son of God"	33

1.

The Historical Record

“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.” Gen. 14:18-21.

Genesis 14 records one of the most intriguing stories in the Bible. In only three verses Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek, king of Salem, “the priest of the most high God,” is told.

The early verses of Genesis 14 record the first multi-nation military conflict found in the Bible, the termination of which was brought about by Abraham himself. The leader of the four nation army defeated by Abraham was Chedor-laomer, king of Elam. This nation was later known as Persia, and today is Iran. Significantly, this same nation has become prominent in the last-day struggles of this age. Ezekiel 38:5 predicts that this was to take place.

Genesis 13 records the separation of the household of Abraham from that of his nephew Lot. Abraham appeared to have been disappointed by the separation, even though it had been God’s will from the moment of His calling of Abraham. But Abraham was not left without consolation. When he seemed alone with only the barren hills of Judea before him, the LORD once more appeared to him and enlarged the promise of the land. As far as Abraham’s eye could see, the LORD bestowed the land upon Abraham and his seed forever.

By faith Abraham took possession of the promised land. He was directed to walk through it; and in the course of his wanderings, he reached Hebron, one of the most ancient cities of the world. Here in the wood of one Mamre, Abraham pitched his tent under a spreading terebinth tree and built an altar to the LORD. Throughout the remainder of Abraham's life, Hebron was to be an important city.

Meanwhile Lot had moved near the "cities of the plain," a district subdivided among several kings, each of whom ruled a city and the immediately surrounding territory.

Rebellion by Canaanite "City-States"

For twelve years this whole district was under the rule of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam. But in the thirteenth year, five of these "city-states" rebelled. Then in the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer's forces swept over the district, bringing death and destruction. This continued until they encountered the five allied kings of the "round of Jordan," in the vale of Siddim, the district around what afterwards became the Dead Sea.

Once more victory came to Chedorlaomer. Two Canaanitish kings were killed: the rest fled in wild confusion. Sodom and Gomorrah were plundered. Their inhabitants — including Lot — were carried away captive. This was the first time, at least as recorded by Scripture, that the world-kingdom founded by Nimrod came into contact with the people of God. That contact took place on the soil of Palestine. Chedorlaomer and his confederates plundered the very land and place where the Babylonian and Assyrian empires were later to be built.

With the capture of Lot and his family, it became necessary for Abraham to act. God had given him the land and the land had been invaded by his enemy. God now called and fitted Abraham, though he was but a stranger and a pilgrim on its soil, to become a deliverer.

An escapee from Chedorlaomer's plunderings brought Abraham news of the disaster. Abraham immediately armed his 318 servants. He was joined by Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, chieftains from the district around Hebron. This company pursued Chedorlaomer and his allies.

A Complete and Devastating Defeat

Probably, as is common in warfare, victory had made Chedorlaomer and his companions careless. Certainly they were ignorant of any coming danger, when Abraham, having divided his force, fell upon them in the dead of night, from several sides at the same time. Abraham inflicted a great slaughter upon these enemies and pursued them to close-by Damascus. The defeat of Chedorlaomer and his allies was complete and devastating. The spoil and captives from the cities of the plain — including Lot — were rescued and brought back.

As the returning host of Abraham entered the valley of Shaveh, close under the walls of what later became Jerusalem, they were met by two kings, having very different characters and coming from opposite directions. From the banks of the Jordan, the new king of Sodom (whose predecessor had fallen in battle against Chedorlaomer) came up to thank Abraham and to offer him the spoils that he had just won. And from the heights of Salem (ancient Jerusalem) the priest-king Melchizedek descended to bless Abraham and to refresh him with "bread and wine." This memorable meeting seems to have given the valley its name — "the king's dale." It was in this very spot that, in later times, Absalom erected for himself a monumental pillar. II Sam. 18:18.

A Sudden Appearance

Melchizedek appeared suddenly, unexpectedly, mysteriously. Then, just as suddenly, he disappeared. Amid the abundance of genealogical details of that period, Scripture tells us absolutely nothing of his descent. In the ancient

record of kings and their achievements, his name and reign, his birth and his death remain unmentioned. Such silence must have been intentional. The reason is that the whole portrait of the man Melchizedek is purposely typical. That is, his being and offices are intended to point to Christ.

Scripture is silent on many things we might regard as essential in the description of Melchizedek. However, in spite of silence, the record does supply some information about Melchizedek that shows the deep significance of his personality. His name is "King of righteousness," his government that of the "Prince of peace." He is "a priest," neither in the sense in which Abraham was, nor yet "after the order of Aaron"; his priesthood was distinct and unique. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and his blessing sounds like a ratification of the bestowal of the land. Abraham gives him "tithes of all."

There is in this tribute paid by Abraham an acknowledgement of Melchizedek as Abraham's superior and an acknowledgement of him both as king and as priest of the true and living God. Abraham recognized him as a priest by giving him "tithes" and as a king by giving him these tithes of the spoil. Abraham recognized that Melchizedek had royal claim upon this spoil. Yet Abraham himself refused to touch any of it, and his allies were only allowed to "take their portion."

Who was Melchizedek? His name means "King of righteousness" (Heb. 7:2), and his title "King of Salem" means also "King of peace." For an individual to have such a name and such a title in such a place as the Canaan of Abraham's day (filled with wickedness and idolatry as it was) is a remarkable thing in itself.

All indications, however, show that Melchizedek's name and title were appropriate. He is the first priest mentioned in the Bible. Within his title "King of Salem" is also the first mention of "peace" in the Bible. This man obviously had a

unique relationship to the true God. Melchizedek used the name El Elyon (The "most high God") to stress the absolute superiority of the true and living God to the multitude of false gods and goddesses worshiped by others in Canaan. He also identified God as "the possessor of heaven and earth," indicating his knowledge of God's creative works.

Recognition and Honor

Abraham gladly recognized Melchizedek as representing the same God who had called him to Canaan, and he recognized Melchizedek's superiority to himself when he "gave him tithes of all." The "King of Salem" had brought bread and wine; and if this were intended for the refreshment of the weary warriors with Abraham, it would have required a very large quantity. It is possible, however, that the bread and wine were intended for ceremonial purposes only, as a thank-offering to God. It has been noted that these are the very elements of the Lord's Supper, which speak of the body and blood of Christ.

A great number of questions are unanswered. How was it possible for a man like Melchizedek to become a king in a land populated by idolatrous descendants of Canaan? How could he come to be recognized as the priest of the one true God? Salem, his city, is actually the same as Jerusalem. Until recent times, it has been the opinion of most scholars that both the Bible and archaeology indicate that this city was inhabited at the time of Abraham by Jebusites, one of the Canaanite tribes from whom it was eventually taken by King David (see II Sam. 5:7). There was certainly no reason to suppose that the Jebusites were different in their paganism than other Canaanites. It hardly seems possible that Melchizedek could have been a Jebusite. But how else could he have become the king of Jerusalem?

Furthermore, how could this man become recognized as God's priest, especially by Abraham? God had called

Abraham to go to Canaan to establish a new nation that would be true to Him. Yet Abraham recognized Melchizedek as his spiritual superior. He gave a tithe to him. Why wasn't Melchizedek himself chosen to establish such a nation? The priesthood he represented was later acclaimed superior to the Aaronic priesthood. Melchizedek also recognized himself as superior to Abraham because he blessed him. This was in spite of the fact that God had already blessed Abraham in giving him victory over Chedorlaomer and his armies.

God's Testimony Before Abraham

The historical record of Melchizedek points to the rather amazing fact that God has not chosen to reveal to man all his past dealings with mankind. These three verses concerning Melchizedek reveal that God had a testimony of Himself in the earth prior to the call of Abraham, and that testimony was not in Abraham.

There was a king and a priest who was the representative of the true and living God in the earth even at the time God came to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. This man was a representative of the priesthood of Shem, and that priesthood had been kept alive in the earth. The people of the earth were made aware of the existence of the God of creation and of His claims upon the earth through a testimony that was not of Abraham or of his immediate ancestors. During that period of earth's history between the Flood and the call of Abraham (that is passed over so briefly in the genealogical records of Genesis 11), God was carrying on a ministry in the earth.

The Spirit of God has not chosen to provide a historical record of this ministry. At the time of Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham, the dispensation was changing. God's ministry was being passed from the hands of His earlier servants into the hands of Abraham and his descendants.

But who was Melchizedek?

2. The Prophecy

"The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:1-4.

The second and final appearance of the name Melchizedek in the Old Testament is in Psalm 110:4. David wrote this psalm over 1,000 years after Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek recorded in Genesis 14.

Psalm 110 exalts Christ as Lord, King and Priest. This psalm, a veritable gem of divine prophecy, is truly messianic. In it David predicted the coming of the Son of God to reign as King and Priest.

The Lord Jesus Himself provided the evidence that He is the object of Psalm 110. Matthew 22 contains the record of the Lord's testing by the Pharisees and Saducees. He overcame their leading questions with devastating answers. Then, in verses 41-45, He asked, *"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he?"*

When they answered, "David's son," He countered, *"How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, the Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?"*

This probing question reveals four facts: (1) The psalm was written by David. (2) The psalm is the inspired revelation of God. (3) It is a psalm of prophecy concerning Himself. (4) Christ is both David's son and David's Lord, the God-Man, and any who deny this messianic prophecy are actually rejecting the testimony of the Lord Himself.

Two Significant Statements

Psalm 110 contains two great utterances addressed by the Father to the Son: "*Sit at my right hand,*" and "*Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*" Both utterances were spoken again after the finished work of the Son of God, after His physical resurrection and after His ascension into heaven. The great truth of the exaltation of our Lord is blessedly woven into every doctrine of Christianity.

On the day of Pentecost, Christ's exaltation was proclaimed by Peter. He said that the One who had died on the cross had been resurrected from the dead and had taken His place at God's right hand, far above all principalities and powers. From that exalted position, Christ fulfilled His promise and sent the Holy Spirit. Upon His arrival on earth, the Spirit testified that Christ is at the right hand of God. "*This Jesus hath God raised up whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, the LORD said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" Acts 2:32-36.

In Hebrews 10 the Lord's exaltation according to Psalm 110 is cited: "*But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; From*

henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool."
Heb. 10:12-13.

We who know Him can look up in faith and see "this Man," the Son of God in the form of man, the second Adam at the right hand of God. He Himself also bears witness to the fact that He took this place the Father gave to Him. In chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, the exalted Christ spoke directly to the Apostle John. In the message that Christ sent to the church of the Laodiceans, He spoke of "having set down with my Father in His throne." There He is still, appearing in the Father's presence as our Priest and Advocate, saving His own by His life and glory. There He will remain until God's purpose in this age — the gathering and the completion of the church — is accomplished.

Scripture reveals that our exalted Lord will not remain at the Father's side permanently. He is there until His enemies are made His footstool. This great event, for which He is now waiting, is spoken of in Hebrews 2:7-9: "*Thou madest him a little lower than the angels (by His virgin birth); thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet . . . But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*"

A Prophetic Revelation

In Psalm 110:4 we find Christ's priesthood prophetically revealed in God's utterance to His Son: "*Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*" According to Hebrews 5, God welcomed His Son back to heaven with this very sentence: "*So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place,*

Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."
Heb. 5:5-6

According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ is now a priest like Melchizedek. In His exaltation, He has a perfect and perpetual priesthood. Just as Melchizedek of ancient Salem, He unites priesthood and kingship in His Person.

The priesthood of our Lord is not Aaronic; it is a more ancient order, the order of Melchizedek. His priesthood is after that of the man who made a brief appearance on the pages of Scripture in the meeting with Abraham in "the king's dale." This is what King David prophesied in Psalm 110.

Again, we have the question "Who was Melchizedek?" The prophetic Word verifies that this obscure man occupied a priesthood that was both older and superior to that of Aaron. His priesthood was that of the Son of God Himself. Melchizedek lived in the time of Abraham and was at that time well established in a priesthood and kingship that stood in the heart of the land of the wicked Canaanites.

The Lord's Full Priesthood Will Be Revealed

The combination of the historical and prophetic views of Melchizedek in the Old Testament brings out something of importance concerning the priesthood of the Son of God. While the Lord Jesus Christ is a priest like Melchizedek now, the full display of that priesthood is not yet. It will come in the day of the manifestation of His glorious power.

In the final night vision of Zechariah (all of which covers events at the close of our age), the crowning of the high priest takes place in a symbolic action. See Zechariah 6. There "his throne" is mentioned, and it is said that He will be a Priest upon it. It is not the Father's but His own throne. Scripture says He must first receive His own throne before He can display the full glory of His Melchizedek priesthood.

It was after the victorious battle when Melchizedek, King of righteousness and King of peace, appeared to bless Abraham and reveal to him the name of Jehovah as the most High God. Likewise, after the final conflict, in which the seed of Abraham will be vitally concerned, the true Melchizedek will appear to bless His people and show forth His glorious power.

Who was Melchizedek?

3.

The Priesthood of Christ

“So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”
Heb. 5:5-10.

After the great declaration of God concerning the eternal priesthood of His Son in Psalm 110:4, the Hebrew Scriptures make no further mention of the name Melchizedek. It does not again appear in Scripture until the Epistle to the Hebrews, where this name from ancient history shows the continuation of his order of priesthood in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Approximately 1,000 years after King David penned this prophecy, its fulfillment was brought out as a major Christian doctrine.

The opening verses of Hebrews 5 remind us that the high priest was taken from among men and set apart to minister on their behalf in things having to do with God. The high priest's function was to present his brethren's gifts and sacrifices for sins. *"For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins."* Heb. 5:1.

The earthly priest, a man weak and sinful as his brethren, could have compassion on the ignorant and on those who wandered from the path of righteousness. Being conscious of his own failures, he had to offer a sacrifice for himself as well as for the people. This contrasts to our High Priest, who needed no offering for Himself but gave Himself in love for others.

A Divine Call

Hebrews 5:4 reminds us that no one was entitled to make himself a high priest. The high priest was determined by divine call. Thus Aaron was chosen by God and set apart for this high office. Even so, Jesus Christ did not make Himself High Priest. Rather, God the Father recognized Him as such when He declared, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Psalm 2:7.

Our Lord's priesthood, however, was not of the Levitical order as Aaron's. It was of a different character altogether. He is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Psalm 110:4.

Melchizedek was recognized as priest of the Most High God centuries before the Levitical priesthood of Aaron came into existence. This latter priesthood, like the legal covenant it was connected with, came in only "by the way." It had its place until the incarnation of God the Son, who fulfilled the Melchizedek type.

In verses 7-10 the Spirit of God emphasizes the reality of

our Lord's manhood and His participation in the sinless experiences of His people. "In the days of His flesh," when He was on earth in human form, He walked the path of faith and took the place of dependence on the Father, "offering up prayers and supplications," accompanied by "strong crying and tears unto him who was able to save him out of death." Note carefully, He was not saved from dying; nor did He ever pray to be saved from death; nor did He fear death. He came into the world to die. He was brought up from death, being raised by the power of God.

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec." Our Lord was perfected as the Captain of salvation. By His work on the cross, He has become the Author of eternal salvation unto all that follow Him in the obedience of faith. He has now been "saluted" of God in resurrection as High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Melchisedec).

A Hard Teaching for Many

After bringing up the name Melchisedec this second time, the author of the epistle declares, *"Of whom we have many things to say and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing."* Primarily this epistle was addressed to believers and professors of Jewish background. The Melchizedek priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ would certainly be distasteful to Jews. It would also be difficult to understand for those trying to keep themselves under legalistic bondage. Many who were to receive this epistle had professed to follow Christ for a sufficient amount of time so that they should have been well able to teach others. However, they themselves needed instruction in the most elementary truths of God's Word.

Many of these had not even grasped the distinction between Israel's hopes (which are earthly) and the hopes of the

church (which are heavenly). They had not realized the passing and the typical character of the Levitical economy in contrast to the permanency of the Christian revelation. They were ignorant of the first principles of the oracles of God, and still required milk, being unable to digest strong meat. They were babes in the truth when they should have been mature believers. The time had come for setting aside Judaism and going on to the full truth of Christianity. The author of this epistle must deal with these things as he goes on with the material of chapter 6.

However, at the end of chapter 6 the author again turns to the subject of our Lord's eternal priesthood. He writes of the "*hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*" Heb. 6:19-20. With this introduction, he writes those familiar words concerning the historic Melchizedek (New Testament spelling Melchisedec) found in the opening verses of Hebrews 7.

"For this Melchisedec, King of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." Heb. 7:1-3.

This description has led many to think of Melchizedek as a mysterious person, possibly supernatural, or even a preincarnate appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. The only record we have of this man is in Genesis 14:18-20. This account depicts him as a royal priest reigning in Salem, the city

afterwards known as Jerusalem. Nothing in those verses suggests that he was anything other than a mortal man. The "mysterious" aspects are supplied by the verses from Hebrews.

These facts can be known. Long before the Levitical economy had been established and a special family set apart for the priesthood, Melchizedek, like Job and Abraham, offered sacrifices as a priest of the Most High God. In the divine providence he met Abraham and his triumphant band returning from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and his allies. Scripture notes that the king of Sodom was on his way to meet Abraham when Abraham was intercepted by Melchizedek. This priest-king came to bless him in the name of the Most High God. Abraham recognized Melchizedek's spiritual authority by giving him tithes of all the spoils of battle. Strengthened by the bread and wine administered by Melchizedek, Abraham was prepared to refuse the temptations of the king of Sodom. This latter king was representative of the world in all its impurity and debasement.

Word Order is Important

Notice how Hebrews 7:2 clearly brings out the typical aspects of the historical Melchizedek. Our attention is drawn to the fact that this monarch is first by interpretation "King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace." If the author of Hebrews had reversed the order of these names, the "type" would not have been perfect. But standing in the order given, the names "Melchizedek" and "Salem" are in perfect agreement with truth elsewhere revealed. Imputed righteousness must come before God's peace. Isaiah says, *"The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."* Isa. 32:17.

Likewise, in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, we first learn how the righteousness of God has been maintained in the

cross before we are told of peace with God that is ours by faith. So precise is God's Word that the changing of the order of the original words in any passage would throw everything out of perfection.

Hebrews 7:3 introduces the mysterious aspects to Melchizedek's background and is the key to our understanding the answer to the question "Who was Melchizedek?" (Statements made here will be considered in detail in chapter 5.)

Verses 4-10 clearly bring out the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood of our Lord over the priesthood of Levi. Levi was not born until many years after the event described in Genesis 14. Abraham, however, was the father of the Hebrew race. Therefore, he was the father of the twelve tribes, including the tribe of Levi, from which the priestly family came. All twelve tribes of Israel were represented in Abraham when he recognized the superiority of Melchizedek by paying tithes of the spoils of battle to him and by receiving Melchizedek's high priestly blessing.

The Superior Royal Priesthood

Hebrews states unquestionably that "the less is blessed of the better." In a double way, the surpassing greatness of this royal priest is emphasized. We are told that "*Levi also who received tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him.*"

Just as the entire human race was represented in Adam at the time of the Fall, so the Levitical priesthood was represented in the patriarch Abraham when he acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek.

After presenting this statement, the way was clear for the author to show how the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ surpasses in every way the Aaronic priesthood of the Levitical economy. It is evident that if perfection had come

under the Levitical priesthood (in connection with which the Law of Moses was given), there would have been no occasion for God to set it aside and raise up another priest after a different and better order.

Our Lord's priesthood, of course, was after the character of Aaron. That is, His Person and work were typified by the Levitical high priest and his service in connection with the tabernacle. But He does not belong to that order. As with Melchizedek Christ is King and Priest by divine decree, not by human succession. This involved a complete setting aside of the old covenant, or "the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."

The economy of Israel stood or fell with the priesthood. If God accepted the high priest on the great day of atonement, He also accepted the nation. If the high priest was rejected, then the nation was set aside.

The End of the Aaronic Priesthood

No high priest was ever to rend his garments. Lev. 10:6. When Caiaphas in his emotional outburst and indignation rent his clothes, the priesthood passed from the house of Aaron. And with it went the entire legal economy, being superseded by the marvelous dispensation of the grace of God.

"For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood." According to Levitical law, our Lord had no title to the priesthood at all. As to the flesh, He sprang from the tribe of Judah, not Levi. However, this in no way negates His priesthood since it is of an altogether different order.

Jesus Christ is consecrated, not in accordance with a legal enactment, but in all the might of resurrection "after the

power of an endless life." As High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, He has brought in a new and better regime than that of the law. *"For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."* Heb. 7:18-19.

So the commandment going before has been set aside. It was weak and unprofitable in the sense that it could not accomplish that for which it was proposed. Its intent was to give man a righteous standing before God. Inasmuch as the flesh, or the carnal mind, is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, the law was useless as a ground for blessing. It made nothing perfect; therefore it had to give way to the introduction of a better hope by which we draw nigh to God.

This better hope is founded upon the principle of grace, of which Melchizedek is the example. And so by divine hope Jesus Christ has become the High Priest of a better covenant.

"And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." Heb. 7:20-24.

There is a contrast between the dying priests of the old order and the ever-living High Priest at God's right hand. There was a constant succession of priests under the old economy, for death was continually taking its toll of them. But our Lord's priesthood, patterned after the unchanging

Covenant written in the blood of Jesus Christ. God provided this man on the pages of history to illustrate those better things to come.

with Abraham? Hebrews 7:3 declares that Melchizedek was *“without father, without mother, without descent (genealogy), having neither beginning of day, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.”*

Many feel these words make a positive declaration that Melchizedek was more than a man. If he were in the earth without human parentage and human ancestors, if his life had no beginning and no ending, if he is like the Son of God having eternal existence, then this excludes him from being “just a man.” At the very least, he must be a man who came into existence by direct creation and therefore one who did not inherit the sin nature of Adam.

There have been four basic proposals as to the identity of the Melchizedek of Genesis 14:

A Preincarnate Appearance of Christ?

First, it has been proposed that Melchizedek was a theophany of the preincarnate Christ. (A “theophany” is an appearance of God in human form.) This is based on the belief that Hebrews 7:3 teaches that Melchizedek did not have human parents, that he came to earth without fleshly ancestors, that he possessed eternal life and a perpetual priesthood and that he was literally “formed like unto the Son of God.” According to this proposal, it was actually the Son of God, the preincarnate Christ appearing as a man, who met Abraham as he returned from the slaughter of kings and served him the elements of the Lord’s Supper. The city of “Salem” over which “Melchizedek” ruled and in which he served as a perpetual priest, was actually a spiritual city. Abraham was visited by God in the Person of the Son.

Several facts rule against this proposal. First, Abraham himself seemed to have no suspicion that he was in the presence of a divine person when meeting with Melchizedek. Although he recognized Melchizedek as his spiritual superior, he

did not recognize him as God. God, in the Person of the Son, had already communicated with Abraham several times earlier in his life. Although the Scriptural record does not actually say so, these communications were no doubt accompanied by an appearance of God in Abraham's presence. It would seem that Abraham would recognize Melchizedek as a theophany, if this were actually the case.

The Son of God did actually appear to Abraham very shortly after his meeting with Melchizedek. Genesis 15:1 says, *"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."* The "Word of the LORD" is a title of God the Son. The Hebrew word "dabar," translated "Word," is the equivalent of the Greek "logos." Christ is identified as the "logos" of God in John 1:14. Would not Abraham have recognized the "Word of the LORD" as "Melchizedek" if such were actually the case?

Genesis 18 records a visit by the Son of God in human form to Abraham on the Plains of Mamre. Two angels, also in the form of men, accompanied Him. Abraham recognized his visitor as the LORD but did not recognize Him as Melchizedek. It would seem that if "Melchizedek" were also a theophany that Abraham would have recognized the association.

Hebrews 7:3 does not say that Melchizedek was "made the Son of God" but rather was "made like unto the Son of God." The Greek word translated "made like" actually means "assimilated." This word means "made similar to" or "made a type of." The use of this word disallows the idea that Melchizedek actually was the Son of God.

A Type of Christ?

The second proposal is that Melchizedek was an historical human who typified Christ. This seems to be what the latter part of Hebrews 7:3 declares: "but assimilated to the Son of

God." Melchizedek was made similar to the Son of God so that he can stand as a type of His perpetual priesthood.

Some feel this proposal does not adequately explain what precedes the final clauses of Hebrews 7:3. These words declare Melchizedek "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." A person without human parentage and genealogy and with endless physical life would be more than just an ordinary man.

This declaration, however, may not pertain to the man himself but rather to God's record of this man. The word "descent," literally "genealogy," strongly indicates that this is what the author of Hebrews actually meant. In a book designed to provide historical records of parentage and genealogy and length of life spans, Melchizedek stands out as having none of these things recorded for him. This indicates that Melchizedek was just a man and that his genealogical record has been suppressed so that he may stand out as a "type" of the Son of God. This is the most likely of the four proposals. Identifying him as a man standing in type for the coming Christ does not give him historical identity but does reveal God's purpose in placing him upon the pages of His written Word.

A Canaanite Priest?

The third proposal is that Melchizedek was a Canaanite priest. This is based on the belief that the ancient site of Jerusalem was occupied in Abraham's day by the Jebusites, a tribe of the Canaanites. Since Melchizedek came from "Salem," or "Jerusalem," he would be the ruling king and appointed priest over that tribe.

The Jebusites were idolators. They worshiped Canaanite gods. The titles for God in Genesis 14:18-19 demonstrate that Melchizedek worshiped no Canaanite god. "Most High

God (El Elyon)" emphasizes God's strength and sovereignty, distinguishing Him from the gods of Canaan who were subject to the same weaknesses as their worshippers. "Possessor of heaven and earth" is similar to titles used by Daniel of the true and living God he spoke of in the fourth chapter of his prophecy.

Although this proposal gives Melchizedek historical identity, it does not solve any of the problems brought up by the commentary of Hebrews 7:3. The archaeological records available today indicate that the Jebusites were not the occupants of Jerusalem in the days of Abraham. Their occupancy was preceded by that of a Shemite group of uncertain genealogy. It was apparently this early Shemite population that had made Melchizedek king and high priest.

Was Melchizedek Shem?

The fourth proposal is that Melchizedek was Shem. Although the least likely of all the proposals, this does give Melchizedek a definite historical identity. It would answer the question concerning the source of Melchizedek's priesthood and kingship.

The proposal that Melchizedek was Shem comes from an ancient Hebrew tradition, which of course would not have been affected by the passage in the Book of Hebrews. If the genealogies and life spans preserved in Genesis 11 are taken as a complete record of the passage of time between the Flood and Abraham, then Shem would have outlived Abraham. Assuming there are no gaps or modifications in the genealogies of Genesis 11, Shem would have lived until 35 years after Abraham's death; so it would have been possible for him to still have been ruling over "Salem." The name "Melchizedek" would, in this case, be regarded as a title rather than an actual name.

To those who follow this proposal, it does not seem unreasonable to imagine that after the dispersion at Babel,

Shem might have moved, under divine guidance, to the place where God would one day establish His temple. As the custodian of the patriarchal records, he could then have transmitted them to Isaac after Abraham's death. This would explain the presence and purpose as well as the background of that one entitled "Melchizedek."

But several points rule against this being an acceptable identification of Melchizedek. First, there is considerable evidence in Scripture and from archaeology that more time passed between the Flood and the birth of Abraham than allowed for by Genesis 11. Abraham's birth probably came about 1,300 years after the Flood rather than the approximately 300 years hinted at by the Genesis 11 record. If this were so, Shem would have been dead for approximately 800 years before Abraham was born. Therefore, he could not have met Abraham in "the king's dale" under the title Melchizedek.

This Possibility is Disallowed

Hebrews 7:3 certainly disallows this proposal. Here we are told that Melchizedek was "without father, without mother, without genealogy." Shem had both a father and a mother. His father was Noah and his mother was Noah's wife. Shem also had a genealogy traceable back to Adam. Hebrews 7:3 further tells us that he had "neither beginning of days, nor end of life." But Scripture says, "*And Noah was 500 years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*" Gen. 5:32. We are also told that "Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad 500 years, and begat sons and daughters." Gen. 11:11. Both the beginning and the ending of Shem's life are recorded in God's Word.

There have been other proposals as to Melchizedek's identity. These are quite unrealistic and hardly worthy of comment. One is that Melchizedek was the "unfallen Adam" from another planet, sent to earth to observe the progress of

God's work of redemption for the fallen race. Another is that Melchizedek was an angel or a specially created being of some kind. There have been serious advocates of each of these views.

But after considering these various proposals, we still face the question, "Who was Melchizedek?"

5. Light from Hebrews 7

"For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of God the Most High, who met Abraham returning from the smitting of the kings, and having blessed him; to whom also a tenth of all divided Abraham; first being interpreted King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, which is King of peace; without father, without mother, without genealogy; neither beginning of days nor of life end having, but assimilated to the Son of God, endures a priest in perpetuity. Now consider how great this (one was) to whom even a tenth Abraham gave out of the spoils the patriarch." Heb. 7:1-4 (literal translation).

It would seem that there are only two possible answers to the question "Who was Melchizedek?" (1) He was a theophany of the preincarnate Christ. (2) He was an historical, human person who typified Christ. The correct answer must be found from Hebrews 7.

Notice what precedes this short description of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7. The last four verses of Hebrews 6 form a single sentence. The last clause of this sentence introduces Melchizedek. "Wherein God, more abundantly desiring to show to the heirs of promise the unchangeableness of his

counsel, interposed by an oath, that by two things unchangeable, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before us, which as an anchor of the soul, we have both certain and firm, and entering into that within the veil; where as a forerunner for us, Jesus entered according to the order of Melchisedec, having become a high priest forever." Heb. 6:17-20 (literal translation).

Our Lord Became a High Priest Forever

The statement says Jesus entered into the veil under the authority of His work of the cross, through this work "having become forever a High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec." The statement is that our Lord Jesus Christ became a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek through His sacrificial death on the cross. If He were the Melchizedek of history, then He would not have become a High Priest through the work of the cross. He would have already been a High Priest forever after His own order.

Hebrews 7:1-4 actually contains only two sentences. The first sentence is contained in verses 1-3. The second is complete in one verse — verse 4.

Note carefully the structure of that first long sentence. The subject is contained in the first phrase and the remainder of the sentence is contained in the last phrase. What comes between is a parenthetical description of the one introduced in the preceding sentence, who is the subject of this sentence. "For this Melchisedec . . . endures (remains, abides, dwells, lodges, continues firm) a priest in perpetuity." We are told that this Melchizedek, because of what Scripture says of him, is "imprinted upon the pages of God's Holy Word as a priest in perpetuity." After that statement concerning the Melchizedek of history, the Spirit of God says, "Now consider how great this (one was), to whom even a tenth Abraham gave out of the spoils the patriarch."

A King and a Priest

The following facts concerning Melchizedek are contained in the parenthetical part of the first sentence. According to the historical record of God's Word, he was king of Salem. He was also the priest of the Most High God. He is the historical character who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings. Melchizedek blessed Abraham in the name of the Most High God. Having received this blessing, Abraham recognized Melchizedek as being of superior spiritual rank to himself. Because of this, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth part of the spoils of battle. Melchizedek's name means "King of righteousness." By virtue of his office as "... king of Salem," he is also "... king of Peace."

Melchizedek stands upon the pages of history without a written record concerning his father or his mother. He is without "genealogy." (The Greek word for "genealogy" used here refers to a written record.) Since Melchizedek stands upon the pages of God's revelation without genealogy, there is no record of the beginning of his days nor of the end of his life. This lack of a genealogical record was intentional on God's part because through this omission he is "assimilated" (that is, "made a type of") the Son of God. As far as God's revelation is concerned, Melchizedek "endures a priest in perpetuity."

Here are the things Hebrews 7 tells us concerning the identity of Melchizedek.

First, verse 4 strongly infers that he was a man. He was not a supernatural being and he was not any man for which Scripture has given us a genealogical record.

Second, his office of priesthood superseded and preceded that of Aaron and the Levitical economy. His rank is exceedingly high.

Third, Melchizedek was "... king of Salem, priest of God

Most High." This was a dignity high above that of Abraham the patriarch.

Fourth, his name means "King of righteousness" (a reference to Christ's work at Calvary). His position is as "King of Salem," which means "King of peace" (a reference to the result of Calvary). Melchizedek as "King of righteousness" typifies Christ at the cross, answering all righteous claims against us. Melchizedek was "King of peace" as Christ is our peace. Melchizedek was a king-priest — king before priest.

Fifth, neither Melchizedek's father's name nor his mother's name is given. However, he had both a father and a mother since he is designated a "man."

Sixth, the record does not say that he was "like the Son of God" but that he was "assimilated to the Son of God." He was "assimilated (in his record) to the Son of God," and in the record he "abideth a priest continually."

Seventh, he is revealed to us as "without father, without mother" and "without genealogy." "Without genealogy" simply means his genealogy is not given. But verse 6 proves that he actually did have a genealogy. Here we read concerning Melchizedek that "he whose genealogy is not counted from them, received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises."

Eighth, he had "neither beginning of days nor end of life." No recorded time of birth, death or age is given in the historical record. It is not the author's intent to infer that Melchizedek was never born, nor that he has not died. These words form a descriptive clause of the same character as "without father, without mother, without genealogy."

Ninth, no kingly line, no dynasty is named. There was no "successor" to Melchizedek as there were always "successors" to the kings of Israel and Judah. No "successor" could

be named to one whose life, in type, is without beginning or end.

No Genealogical Records Presented

Hebrews 7:3 simply declares that so far as Scripture is concerned Melchizedek appears upon its sacred page "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually." That is, in the Book of Genesis (a book designed to provide genealogies) this man, in spite of his tremendous importance, has no genealogical records.

There is no record of his parentage, birth or death. He simply appears for a moment, then vanishes from sight, never to be mentioned again in the Word of God until the prophecy of Psalm 110. Thus he, a man, is an appropriate type of our ever-living Saviour and High Priest.

We conclude that Melchizedek was not a theophany of the preincarnate Christ. He was not a supernatural being at all. He was a man; and because of the absence of any genealogical records concerning him, God has made him a marvelous type of our Lord Jesus Christ, both in his kingship and in his priesthood.

6. The Culture and Politics of Ancient Salem

“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.” Gen. 14:18.

Melchizedek is introduced upon the pages of Scripture as both king of “Salem” and priest of the Most High God. This declares him a man who simultaneously held two high offices.

What were the natures of these two offices? What kind of people did Melchizedek rule over? What kind of society submitted to the kingship and the priesthood of this ancient king-priest? How did Melchizedek obtain his offices if not by birthright? Who succeeded him to these offices? Was there only one Melchizedek?

These questions have plagued Bible students for years. Most believe that the “Salem” mentioned here refers to ancient Jerusalem. Until the early part of this century, archaeologists believed that the site of ancient Jerusalem was occupied by the Canaanite tribe of the Jebusites from before Abraham’s time up until the time of King David. It was David himself who finally dislodged these occupants. What was known of the culture and politics of the Jebusites left no place for a king-priest who was a worshiper of the true and living God. It was most difficult to believe that Melchizedek was a Jebusite.

Records Discovered

While working among Hittite sources during the early part of this century, archaeologist A. A. Sayce discovered

some records that point to occupation of ancient Jerusalem prior to the arrival of the Jebusites. These earlier occupants lived there during the time of Abraham and were descendants of Shem. The exact link to Shem is not known, but they were most definitely not Hamites or Japhethites. These ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem did worship the one true God and kept alive a testimony for Him.

Sayce's discoveries have brought to light the fact that in the ancient world the worship of the one true God has always centered in the one city, which was called Salem in the days of Melchizedek. Later it was called Jeri-Salem, and this in turn gave way to the present name of Jerusalem.

In its early history, Jerusalem was inhabited entirely by priests and their families. They had a strange economy and an even stranger system of politics. It is difficult to describe their form of government, for it was unique. It could be called a "despotic democracy." The ruler was a "benevolent despot."

The reason their form of government is so difficult to describe is that we have no parallel type today. Salem was ruled by a king whose authority was absolute. In every case the king was also the high priest of the monotheistic faith. These king-priests kept alive the worship of Jehovah and taught His name to many of the ancient races.

Successors Were Elected

When a king in Salem died, democracy functioned. All adults of the society, both men and women, gathered to vote for a successor to the throne. After this election, democracy retired into the background and the elected king ruled without check upon his wisdom or power. In electing a new king, the priestly families of Salem followed two inviolable laws. The first was that the candidate must be characterized by piety. The godliest man in the community was the most logical candidate for the throne.

The second rule had to do with genealogy. No man could be a candidate for the throne in Salem who was related by birth or by marriage to any royal family, living or dead. The people of Salem were determined that they would never have a traditional and hereditary dynasty.

Only One Melchizedek

Let's associate Sayce's facts with those intriguing words of Hebrews 7:3. The plain implication of the Hebrews commentary is that the king of Salem was not king by inheritance. He received his throne neither from father nor mother because he was without royal pedigree. His office of priest and king had neither beginning nor end. He established no dynasty. But one and only one "Melchizedek" ever graced the throne in Salem. Like the eternal Son of God, he had an abiding priesthood that never passed away. Thus the reference "without beginning and without end" denotes his dynasty, not his physical life.

Who was Melchizedek? He was the king-priest of Salem in the days of Abraham. He was a man who ruled over and mediated for a people and represented the fading priesthood of Shem in that early world. The testimony for the true and living God had been kept alive by these Shemites of uncertain genealogy in that time between the Flood and the call of Abraham. God has purposely not provided us with a record or history of these people. Only Melchizedek, a type of the eternal Son of God, stands upon the pages of God's written record.

Some have speculated that the peoples of ancient Salem were descended from Job. The setting of the story of Job places this man of patience in the "land of Uz." This would indicate he was a descendant of Uz. According to Genesis 10:23, Uz was the first son of Aram, who was in turn the fifth son of Shem. This could be the beginning of the genealogy that produced the society of ancient Salem. However,

this is only speculation. For God has not seen fit to provide the necessary genealogical record. Such records would spoil the "type" of Melchizedek's eternal priesthood.

Melchizedek was a Shemite who, as king of Salem, also was a universal priest of Jehovah. His priesthood was not limited to any certain people or place. He was the real earthly king of what is now Jerusalem. Neither his parentage nor his ascension to the priesthood is recorded. In a chosen spot upon the earth's surface, in the midst of people given to gross idolatry, he was called a priest and king by the LORD Himself. Melchizedek was apparently taught of the LORD just as the Apostle Paul was similarly taught.

No priest of Israel was ever king and priest. This man is unique in every sense of the word. That must of necessity be, since he was the prototype of the coming eternal king-priest, Jesus Christ.

7.

"Made Like Unto the Son of God"

"For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." Heb. 7:14-17.

The Melchizedek of Genesis 14 was a descendant of Shem who, as king of Salem, was also a universal priest of Jehovah, not limited to any certain people or place. He was the real earthly king of a unique society of priests who, at the time of

Abraham, was living in the city that is now Jerusalem. Melchizedek's parentage or succession to the priesthood is not recorded. This man, in the midst of a Canaanite population engaged in gross idolatry, was appointed priest by the LORD.

The comments about Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:3 do not signify that he, as a real man, was born without father or mother. Rather, these words teach that his appearance in Genesis 14 is without mention of father or mother. Thus that which comes as a sudden unexplained appearance in the historical record is used as an example of what is literally true concerning the Eternal Christ.

Melchizedek was a priest by direct appointment of God, and this divine appointment was not passed on to his descendants. Standing uniquely without precedent or consequent, it figuratively was forever.

The fact that one is in office does not necessarily qualify him for God's larger purpose. Although Abraham was blessed of Melchizedek and (according to Hebrews 7:7) the less is blessed of the better, God chose Abraham, not Melchizedek through whom He would bless the world. That blessing was to come on the basis of faith, not office.

The Epistle to the Hebrews brings together the names of Jesus and Melchizedek to point out several important facts concerning God's program for the redemption of lost mankind. First, a change in the Aaronic line of the priesthood had to be made in order that all nations (not the Jews only) would be included. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is after the order of Melchizedek not after the line of Aaron. Jesus Christ is not after the tribe of Levi, from which line all priests of Israel came. Rather, He was after the tribe of Judah.

Second, the priestly order of Melchizedek was superior to the Levitical priesthood in that Melchizedek was both king

and priest. Again, no priest of Israel after the order of Levi was ever simultaneously king and priest. The priesthood of Jesus Christ was superior to both the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Melchizedek.

The priesthood of Jesus Christ is eternal. It operates in the true sanctuary not made by hands, the heavens. It abolishes the order of Levitical priesthoods and does away with the earthly sanctuary made with hands and worldly ordinances that were carried out in them.

The priesthood of Jesus Christ establishes a better covenant upon better promises, one that is not written on tables of stone but rather in the heart and mind. This priesthood forever fulfills the requirements of the law. The priesthood of Jesus Christ operates in the spiritual realm.

The New Covenant makes Jesus Christ the High Priest for every believer. It forever elevates every believer to the position of priest, with ready access to the heavenly Father.

“If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident; for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” Heb. 7:11-17.

Who was Melchizedek? He was God’s perfect type of that new heavenly priesthood that was to come through the New

Covenant written in the blood of Jesus Christ. God provided this man on the pages of history to illustrate those better things to come.

The End