

THE PARADOX OF MELCHIZEDEK

HOW THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS UTILIZED
PARADOX TO HARMONIZE DISHARMONY

MATTHEW R. HAMBRICK

POINT LOMA NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

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GENERAL:

EQ – Evangelical Quarterly

LQ – Lutheran Quarterly

MT – Masoretic Text

WTJ – Westminster Theological Journal

THE WORKS OF PHILO:

Abr. – De Abrahamo

Congr. – De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia

Deus. – Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis

Fug. – De Fuga et Inventione

Her. – Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit

LA – Legum Allegoriarum

Mig. – De Migratione Abrahami

Post. – De Posteritate Caini

Prov. – De Providentia

Somn. – De Somniis

OTHER:

HE – Historia Ecclesiae

INTRODUCTION

Melchizedek is a mystery. He appears only twice in the Old Testament and in only one document in the New Testament. However, Melchizedek is interpreted in such an odd way he becomes quite important. The New Testament document in which he appears is Hebrews.¹ Hebrews is, in itself, quite mysterious. Next to nothing is known about the author of the document. Next to nothing is known about to whom it was written. Next to nothing is known about the document in general. Scholarship makes a lot of guesses, but really no answers are to be found. The mysteriousness of Melchizedek in Hebrews should surprise no one; Hebrews is itself one of the most mysterious works of the New Testament.

By the time Hebrews was composed, Melchizedekian speculation had apparently been going on for some time. Christianity, even as a sect of something that resembles Judaism, was new, merely

¹ I will not be referring to Hebrews as “The Epistle to the Hebrews.” It has become evident that Hebrews is not, in fact, a letter at all. See Craig R. Koester, “Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 103, and also his “The Epistle to the Hebrews in Recent Study,” *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 2 (1994): 125-128.

forty to seventy years old. The messiah of Christianity was born normally (disregarding the virgin birth), lived a human life for roughly thirty years, was crucified as a criminal, resurrected, and was now conspicuously absent. The feeling of religious isolation the audience felt can only be imagined. Melchizedek had been spoken of as an angel long before Jesus walked the earth. If the audience of Hebrews was familiar with Melchizedekian speculation, does it follow that they might wonder if Melchizedek was akin, in some way, to Christ?

MELCHIZEDEKIAN SPECULATION

Hebrews commentaries, for the most part, do a good job discussing the *purpose of writing* or, in rhetorical terms, the *exigence* of the document. First and foremost, scholars view Hebrews as a warning against apostasy.² This is a correct interpretation; it is, however, incomplete. To reduce the author's intent – if that can be ascertained – to a prevention of a 'falling away' is to miss many other important, related points

² See P.E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 10-11. See also, Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1989), 21-22, for a complete picture of possible exigencies.

to which the author wishes to call attention. It is necessary to recognize that the author of Hebrews does not have one, single *exigence*. He has a multitude of problems that need to be addressed. Yes, the main issue facing the author of Hebrews was a movement from the fledgling Jesus movement back to the system of beliefs that would later be called Jewish. However, he³ is also attempting to instill a proper angelology (arguments concerning Melchizedek are a part of this), display a new interpretation of the *parousia*,⁴ show the superiority of this “new covenant,” and possibly most important, promote proper Christology. All of these goals, for the author, are inseparable from one another. For the purposes of this thesis, I will attempt to show the intertwined exposition of the human and angelic

³ I will be referring to the author as “he” on occasion and find it necessary at this point to explain why I do not believe the author to be female. Adolph von Harnack, Arthur S. Peake, and others are of the opinion that the author of Hebrews was Priscilla. Some have advanced this position with the minor modification that here husband, Aquila, collaborated with her. While it is an attractive notion that a female author made her way into the canon, it is not probable. Harold W. Attridge finds a problem with the argument on the grounds of the pronoun usage. He writes, “[T]he author’s masculine singular self-reference at 11:32 would seem to preclude [Priscilla], either alone or with her husband” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 4). Further explanation will be given in chapter two of this thesis.

⁴ Cf. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 11.

Melchizedek and the human and divine Christ. To discuss the elevated nature of Melchizedek, while forgetting its intertwined discussion of the ultimate elevation of the Son, is to completely miss the point.

Paradox is evident in the entire Hebrews document. Hebrews makes it clear that God spoke “to the fathers” and “in his Son” (Heb. 1:1-2).⁵ Therefore, is Judaism true to the author, or is a belief in Christ true? Should one deny Judaism or deny Christianity? Either choice, to the author of Hebrews, would prove to be apostasy. Hebrews 2:1 reveals the goal of the author: “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.” As a result, we can see that the author is calling his audience not to reject Christ, not to leave the *ekklēsia* in favor of a return to the synagogue. However, somewhat unexpectedly, the author utilizes Jewish heroes to argue a case for Christ and His assembly! The central method of argumentation in Hebrews is in itself paradoxical. Christ is no exception to this paradoxical treatment. Can it be said of Jesus Christ, in the Hebrews text, that he is human? Most

⁵ All biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.

definitely, Christ is human to the author of Hebrews. Can it be said of Jesus Christ, in the Hebrews text, that he is God or divine? Most definitely, Christ is divine as well. To choose one nature and deny the other is a wrong interpretation of the text. Can this method be applied to Melchizedek as well? I contend that it can; Melchizedek is no exception.

At the time the author of Hebrews was writing, two main traditions concerning Melchizedek were in existence. The author of Hebrews, while seeming to know both the tradition of Melchizedek as human being and the tradition of Melchizedek as a heavenly figure, may have taken aspects of both and created a paradox in order to harmonize the indefinable, unexplainable, enigmatic figure of Melchizedek. In Hebrews, is Melchizedek human or angelic? I contend that, to the author of Hebrews, Melchizedek is both.

CHAPTER ONE:
VARIOUS TRADITIONS REGARDING MELCHIZEDEK
PRIOR TO HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION

Who was Melchizedek to the writers of religious documents prior to Hebrews? Although there are a number of texts that discuss Melchizedek written before Hebrews, for the most part, the work to be done is speculative. Just as those people who advance questions regarding the authorship of Hebrews must be content with either speculation or with a simple “only God knows,” the mystery of the author of Hebrews’ sources will remain just that, a mystery.

That is not to say that the sources we have are not adequate to witness common traditions about Melchizedek. Truthfully, just the opposite is the case. While there may not be the plethora of sources about Melchizedek that there are about Abraham, enough source material exists to make a compelling case that, to many writers who wrote before the creation of Hebrews, Melchizedek was more than human. In this first chapter, I will be discussing the many and varied

traditions about the person Melchizedek. Was he an angel? Was he human? Could he possibly be both? All of these questions will be considered in the following pages.

GENESIS

(Dating Uncertain)

To say that Melchizedek is discussed briefly in Genesis is a supreme understatement. This is not to say that Genesis is different than any other Old Testament source – elsewhere Melchizedek is either never even named or merely mentioned in passing; but in Genesis he is given an extremely large role by the author with the use of exceptionally few words. Genesis is the first place we see any actions of the ‘historical’⁶ Melchizedek recorded. The author of Genesis writes,

After [Abram’s] return from the defeat of Cherdorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet [Abram] at the Valley of Sheveh (that is, the King’s Valley). And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed [Abram] and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most

⁶ When I use the word ‘historical,’ I use that word in terms of literary history and do not mean to say that there is necessarily any historical event described.

High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram⁷ gave him one-tenth of everything. (Gen. 14:17-20)

To recap, Abraham, then called Abram, had just been very successful in battle, defeating a number of so-called kings. Melchizedek stepped out of nowhere pronouncing blessing upon Abraham. Of course, without further explanation given in the text, it could be presumed that Melchizedek, called the king of Salem, was simply one of the kings that Abraham had just defeated. Perhaps Melchizedek had seen Abraham’s power – in his defeat of many; and as a sign of submission and respect Melchizedek had decided to bless Abraham as a symbol of his loyalty and as an illustration of his wish not to be destroyed by his adversary.

How could one advance this assertion? The text clearly says that Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek. Traditionally it is accepted that the “he” in verse 20 is Abraham and that he, Abraham, gave his tithe to Melchizedek. There is another seldom-

⁷ In the MT the text reads “he”. E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 100.

addressed option. Fred L. Horton suggests that there is no reason, looking at the Masoretic text (MT), that the language could not mean Melchizedek was giving tithe to Abraham.⁸

Is it not possible that the story could actually be referring to a payment from Melchizedek to Abraham in order to prevent Abraham from destroying Melchizedek in further warfare? There seems to be no reason, in the Genesis text alone, to keep this from being an arguable option.

Yet I am aware of a number of possible problems with this minority view. First, Salem is more than likely a play on words; Salem (Shalem) means peace.⁹ Second, Salem is not listed in the places in which conflict with Abraham occurred.¹⁰ Third, and

⁸ See Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 14. For more background regarding the Melchizedek episode of Genesis, see Speiser, *Genesis*, 99-109.

⁹ See J.A. Emerton, "The Site of Salem, the City of Melchizedek," in *Studies in the Pentateuch*, J.A. Emerton ed. (Leiden, Neth: E.J. Brill, 1990), 45. Further comment on the interpretation of 'king of Salem' as 'king of peace' will be discussed later in this section and in chapter two. See also Heb. 7:2.

¹⁰ Speiser, *Genesis*, 106.

finally, this subsection of Genesis 14 is more than likely a later addition to the text.¹¹

The name of Salem, interpreted as peace, may be important to note for the sake of caution in interpretation, but it does not completely detract from the possibility of Melchizedek as a previous adversary of Abraham. Salem's absence from the list of adversaries is probably the best refutation, for which I have no real defense. If the text of Genesis 14:18-20 is, in fact, a later insertion (which is most likely),¹²

¹¹ In regard to the later addition of the text, Horton writes, "Although the passage is imbedded in a section of the Pentateuch that is thought by some to have a great historical value, vss. 18-20 are an insertion into the text and do not necessarily share whatever historical value might belong to the rest of the chapter" (*Melchizedek Tradition*, 13). The work of Speiser is in complete agreement with Horton on this point. He writes, "The date of the narrative has been variously estimated. A ranking documentary critic is inclined to dismiss the story as a late scholastic reconstruction.... Others would regard it as the product of living tradition. A fresh re-examination of all available scraps of evidence, both internal and external, favors an early date, scarcely later than the second millennium," (*Genesis*, 106).

¹² Beyond any outside evidence, if one removes Genesis 14:18-20 from the text, it reads as if the passage were never there, without any real problems or gaps. "After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet [Abram] at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the Kings's Valley). [...] Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.' But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the Lord, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you

then it is not explained thoroughly enough to decipher what Melchizedek's role is in the narrative. Therefore, the option still remains open as to whether Melchizedek was viewed as friend or foe to Abraham in this narrative. However, the idea of a later insertion would assume Melchizedek functioned in a positive way with Abraham.

While it is probably impossible to know the original intentions of the author, it is most likely that the author was a member of a later royal cult. Horton explains that historical scholarly consensus, when discussing the dating scheme of Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, had dated Psalm 110 as the later work and Genesis 14:18-20 as the earlier work. As a result of this dating configuration, it has long been believed that Psalm 110 depended on Genesis 14:18-20. Horton discusses that to more recent scholarship (twentieth century), the date for Psalm 110 has moved backward and the date for Genesis has moved to a more recent time. Horton finds it more than likely, or at least equally as likely that Genesis 14:18-20, as a result of

might not say, 'I have made Abram rich'" (Gen. 14:17, 21-23). "That vss. 18-20 are an insertion into Gen. xiv is shown quite easily by showing vss. 17 and 21 together" (Horton, *Melchizedek*, 13).

this new dating scheme, may very well depend on Psalm 110.¹³

If Melchizedek was not a part of the battle and had no stake in who won, why does he appear? Why does he feed Abraham? Why does he bless him? Was he a lesser king who would need the protection of Abraham? With each proposed answer comes another question. None of these questions, however, is discussed within the text. It is more than likely that these questions have spawned many of the stories that are to be discussed later in this chapter. It is probably as a result of the answers these stories give that Hebrews discusses Melchizedek. What seems to be a given in this story, however, is that Melchizedek is undoubtedly a human being. This one seemingly simple statement becomes exceedingly important.

¹³ Horton sees Genesis 14:18-20 as being a possible midrash on a very difficult psalm. More will be discussed in regard to the relationship between Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4 below (Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 22).

PSALMS

(Dating Uncertain)

Psalm 110 was very important to the New Testament writers. Authors quoted it in Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43; Acts 2:34; and Hebrews 1:13, 5:6, 11:21. This is not even to include the places where reference to the psalm is simply assumed. Attempting a date with Psalm 110, like most of the Hebrew Bible, is a wasted effort. Horton cites many who attempt to place Psalm 110 at or around the time of David, while others place the psalm in the pre-Israelite period.¹⁴ The authorship of the Psalms is traditionally ascribed to David. While this may or may not be true, Mitchell Dahood dates this particular Psalm to the tenth century, a similar timeframe to which some archeologists believe the historical David would have lived.¹⁵ Psalm 110, if it is in fact a

¹⁴ According to Horton, Gressman “suggests that the psalm deals with David’s take over of an ancient Amorite priest-kingship in Jerusalem, perhaps even a reappearance of Melchizedek!” Others (Bentzen, Rowley, et al) claim that Psalm 110 is “legitimization of David’s kingship and Zadok’s priesthood” (*Melchizedek Tradition*, 34 n. 3).

¹⁵ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 101 – 150* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 112; Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18, 28.

legitimization text, advances the argument that David, or to whatever king the psalm refers, was a priest-king; for the early Church, then, Jesus, as his “son,” would have been entitled to the same role. By this I mean to say that by belonging to the lineage of David, Jesus would have been allowed the same traditional rights as David was himself. The psalm reads,

The Lord says to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.” The Lord sends out from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes. Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter heads over the wide earth. He will drink from the stream by the path; therefore he will lift up his head. (Ps. 110:1-7)

The only line concerning Melchizedek in Psalm 110, the only psalm in which Melchizedek is mentioned, states, “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Ps. 110:4). Psalm 110 becomes quite interesting when discussing Melchizedek in Hebrews, but for the purposes of introduction – and in order to stay true to the original text (so far as that is possible) – we must begin by saying that, similar to Genesis, a large role is given to Melchizedek without any textual explanation.

James R. Davila’s work is quite good even when his conclusions cannot withstand scrutiny. In his article “Melchizedek: King, Priest, and God” he attempts to use sources prior to and later than Genesis and the Psalms (Ugaritic, 11Q13 Melch, Nag Hammadi, etc.) to prove there was an importance placed on Melchizedek by the “Davidic royal cult.”¹⁶ Going further, Davila wishes to show that Melchizedek was a god to this cult and, as a result of this tradition, he was a god to the Qumran community. Davila

¹⁶ “Melchizedek: King, Priest, and God,” In *The Seductiveness of Jewish Mysticism* (S. Daniel Breslauer, ed.; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 229.

believes that the Melchizedek interpreted as a god is patterned after a divinized king, or was a divinized king. As a result, Melchizedek became this godlike figure to all communities that follow (e.g., Qumran, Gnostics, fringe Christians, etc.).¹⁷ One must tread carefully in this area. More than forty years ago, Samuel Sandmel in his landmark work “Parallelomania,”¹⁸ warned us of the pitfalls of looking for causal links where there may or may not be links to be found.

Davila’s argument is intriguing, but ultimately built upon too much speculation. If Melchizedek was so important in the Davidic royal cult, why are the original sources lost or why are there not common quotations in Melchizedekian texts? Davila has a fascinating, but again ultimately inadequate, answer. He states that the texts in the Bible do not show other Melchizedekian links because of the following:

¹⁷ More on the Qumranite interpretation of Melchizedek will be discussed in 1.5 – Qumran.

¹⁸ Sandmel defines parallelomania as “that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction.” Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 1-13, esp. 1.

[T]he literature of pre-exilic Israel passed through the hands of the Deuteronomistic school, the editors of the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History. Funerary cults were strictly forbidden by this group, whose monotheism was extremely rigorous. An object lesson was also made of King Saul of Israel, who received a severe condemnation in 1 Samuel 28 for calling up the shade[,] or *elohim*[,] of the prophet Samuel.¹⁹

First, if examples of such proscription can be found in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, why is there no mention of this particular cult, or of any practice regarding the veneration of Melchizedek from a similar time period? Also, is it really fair to say that Melchizedek in 11Q13 Melch is God, or a god? Is it really safe to assume that Melchizedek, in Psalm 110:4, is of any particular nature when so little information about him (especially in regard to the Psalm) is known? Even in the Gnostic texts, it is difficult to say whether Melchizedek is an angel or a god – no matter how unlikely this author finds the question of divinity of Melchizedek to be. If Davila were somehow able to answer these questions,

¹⁹ Davila, “Melchizedek,” 229.

it is still important to ask why Melchizedek does not appear in Chronicles. Chronicles has an obvious Davidic bias; if Melchizedek had been so important in the Davidic royal cult, why was neither he nor the Genesis 14 narrative discussed? It would make a lot of sense to see him in Chronicles. If Davila's views are correct, then it follows that Melchizedek is conspicuously missing from the Chronicles text. Chronicles has such a bias toward the Davidic line that, if Melchizedek were necessary in order to legitimize priesthood, would it not seem fitting to have this figure present in the text that could so easily utilize him?

Initially I thought the Davidic bias would have been a perfect fit for Hebrews, but, just as in Chronicles, someone else is central. In order to fully understand why Melchizedek does not necessarily fit into the role of Davidic/priest-king legitimizer, it might be helpful to discuss why he is able to fit, and does not fit, in Hebrews when the author of Hebrews attempts to legitimize the priesthood of Christ.

Jesus Christ was central to Hebrews, just as David was central in Chronicles, and in some ways, David could have overshadowed Jesus' role in

Hebrews. For instance, Hebrews states, “Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honour than the house itself” (3:3). If Jesus, as David’s descendent, were discussed inside of the Davidic royal lineage, in any in-depth discussion, David as the “builder” of the royal line might have been given misplaced honor.

Jesus Christ was not at all what people were expecting. A first century Jew waiting for a Messiah to come could have believed a number of things about the one to come. One might have expected a Levite to come and take over the Temple and cause fire to rain from heaven on the Romans. Another person might have a different, possibly more popular, expectation – a “son of David” (Mt. 22:41-45), a son of Judah, to come in the warlike ways of David, to build an army to take back the land and to take away the Romans’ control of the people. Jesus was decidedly neither of these; this made him quite unexpected.

Jesus had no need to be a Levite in order to be a priest. As a “son of David,” Jesus was already in the kingly line of David; in that lineage, priestly rights can be found. Who needs Levi when David is your ancestor? What can be noticed in I Chronicles 16

proves that the parallels shown in Matthew²⁰ between Jesus' life and the life of David make it possible to identify Jesus as both priest and king. However, the question remains, why would the author of Hebrews use Melchizedek when a more suitable genealogical link was available? Is Melchizedek really necessary to the priesthood of Jesus? What is more, in light of all that has been discussed, does Melchizedek exist as a necessary legitimizer for David or for Jesus? In Chronicles, does David need any legitimization? He is held in such high esteem that any legitimization would be superfluous. Does the same not hold true for the author of Hebrews? While it may be true for the author, the audience may have been losing some of their reverence for Jesus. Perhaps that is why the author felt the need to explain.

²⁰ Jesus is shown as the son of David (Mt. 1:1-17). Jesus is born in the city of David (Mt. 2:1). The blind men call Jesus, the son of David (Mt. 9:27). Jesus speaks of David eating bread made only for priests being unlawful but permissible – possibly the most interesting of all Davidic Jesus links in Matthew (Mt. 12:1-8). When the people see Jesus cast out demons, they ask if he is the son of David (Mt. 12:23). The Canaanite woman calls Jesus, son of David (Mt. 15:22). More blind men call Jesus the son of David (Mt. 20:30-31). Jesus enters Jerusalem as king (Mt. 21:10). Jesus enters the temple with the authority of a king (Mt. 21:12-17). Jesus places himself higher than the son of David by calling himself David's "Lord" (Mt. 22:41-45).

Hebrews portrays Jesus as high priest in the pattern and line of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is only mentioned in two passages in the Bible prior to Hebrews; even then he is only mentioned in very minor ways. Would David not be a more suitable model for a member of the tribe of Judah to be given the rights of priesthood?

By birth, Jesus is actually in David's lineage. Jesus could have easily been interpreted as not only high priest, but also king, a result of the model of David shown in I Chronicles 16:2-3 and 21:26. I Chronicles 16:2-3 reads,

When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord; and he distributed to every person in Israel – man and woman alike – to each a loaf of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins.²¹

²¹ Although Gary Knoppers translates this passage quite similarly to that of the NRSV, he places little importance on the fact that David has just performed priestly duty in his comments. He merely notes that David is similar to the Mesopotamian kings, by which he means that David was not so much acting in a priestly manner, but instead was showing that he was the 'boss,' so to speak, even over the levitical order. Knoppers in his textual notes, places David in a similar pattern and position as Moses, but makes it very small in regard to importance. Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10-29* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 605, 627, 633.

And again, David offers the sacrifice in I Chronicles 21:26:

David built there an altar to the Lord and presented burnt-offerings and offerings of well-being. He called upon the Lord, and he answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt-offering.

David – as king – had rights over the sacrifice and other priestly duties. As David’s ancestor, given position as king, Jesus should be afforded the same right to perform in the function of high priest. Matthew 2:2 calls Jesus the ‘King of the Jews.’ Would it not follow that this idea would be floating around when the author of Hebrews is writing?

Is it possible that there was a tradition, around 60 - 100 C.E., in which it became fashionable for Christians to talk about Jesus as their high priest? It is most certain that a person familiar with the positions of the families in the tribes would come along and bring it to the attention of the speaker that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and was not genealogically able to be a priest. It is easy to see why the author of Hebrews would be attempting to argue that Jesus was able to be

a priest, even a high priest. The question remains whether there is actually a need of legitimization.

The first of all reasons to discontinue discussion of Davidic possibilities in Hebrews is that the author of Hebrews did not use David, but used Melchizedek. If the author of Hebrews had wanted to use David, he would have done so. There is no lack of continuity with the heroes of the people of Israel. Abraham is used (Heb. 2:16, 6:13-15, 7:1-10, 11:8-12, 11:17-19), Moses is used (Heb. 3:2-5, 3:16-19, 7:14, 8:5, 9:19, 10:28, 11:23-29, 12:18-21) and Melchizedek is used. If the author were not familiar with the Hebrew texts and/or Hebrew heroes, he would not have been familiar with Melchizedek. While it remains strange to me to use Melchizedek, it is an author's prerogative to do what he wishes.

In order to prove the uniqueness of Jesus' priesthood, there would be no better character to use than Melchizedek; he was as unique as it comes in the Hebrew Bible. There may be something to this. What better way to talk about uniqueness than to talk about Christ being 'better'?

If one wished to talk about Jesus' being 'better' or an author's attempting to build a priestly lineage, an

anomalous figure out of Genesis is actually an asset. If one were to venture to employ a historical figure to legitimize the priesthood of Jesus, the one who has no sin, David is not the one to utilize. He is not strong in will, as is witnessed to in the Bathsheba story (II Sam. 11). His reign as king ends in civil war, impotence and controversy (I Kgs. 1). And he is a deadly warrior (I Chr. 11:10-14). When the author of Hebrews wants to show Jesus as a ‘better’ sacrifice, he shows Jesus following a path that is completely dissimilar to David’s.

The Hebrew faith could claim Abraham, Moses, and, most important for the purposes of this discussion, David as its own. So to what figure may the Hebrew faith not lay claim? To a certain degree, it cannot claim Melchizedek – even if the people of the faith do claim him. They can claim that he met with Abraham, but what does that story have to say about Abraham’s relationship to Melchizedek? Traditionally interpreted, Abraham paid Melchizedek a percentage of his cash as a tribute (Heb. 7:4, Gen. 14:20). If the author of Hebrews had used David, the followers of the Hebrew faith could lay claim to him as their king.

Jesus, as his son, would be subject to him and therefore lesser than he.²²

By portraying Melchizedek as Abraham's advocate and therefore portraying Jesus, after the order of Melchizedek, as an advocate for the readers, the author exhibits a Jesus who supports the readers, the newly established followers of Christ. By highlighting the uniqueness of Jesus, through the uniqueness of Melchizedek, it follows that the same experience is not available in the Hebrew tradition. If the author had used David, it is hard to escape the fact that David could easily have been envisioned as greater than Jesus, as the 'father' of Jesus. If David is greater than Jesus, what reason is there to remain in the Christian faith? There is no reason. Only deprecating remarks about the beliefs of the followers of Christ can be made from this line of thinking.

It quickly becomes evident that David would not be a good image to use if one is trying to juxtapose Christianity against Judaism. If one wishes to compare, or more specifically contrast, two groups of people against one another, it would not be wise to

²² For more discussion regarding Jesus' handling of his lineage, see Mt. 22:45.

utilize a prominent figure from the assumed ‘lesser’ group to argue proof of superiority of the assumed ‘superior’ group. In rhetorical terms, if the author were to attempt to use *synkrisis* – a characteristic of the epideictic genre in which two individuals or things are compared most likely with one set up as the predetermined winner – in regard to Judaism and Christianity, it would make little sense to discuss David as a proof of Christ’s superiority. David, as a ‘historical’ figure, belongs to the Hebrew people.

Beyond the inevitable question of whether or not David could have overshadowed Jesus Christ in Hebrews, could David have been used as proof for the legitimacy of Jesus’ high priesthood in Hebrews? No. Looking further, David is not the picture of perfection. Too many negative aspects of his character are written about in the scriptures, especially in Samuel/Kings. This leaves David open to a lot of criticism and, by implication, Jesus might be open to criticism as well. With Melchizedek being such an anomaly, he is the perfect proof for the legitimacy of Jesus’ high priesthood (if it is even necessary). Nothing negative can be said by those in the Hebrew tradition about Melchizedek since their father Abraham, in traditional

interpretations, paid him tribute. David is both too closely related to the Jews and too negative to be used as a proof for the legitimacy of Jesus' priesthood.

Psalm 110:4 is difficult to interpret. It is, like Melchizedek, an oddity. There is nowhere in the whole of the Psalms that Melchizedek is mentioned. It is too difficult to decide whether or not the text was used as a legitimization for a king to be given priestly rights; I am not by any means conceding that this is the case. It is too difficult to determine with any sense of finality.

PHILO

(c. 20 B.C.E. – 40 C.E.)

For the purposes of this thesis, Philo's could perhaps be regarded as the most interesting of the bodies of Melchizedekian literature written prior to the New Testament, if only for the apparent Philonic link that may be found in Hebrews. Without more textual evidence or other data, we can never, with any sense of irrefutability, know whether there is a link between Philo and Hebrews. As a result, it is good that my goal is not necessarily to prove the link exists, but to show the importance of discussing the similarities between Philonic literature and Hebrews.

There are a number of ways to begin discussing these commonalities. James H. Burntress claims there are five areas of overlap, developed in past scholarship, that allow us most effectively to find Platonic or Philonic influence on the author of Hebrews. The five areas most discussed in Hebrews scholarship "are the nature of language, the Logos doctrine, the Platonic doctrine of ideas, the concept of faith, [and the similar method of interpreting the Old

Testament].”²³ In order to show a similar intellectual background in Philo and Hebrews, it is necessary to primarily discuss the logos doctrine as a possible area of Philonic influence. For the sake of brevity, this discussion must be confined to Hebrews 4:12-13.

After the possibility of a Platonic/Philonic milieu in regard to logos doctrine has been considered, three sections of Philo’s Melchizedekian texts will be examined. Then, after a discussion of the broad similarities between Philo’s text and the text of Hebrews, similarities in Melchizedekian interpretation will shine brightly. That said, it is exceedingly important to note that the interpretation of Melchizedek from Philo’s standpoint is different from the interpretation of the author of Hebrews. These differences will be made clear when the Melchizedekian interpretations of both authors have been contrasted.

²³ James H. Burtness, “Plato, Philo, and the Author of Hebrews.” *LQ* 10 (Fall 1958): 55. While it may seem that I only discuss the logos doctrine, these areas of Philonic discussion overlap in such a way as to be inseparable.

HEBREWS AND PHILO

The question as to whether Hebrews is Philonic has been discussed for a long time,²⁴ but never was the debate so hot as it was in the middle of last century when Celas Spicq published *L'Épître Aux Hebreux*²⁵ and subsequently when Ronald Williamson wrote his refutation, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*.²⁶ To boil down a pair of extremely long arguments to their essential points: Spicq views Hebrews as being directly influenced by Philo and Williamson does not share that point of view. It is not my role here to outline the two most prominent works that discuss the possible Philonic influence upon Hebrews. I mention them merely to show that intelligent Hebrews scholars can have a number of opinions in regard to “direct” influence of Philo on the author of Hebrews. However, these two men, with quite different views on

²⁴ In 1644, Hugo Grotius (1582-1645), a philosopher and Christian apologist, may have been the first to show the “Philonic influence in Hebrews.” Frank G. Carver, *A Historical Survey of the Methods Used to Determine the Relationship of Hebrews to Philo* (San Diego, CA: Unpublished, N.D.), 1.

²⁵ Spicq, *L'Épître Aux Hebreux* (2 vols; Paris: Gabalda, 1952-53).

²⁶ Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden, Neth: Brill Publishers, 1970).

the manner of Philonic influence, agree on the apparent existence of a Philonic/Platonic milieu. That milieu becomes evident when the many and varied similarities between Hebrews and Philo are exposed. The first similarity to be discussed is the logos doctrine.

THE LOGOS DOCTRINE

Philo and Hebrews have much common ground in regard to the logos doctrine, but there are a few differences that cannot be ignored and must be examined.²⁷ Nonetheless, the logos is a central figure to both Philo and the author of Hebrews. Hebrews states,

Indeed, the word of God (λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are

²⁷ Thurston makes these differences a result of the author's addressing a group of Philonic Christians. These Christians would have been making Christ the second, lesser god of Philo and therefore, would need to be placed back on theological track. It is Thurston's assertion that the author of Hebrews has used Philonic language in order to show the contrast between Philonic thought and right Christology. Robert W. Thurston, "Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews." *EQ* 58 (January 1986): 133-143.

naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. (Heb. 4:12-13)

The author of Hebrews makes it clear that when he speaks of the logos, he means Christ. Hebrews 4 is central to the document; by the time one reaches the chapter, the author of Hebrews has spoken extensively about Christ. Although the first mention of the title Christ comes at 3:6, the document has nine references to the Son, meaning the Son of God, i.e., he who is later referred to as Christ (Heb. 1:1-3, 5,8; 2:6,10; 3:6). The chapter also deals with the Word of God, describes the Word as “him” in verse 13,²⁸ and moves swiftly to describe the Word as the “great high priest” (Heb. 4:14). It is difficult to understand exactly what the implications of discussing the Word and his actions alongside the Great High Priest and his actions are to the author of Hebrews. It becomes evident that the author, just as in the Christology to be considered later, wants to make clear that there are many roles in which

²⁸ While it could be argued that the “him” in Hebrews 4:13 could refer to God, the main figure in this passage is the logos. It would follow that the “him” would refer to the logos and not to God. It is the opinion of this author that the same method of personifying divine attributes found in Philo is evident in this chapter of Hebrews. Further discussion of personified divine attributes will follow below.

Jesus Christ acts. It is important to see that just as in Philo, all these monikers are meant to designate the logos, and in Hebrews, the logos is Christ.

In Philo, the logos is a mediator between the world and an immovable mover; it is a second, lesser god.²⁹ The logos is the “interpreter and prophet of [God’s] will.”³⁰ It acts as God’s angel guiding and removing the obstacles from the paths of humans, obstacles that are a result of the “diseases of the soul.”³¹ The logos created virtue³² and is described by Philo as “very sharp-sighted, so as to be capable of beholding every thing, and by which all things that are worth seeing can be beheld.”³³ It “is the most universal of all things; for the word of God is over all the world, and is the most ancient, and the most

²⁹ *Prov., Frag. I.* Unless otherwise noted, all Philonic quotations are taken from Philo, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, tr. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1993). For a discussion of the Platonism of Philo see Thomas Henry Billings, *The Platonism of Philo Judaeus* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), and Ronald Nash, “The Notion of Mediator in Alexandrian Judaism and the Epistle to the Hebrews.” *WTJ* 40 (1977): 89-115.

³⁰ *Deus*, 29.138.

³¹ *Deus*, 37.182. *LA*, 3.62.177.

³² *LA*, 1.19.65.

³³ *LA*, 3.59.171.

universal of all the things that are created.”³⁴ It is the “royal road,” that is to say, “true and genuine philosophy” and what “the law calls the word and reason of God.”³⁵ It is the “beginning and fountain of all good actions.”³⁶ It is the “law”³⁷ and the “attendant” of the “one supreme Being.”³⁸ The logos is “the fountain of wisdom, in order that by drinking of that stream [one] may find everlasting life instead of death.”³⁹ It is the perfect high priest who is unable to make mistakes, intentional or otherwise.⁴⁰ The logos “assists and protects those who are akin to virtue, or whose inclinations lead them to virtue; so that it provides them with a complete refuge and salvation, but upon their enemies it sends irremediable overthrow and destruction.”⁴¹

³⁴ *LA*, 3.61.175.

³⁵ *Post*, 30.102.

³⁶ *Post*, 37.127.

³⁷ *Mig*, 23.130.

³⁸ *Her*, 48.234.

³⁹ *Fug*, 18.97.

⁴⁰ *Fug*, 20.108.

⁴¹ *Somn*, 1.15.86.

Pfleiderer writes “that all the characteristics of the Philonian Logos are transferred by the author of Hebrews to Christ.”⁴² However, Hughes concludes about the differences,

[How] totally different is [Philo’s] incorporeal and ethereal Logos from the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us of the gospel (Jn. 1:1, 14)! What could the former possibly know of human temptation? ‘Philo, too, suggests that the *Logos* as high priest should be sinless...,’ observes Montefiore; ‘but then Philo’s *Logos* had no experience of the frailties inherent in adult existence.’⁴³

The logos of Hebrews is not a lesser god, is not a second god. The logos is God.⁴⁴ In the first chapter of

⁴² Otto Pfleiderer, *Primitive Christianity* (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1910), 284. Quoted in Burtneis, “Plato, Philo, and the Author of Hebrews,” 56.

⁴³ Hughes and Montefiore both have a tendency to lose sight of the real issue of Hebrews when they reach Heb. 4. They understand issues of apostasy in most other areas, but in regard to interpretation of “tempted as we are” (Heb. 4:15), they forget that this is referring to apostasy and Christ’s temptation to commit apostasy. P.E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 172; Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: A & C Black Publishing, 2000).

Hebrews, the logos (called Son) created the worlds, *αἰῶνας* (Heb. 1:3). Therefore Christ, the Son, was in existence before the creation of anything.

PHILONIC INTERPRETATION OF MELCHIZEDEK

Philo has both the tradition of Melchizedek as a human being and the tradition of Melchizedek as something vaguely angelic represented in his body of work. It could be argued that in Philo there is one Melchizedekian account that is treated literally and two that are treated allegorically. This, however, is not the reality. To say that any of them is strictly literal or strictly allegorical is a misinterpretation of what it seems Philo is doing in his texts. It seems there is a blending of categories, but it is much more correct to say there are three allegorical treatments, if there is a need to make the distinction. Melchizedek is shown strictly as a human figure twice and is treated as possibly a human and possibly something else in one document. The first allegory, found in *On Mating with*

⁴⁴ It is possible that there is some room to work within the question “Is Christ God to the author of Hebrews?” Thurston sees Hebrews as a combating of Philonic Christian Christology. He sees the “better” language as a refutation of Philonic Christian ideas about Christ being an angel or a prophet (Thurston, “Philo and Hebrews,” 137).

the Preliminary Studies, is so close to the original story that it almost need not be called allegorical, but the second account, *On Abraham*, shows Melchizedek as a human, the priest from Genesis, and also as the high priest, a remark that is not found in the Genesis narrative. The last of the Melchizedekian interpretations, *Allegorical Interpretation 3*, shows Melchizedek as the king of Salem, but also as a figure of continued, possibly eternal, importance.

*ON MATING WITH THE PRELIMINARY STUDIES*⁴⁵

Philo's passages on the undeniably human Melchizedek are small but important. Philo writes,

From this consideration it was, that Jacob, the practiser of virtue, at the beginning of his prayers, says: "Of all thou givest me, I will set apart and consecrate a tenth to thee." And the sacred scripture, which was written after the prayers on occasion of victory, which Melchizedek, who had received a self-instructed and self-taught priesthood, makes,

⁴⁵ Titles are copied from C.D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo*, 1993. While the above title is not original, it is based upon the text contained within; much of the text involves a discussion of mating.

says: “For he gave him a tenth of all things,” assigning to him the outward senses the faculty of feeling properly, and by the same sense of speech the faculty of speaking well, and by the senses connected with the mind the faculty of thinking well.⁴⁶

As can be seen, Philo, in the first of his human accounts of the Melchizedek story, does not adhere strictly to the Genesis 14 narrative. He takes some creative license with Melchizedek; he writes that Melchizedek is “self-taught” and “self-instructed,” thus giving an allegorical interpretation. However, generally speaking, he gives an account that is almost completely based on the Genesis 14 interpretation of Melchizedek.

ON ABRAHAM

In a continuation of allegorical interpretation, Philo portrays Melchizedek as a high priest, a motif that is represented in Hebrews as well. As can easily be seen, Philo, while giving an allegorical treatment, basically stays true to the Genesis account:

⁴⁶ *Congr*, 99.

And when the great high priest⁴⁷ of the most high God beheld [Abraham] returning and coming back loaded with trophies, in safety himself, with all his own force uninjured, for he had not lost one single man of all those who went out with him; marveling at the greatness of the exploit, and, as was very natural, considering that he had never met with this success but through the favour of the divine wisdom and alliance, he raised his hands to heaven, and honoured him with prayers in his behalf, and offered up sacrifices of thanksgiving for his victory, and splendidly feasted all those who had a share in the expedition; rejoicing and sympathizing with him as if the success had been his own, and in reality did greatly concern him. For as the proverb says – “All that befalls from friends we common call.” And much more are all

⁴⁷ The Greek is μέγας ἱερεὺς, great priest – C. D. Yonge’s translation attempt to create an exact parallel between Hebrews and Philo where one does not necessarily exist. By using the term “great high priest” instead of “high priest” or “great priest,” Yonge makes it easy for a reader to find a link between Philonic language and Hebrews language with the English text of Philo where a reader of the Greek would not. For further discussion, see Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 55.

instances of good fortune common to those whose main object it is to please God.⁴⁸

Horton notes four points of difference from the Genesis narrative: first, Philo inserts into the story that Abram “had not lost one single man”; second, Melchizedek “raised his hands to heaven” in prayer; third, Melchizedek “offered up sacrifices of thanksgiving for [Abram’s] victory”; fourth, and finally, Melchizedek and Abram become friends so quickly that Abram’s victory is enjoyed by Melchizedek.⁴⁹

ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION III

The third, final, and most substantial treatment of Melchizedek by Philo is much more allegorical than either of the previous passages. In this analysis, Melchizedek is called the logos, another similarity between Philo and Hebrews.⁵⁰ It is in this document

⁴⁸ *Abr*, 235

⁴⁹ Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 55.

⁵⁰ By similarity I mean, as stated previously, that in *LA 3*, Philo calls Melchizedek the logos and in Hebrews, Jesus Christ is the logos.

that Philo gives Melchizedek continued abilities beyond that of the human priest of Genesis:

Moreover, God made Melchisedek, the king of peace, that is of Salem, for that is the interpretation of his name, “his own high priest,” without having previously mentioned any particular action of his, but merely because he had made him a king, and a lover of peace, and especially worthy of his priesthood. For he is called a just king, and a king is the opposite of a tyrant, because one is the interpreter of law, and the other of lawlessness... But Melchisedek shall bring forward wine instead of water, and shall give your souls to drink, and shall cheer them with unmixed wine, in order that they may be wholly occupied with a divine intoxication, more sober than sobriety itself. For reason [λόγος] is a priest, having, as its inheritance the true God, and entertaining lofty and sublime and magnificent ideas about him, “for he is the priest of the most high God.”⁵¹

⁵¹ *LA* 3.79-82. It may not be evident upon first glance that “reason,” λόγος, is referring to Melchizedek. However, on further inspection, when one reaches “For he is the priest of the most high God” (Gen. 14:18), it is obvious that the author is

Some have wished to make the Melchizedek in this passage the same in nature as the Melchizedek in Hebrews.⁵² It is most likely that the Melchizedek Philo has either created, or is commenting on, is being used as a divine attribute. Larry Hurtado has made it clear that this was not uncommon in what might be called first-century Jewish speculation.⁵³ He definitely links this attribute to the Melchizedek of Genesis, but he has allegorized him to a place that Melchizedek has become a *movement* of God. This is definitely not the Melchizedek of Hebrews; it is a Melchizedek of a different nature. Were the author of Hebrews to use this Melchizedek as a divine attribute, the Melchizedekian doctrine would be difficult to assimilate into Christianity. If Melchizedek was an action of God, and that attribute had a body, then what was the point of the incarnation of Christ? It is also

speaking of both “reason” and Melchizedek and they are the same figure to Philo in this passage.

⁵² It is this position that Ronald H. Williamson wishes to refute in *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*.

⁵³ Hurtado, in this section of his book, discusses in depth the logos, in the work of Philo, as a personified divine attribute. It becomes very interesting when one is able to see Melchizedek in *LA 3* being equated with the logos. Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 41-50, esp. 44-48.

important to note the distinction Philo makes, when speaking of the different natures of Melchizedek, between human and what could possibly be called angelic.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been argued that Philo's writings on Melchizedek display a link to Hebrews in regard to Old Testament interpretation.⁵⁴ To say that Hebrews has a link to Philo, in terms of Old Testament interpretation – especially in regard to Melchizedekian interpretation – is interesting and possibly true, but this description is ultimately insufficient. It is much more important to see Philo as representing two opposing traditions about Melchizedek. As a result, he leaves the Melchizedekian natures in an interesting tension. Hebrews should be seen as a solution to that tension, even as a tension never actually allows itself to be thoroughly resolved. Hebrews brings together the traditions discussed by Philo (and others), and by using

⁵⁴ For information regarding Philo and the author's respective interpretations of the Old Testament, see Sidney G. Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews: A Comparison of the Interpretation of the Old Testament in Philo Judaeus and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965).

paradox, harmonizing them into a possibility of orthodoxy. That is to say, at the time of Hebrews' composition, there was no orthodox position on Christ, and definitely no orthodox position on Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews gives us a possibility for orthodoxy in regard to Melchizedek.

On the surface, the differences may appear minor, but there is a possibility of a sort of Melchizedekian worship at the time of the Hebrews authorship that required Melchizedekian subordination in light of the incarnation of Christ and the need to uphold monotheism.

JOSEPHUS

(c. 37 – 100 C.E.)

Josephus mentions Melchizedek only twice: once in *Antiquities* and once in *The Wars of the Jews*. In both accounts, Josephus is basing his discussion of Melchizedek on the Genesis 14 narrative. Melchizedek, in both documents, is undoubtedly a human being. The probability that Josephus oversteps his knowledge must be taken into consideration. His accounts are captivating, however. An example of this overstepping tendency is found when Josephus, in the documents below, writes that there is a relationship between Salem and Jerusalem; they are the same place. If one were to take seriously the absence of data on the subject, it seems Josephus is simply being creative, interpreting or expounding. Josephus may or may not be the first to state that Salem became Jerusalem. He is not alone in this regard. *The Genesis Apocryphon* shares the belief that Salem became Jerusalem. However, as the date of that text is hard to pinpoint, I will assume that document is at least vaguely

contemporary to Josephus.⁵⁵ While it cannot be stated positively who was the first to interpret the place of Salem in this way, a discussion as to whether there could be a common tradition could prove fruitful.⁵⁶ By looking into the texts in which Josephus discusses Melchizedek, my hope is to decipher whether Josephus believed Melchizedek to be a human, angelic, or divine figure.

*THE WARS OF THE JEWS*⁵⁷

The Wars of the Jews is a different work than the one above. Instead of being a retelling of the Genesis story, this is a story of one of the falls of Jerusalem. In telling of Jerusalem's defeat, Josephus moves into an excursus on the one he names as the founder of the Temple, Melchizedek.

⁵⁵ Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 61-62, 86. For more discussion on *Genesis Apocryphon*, see my section concerning the Qumran texts.

⁵⁶ Be that as it may, it does not fit the scope of this thesis. For further research regarding the place of Salem, see Emerton, "The Site of Salem, the city of Melchizedek," 45-72.

⁵⁷ The titles of Josephus's works and all quotations are taken from Josephus, *The Works of Josephus*, tr. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987).

There are a number of new ideas in this passage. Josephus writes that Melchizedek was “the Righteous King,” “the first priest of God,” and that he “first built a temple [in Jerusalem].” It is also here that we learn Melchizedek was a “Canaanite chieftain.”⁵⁸

And thus was Jerusalem taken, in the second year of the reign of Vespasian, on the eighth day of the month Gorpeius [Elul]. It had been taken five times before, though this was the second time of its desolation; for Shishak, the king of Egypt, and after him Antiochus, and after him Pompey, and after them Sosius and Herod, took the city, but still preserved it; but before all these, the king of Babylon conquered it, and made it desolate, one thousand four hundred and sixty-eight years and six months after it was built. But he who first built it was a potent man among the Canaanites, and is in our own tongue called [Melchisedek], the Righteous King, for such he really was; on which account he was [there] the first priest of God, and first built a temple [there], and called

⁵⁸ Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 82.

the city Jerusalem, which was formerly called Salem.⁵⁹

It is of note that Josephus – like the author of Hebrews, his contemporary, and Philo before him – interprets Melchizedek’s name using its Hebrew roots. It is also important to note that, unlike the information found in Josephus’ *Antiquities*, in the *Wars of the Jews*, Josephus states that Melchizedek was the person who changed the name of Salem to Jerusalem.

THE ANTIQUITIES OF THE JEWS

In *Antiquities*, Josephus retells the Genesis 14 story with a number of small alterations. The passage concerning Melchizedek reads,

So Abram, when he had saved the captive Sodomites who had been taken by the Assyrians, and Lot also, his kinsman, returned home in peace. Now the king of Sodom met him in a certain place, which they called The King’s Dale, where Melchizedek, king of Salem, received him. That name signifies ‘the righteous king;’ and such he was without dispute, insomuch that, on this account, he was

⁵⁹ *War*, 6.10.1.

made the priest of God: however, they afterward called Salem ‘Jerusalem.’ Now this Melchizedek supplied Abram’s army in a hospitable manner, and gave them provisions in abundance; and as they were feasting he began to praise him, and to bless God for subduing his enemies under him. And when Abram gave him a tenth part of his prey, he accepted the gift: but the king of Sodom desired Abram to take those prey, but entreated that he might have those men restored to him whom Abram had saved from the Assyrians because they belonged to him; but Abram would not do so; nor would make any other advantage of that prey than what his servants had eaten; but still insisted that he should afford a part to his friends that had assisted him in the battle.⁶⁰

It is obvious that this is a retelling of the Genesis narrative, but Josephus has discussed several things not found in the Genesis 14 text; these are the aforementioned alterations.

The first of many differences is the interpretation of Melchizedek’s name. Josephus writes

⁶⁰ *Ant*, 1.10.179-182.

that Melchizedek's name "signifies 'the righteous king'"; this interpretation is also found in Hebrews. Second, Josephus not only mentions the feeding of Abraham, but also expands the text to show that Melchizedek fed all of Abraham's men.

CONCLUSIONS

Who was Melchizedek to Josephus? Can it be said, having read the works above, that Josephus interpreted Melchizedek as anything more than a "Righteous King?" I find no evidence to the contrary. It is hard not to assume that Josephus either was not familiar with, ignored, or reacted against any angelic teaching regarding Melchizedek. If Josephus had been familiar with a popularized tradition regarding the angelic nature of Melchizedek, would it be found in his work? There is really no way to know. It is safe to assume that if Josephus were exposed to the tradition, he had not subscribed to the system of belief. Melchizedek, to Josephus, is nothing more than a human being.

QUMRAN

(Dating Uncertain)

In 1947 a nomad by the name Muhammed edh-Dhib, from the Ta'amireh tribe, discovered the ancient scrolls that would later be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. While the traditional story of their discovery is not necessarily factual, it is the only story available. It states that Muhammed was tending his goats near a cave. One of his goats had gone inside, so Muhammed threw a stone to coerce his goat from the cave. After the stone flew into the cave, he heard what sounded like breaking pottery. Sure enough, it was pottery. And in the rubble, Muhammed found the first piece of several pieces of pottery containing the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁶¹

Dating the work is quite difficult. Horton is content dating them between 100 B.C.E. and 100 C.E.⁶² In regard to authorship, there is really no way

⁶¹ For further information regarding the discovery of the scrolls see *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 4-5. And also, Norman Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Search for the Secret of Qumran* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 3-4.

of ascertaining who could have written the texts. The writings are a vast collection and were composed by many authors. Some have wished to call the community who collected the writings the Essenes, the same Essenes discussed by Philo⁶³ and Josephus⁶⁴ in a number of documents.⁶⁵ Having little evidence for this assertion, I am content to call them Qumranites.

*THE VISION OF AMRAM (4Q545 – COL. 2)*⁶⁶

The Vision of Amram is one Qumran text in which Melchizedek's presence is ambiguous. His presence is assumed because of the appearance of Melchiresa, the king of wickedness. There is an expectation of the presence of Melchizedek because of the way in which Melchizedek is written in other Qumran texts. In the text, there is an angel of light

⁶² Horton cites a number of sources (e.g., Fitzmeyer, Kutcher, et al), of which there is no perceivable difference in final product (i.e., date), but their methods for arriving at the final date are varied (Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 61-62).

⁶³ *Prob*, 12.75. *Hypoth*, 11.1. *Cont*, 1.1.

⁶⁴ *Ant*, 13.311, 15.371-379, 18.11, 22, et al. *War*, 2.119-161. Josephus' major treatment of the sect is found in a section from *The Jewish Wars*.

⁶⁵ Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?* 4-7.

⁶⁶ English titles taken from Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*.

who many conclude is Melchizedek. While the evidence is lacking I find the evidence that does exist quite compelling. The text reads,

[... rules] over you [...] [...] who is this one? He said to me, “Now this one [...] [...] His name is] Malki-Resha, ruler of wickedness.” And I said, My lord, what is the nature of [...] [...] all his deeds are darkness, while I [am Melchizedek...] from the height to the depths, I am ruler over all light.⁶⁷

It is hard to imagine who else could be mentioned in this text. The existence of Melchizedek is assumed to such a degree that Wise has interpolated his name into the text.⁶⁸

Later, as will be discussed, Melchizedek as a ‘ruler of light’ is not an idea that is found in this work alone. In *The Coming of Melchizedek*, a similar

⁶⁷ Wise, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 433-434. The reason so much of the text is filled with ellipses is a result of degraded text. Most of the texts from Qumran are in such condition. The same is true with the Nag Hammadi. For more on degraded text and its implications in regard to interpretation of these texts, see page 94 of this thesis.

⁶⁸ For an in-depth handling of Melchizedek in the text of *The Vision of Amram*, see Paul J. Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchireša* (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981.), 24-36.

interpretation is found. If Melchizedek is actually to be found in the above text, his nature is quite difficult to ascertain. Could one call this Melchizedek human? Could one call this Melchizedek angelic? There is really no solid answer. It would be easy to conclude that because he is the “ruler over all light,” he is some divine attribute or angelic figure. To do this would be an example of not relying on the text. There really is no answer, only speculation.

THE GENESIS APOCRYPHON (1QAPGEN)

The Melchizedek narrative in *The Genesis Apocryphon* (1QapGen) is quite similar to Genesis. It recounts the Genesis narrative with one difference; whereas Abram gives one-tenth in Genesis, in the Apocryphon, Abram gives “a tithe of all the flocks belonging to the king of Elam.” There is no numerical figure mentioned; this is unlike any other text, although “tithe” and “one-tenth” are synonymous and therefore probably a matter of translation:

The king of Sodom heard that Abram had recovered all the captives and plunder, so he went up to meet him. He came to Salem, that is, Jerusalem, whereas Abram was encamped in

the valley of Shaveh, that is the Valley of the King, the Valley of eth Hakerem. Now Melchizedek, the king of Salem, was a priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the Lord of heaven and earth. Blessed be God Most High who has closed your grasp about your enemies.” Then Abram gave him a tithe of all the flocks that had belonged to the king of Elam and his allies.⁶⁹

The text surrounding this passage is a retelling of Abraham’s story. There is some embellishment, but on the whole it stays true to the Genesis text. One example of embellishment comes when the *Apocryphon* describes Abram as “[weeping] over his nephew Lot, but then [gathering] strength” to assemble an army.⁷⁰ The text of the narrative involving Melchizedek is almost exact, except for the aforementioned difference concerning financial figures. It does, however, take for granted that Abram gave the tithe to Melchizedek and not the other way

⁶⁹ Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 83.

⁷⁰ Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 83, Col. 23.

around. In this narrative, is there any doubt that Melchizedek is a human being? He is a priest. He is apparently influential. He is, however, definitely human.

THE COMING OF MELCHIZEDEK (11Q13 MELCH)

It is possible that *The Coming of Melchizedek* utilizes the tantalizing absence of information in the Hebrew Bible, in regard to Melchizedek, to speculate about an angelic Melchizedek. However, this appears to be an arrogant position on the matter. It is more probable that there is a long tradition of Melchizedekian speculation. Unfortunately this tradition was, for whatever reason, forgotten in the years that have passed. In 11Q13, Melchizedek is portrayed as an angelic, messianic figure who will usher in the end times. He “shall atone for all the Sons of [Light] and the peopl[e who are pre]destined to Mel[chi]zedek.”⁷¹ As this is one of the larger treatments of Melchizedek, only relevant passages will be included.

[Isaiah said: “To proclaim the jubilee to the captives” (Isa. 61:1)... just] as [...] and from

⁷¹ Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 456, Col. 2.

the inheritance of Melchizedek, f[or... Melchize]dek, who will return them to what is rightfully theirs. He will proclaim to them the jubilee, thereby releasing th[em from the debt of a]ll their sins. [He shall pro]claim this decree in the fir[s]t week of the jubilee period that foll[ows nine j]ubilee periods. Then the “D[ay of Atone]ment” shall follow af[ter] the [te]nth [ju]bilee period, when he shall atone for all the Sons of [Light] and the peopl[e who are pre]destined to Mel[chi]zedek... [and] by his might he w[i]ll judge God’s holy ones and so establish a righteous ki[n]gdom... Therefore, Melchizedek will thoroughly prosecute the veng[ea]nce required by Go[d’s] statu[te]s... Your di[vi]ne being” is [Melchizedek, who will del]iv[er them from the po]wer of Belial.⁷²

At first glance, this passage looks problematic in terms of maintaining monotheism. It must be remembered, from the section on Philo, that there was a discussion on divine attributes and the way they were utilized in first-century Jewish thought. From the texts encountered in this study, this is probably the best

⁷² Wise, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 456-457, Col. 2.

example of the function of a divine attribute.⁷³ Melchizedek is the agent of God working in creation to punish and perfect.

When discussing the possibility of links between Hebrews and Qumran, Longenecker's work is important to discuss because in some ways he and I are very much attempting similar things.⁷⁴ We both want to know who Melchizedek was to people who venerated him. He and I both take seriously the idea that the author of Hebrews wishes to place Melchizedek below Christ. He writes a very compelling work similar to Horton, albeit less comprehensive. Much of what he writes is quite helpful; however, his parallels in regard to 11Q13 Melch and Hebrews are disconcerting. He claims the author of Hebrews is addressing a group of Qumranian converts. Longenecker also believes, through the

⁷³ A discussion of the basic ontological assumptions must be made. It will not, however, occur in this chapter. Please read on, in chapter 2, in order to better understand what is meant about divine attributes not being divine themselves.

⁷⁴ Richard Longenecker, "The Melchizedek Argument: A Study in the Development and Circumstantial Expression of New Testament Thought," in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, ed. Robert A. Guelich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 161-185.

evidence in 11Q13 Melch, that the Qumranian community had an elevated perception of Melchizedek. Longenecker claims that this elevation by the Qumranian converts led them to believe Melchizedek to be superior to Christ. If one takes this argument seriously, one must ask why there is such exaltation language in regard to Melchizedek in Hebrews. Why is Melchizedek written about as if he is immortal (Heb. 7:3)? When using *synkrisis*, the author of Hebrews uses “better” language when referring to Jesus. Never does he attempt this better language in regard to Melchizedek. It is hard to harmonize this view.

CONCLUSIONS

As always, our question becomes what is Melchizedek’s nature (to the authors of the Qumran texts)? Is he angelic? The author proposes Melchizedek to be the bringer of justice. “He will judge God’s holy ones and so establish a righteous kingdom.” Does this mean that Melchizedek is angelic? The Qumran textual data does not necessarily point in that direction. Is he more powerful than a human being? He is definitely more than human. This

power, as a divine attribute, does not preclude Melchizedek from being a human, but in this instance he is acting in a more-than-mortal capacity.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Hurtado gives an entire chapter to “Exalted Patriarchs as Divine Agents” in *One God, One Lord*, 51-69.

MELCHIZEDEK (ALMOST) HARMONIZED IN 2 ENOCH

(Dating Uncertain)

The document known to us as 2 Enoch is somewhat controversial in a number of ways. The date cannot be determined as a result of differing views and no real concrete evidence. F.I. Anderson dates 2 Enoch as late as 1000 C.E!⁷⁶ However, Birger Pearson dates the work as early as the first century C.E. The original language in which it was written is still unknown.⁷⁷ I place this work before or vaguely contemporary to Hebrews because it is the only place we find a knowledge of *conflicting* Melchizedekian traditions evinced other than in Hebrews. 2 Enoch attempts to answer the question why are there two Melchizedeks?

⁷⁶ “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1, 92-100.

⁷⁷ Beverly A. Bow, “Melchizedek’s Birth Narrative in 2 Enoch 68-73: Christian Correlations,” in *For A Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. Randal A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow, and Rodney A. Werline (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 33-41, esp 33.

Hebrews is not the only document to attempt to harmonize the two polar traditions regarding the two natures of Melchizedek. In the Qumran texts, Melchizedek is portrayed either as an angelic figure or as the human figure from the Genesis account. Philo outlines both Melchizedeks, but does not attempt to provide compatibility in regard to the natures. The rabbis, in the Talmud, give Melchizedek a treatment similar to Philo's. The Melchizedekians divorce Melchizedek from his humanity.⁷⁸

2 Enoch is different from any other document in its treatment of Melchizedek. The story of Melchizedek in 2 Enoch is much too long to include its full text here but, fortunately for us, it is really interesting to view this story through its summaries by contemporary scholars. In these retellings, the interpreters' biases shine brightly, but at the same time, they allow us to notice things about the text that might otherwise not be evident. I have chosen a couple of these narrative summaries in order to show these biases and also reveal subtleties within the text.

⁷⁸ The Melchizedekians, among others, will be discussed at some length in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Pearson tells the story of Melchizedek in 2 Enoch in this way:

Noah's brother Nir, a priest, has an aged and barren wife who miraculously conceives, dies and bears posthumously a son. The boy has a glorious appearance and is marked with the badge of priesthood on his chest. He is given the name Melchizedek. Nir receives a night vision in which God tells him of the impending flood and he is informed that the archangel Michael will bring Melchizedek to paradise [or the Garden of Eden] for protection from the flood. Michael then goes to Nir to take the child to paradise. In one recension Michael tells Nir about two other Melchizedeks, one of whom will be priest and King in Salim, and the other will function at the end-time in a messianic capacity.⁷⁹

James R. Davila has a slightly different reading:

Two versions of the story of Melchizedek appear in 2 (*Slavonic*) *Enoch* 71-72 in which,

⁷⁹ Birger Pearson, "Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism," in *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible*, ed. Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 184.

after his [Melchizedek's] miraculous birth into the priestly family of Noah's younger brother Nir, he himself is made a priest and then spirited off to the Garden of Eden by the archangel Michael where he is to be head of all future priests. His main function as mediator seems to be as an ideal future figure, the eschatological high priest enacting the consummation pattern, but the picture is very obscure and it is debatable whether *2 Enoch* preserves an early Jewish tradition at this point.⁸⁰

While Davila is unwilling to state definitively that *2 Enoch* preserves Jewish tradition, is it not possible that, similar to the link posited between 11Q13 and Hebrews, *2 Enoch* and Hebrews could have a connection in terms of a common Melchizedekian tradition? It could prove helpful, if only as a tool, to make that assumption in order to flesh out the Melchizedekian utilization of Hebrews.

⁸⁰ James R. Davila, "Melchizedek, the Youth, and Jesus," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. James R. Davila (Leiden, Neth: Brill, 2003), 253-254.

My paraphrase of the story is as follows: Nir, Noah's brother, had just discovered that the world is to be destroyed by flood and was greatly upset by the news. He was not, however, surprised. He had noticed the wickedness in the world. His wife, Sopanim, was barren and had never in her life given birth. She was, at this time, quite old, and all hope for childbearing has been lost. However, she conceived. While in some situations this would be considered a miracle, in this case, it was a negative thing. Nir was a priest and had not been sexually involved with her in quite a long time. As a result, Sopanim, not considering the miraculous possibilities, was "ashamed and embarrassed."⁸¹

When Nir "remembered" Sopanim, he called her to come to his house so he could talk to her. When he saw that she was pregnant, he screamed at her. He said, "What is this that you have done, O wife? And why have you disgraced me in front of the face of these people? And now, depart from me, and go where you began the disgrace of your womb, so that I might not defile my hand on account of you, and sin in front

⁸¹ 2 *Enoch* 71:3; Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha*, 1, 204.

of the face of the Lord.”⁸² Sopanim expressed her surprise at the pregnancy. She said she did not know how it had happened, but Nir did not believe her. He told her to leave. After he said this she fell dead at his feet.

Feeling bad about the whole thing, Nir left her in order to find his brother Noah. He wanted Noah to help him cover up the death by burying her quickly in the night. However, when Noah and Nir returned, they were awestruck when they saw a young boy sitting beside the dead woman’s body. It seems the woman had given birth posthumously to a fully formed child. He appeared as a three year old, already able to speak. This child was Melchizedek. He had the badge of priesthood on his chest; “it was glorious in appearance.”⁸³ Nir was so happy about his newborn son that he gave Sopanim a beautiful funeral.

The end of the world was at hand, and Nir was distressed about the fate of his son, Melchizedek. He went to sleep one evening and had a vision. The

⁸² 2 *Enoch* 71:6; Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha*, 1, 204.

⁸³ 2 *Enoch* 71:19; Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha*, 1, 208.

archangel Michael came to him and told him of the plans that God had for Melchizedek. He told Nir he would come back before the flood to take Melchizedek to the Garden of Eden. In a point not missed by Pearson, in one version of the story, the archangel tells of two Melchizedeks. One Melchizedek is the Melchizedek of Genesis 14 and the other represents a tradition of a heavenly Melchizedek, although what that means exactly is not clear. “And afterward there will be a planting from this tribe, and there will be other people, and there will be another Melchizedek, the head of the priest reigning over the people, and performing the liturgy of the Lord.”⁸⁴

In chapter two, I will make the case that the author of Hebrews – in discussing Melchizedek and his priesthood and by speaking of him as a human being and as an angelic figure – has made Melchizedek irreconcilable, thereby reconciling (in a manner of speaking) both previous traditions. If we can look at 2 Enoch as having a comparable (albeit Jewish and not Christian) exigence, then Hebrews is not alone in an

⁸⁴ 2 *Enoch* 71:37; Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha*, 1, 210.

attempt to reconcile the branched traditions about Melchizedek.

How does a discourse about the existence of two Melchizedeks, somehow related to the Melchizedek of the Genesis 14 narrative, create any kind of harmony? It is most likely that the author of this section of 2 Enoch, just like the author of Hebrews, was familiar with the various traditions regarding Melchizedek. And, just like the author of Hebrews, a need to make these traditions compatible was observed. So possibly, when I have used the word *harmony* or *harmonize*, at least in regard to 2 Enoch, what I mean is that the author was attempting to answer a question. The question at hand is, “Why is Melchizedek an angel, or at least more powerful than a human, in one tradition, while being interpreted as a mortal in another tradition?” The author of 2 Enoch answers the question by bifurcating Melchizedek. Whereas, as will be argued in chapter two, in Hebrews Melchizedek is both angelic and human in nature, in 2 Enoch, Melchizedek is both angelic and human in nature, but his two natures never exist in any text at the same time

CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING PRE-HEBREWS

LITERATURE

Who was Melchizedek to the writers of religious documents prior to Hebrews? We have discussed the interpretation of Melchizedek as human (e.g., Genesis, possibly Psalm 110, two-thirds of Philo's Melchizedekian writings, Josephus, maybe *The Vision of Amram*, *The Genesis Apocryphon*, and one of the two Melchizedeks described in 2 Enoch). We have discussed the interpretation of Melchizedek as angelic, or at least more than human (e.g., possibly Psalm 110, one-third of Philo's Melchizedekian writings, maybe *The Vision of Amram*, and potentially one of the two Melchizedeks described in 2 Enoch).

There are at least two traditions, contrasting conditions, to be found in the body of those writings produced prior to Hebrews. It is important to understand this before moving to an exposition of Melchizedek in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews was familiar with the tradition regarding the Genesis 14 narrative but also, most likely, at least one tradition concerning an angelic Melchizedek. Hebrews utilizes these traditions in order to harmonize them into a

greater, more understandable, tradition. However, as will be presented in chapter three, this tradition was misunderstood and did not last.

CHAPTER TWO:
THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS' INTERPRETATION OF
MELCHIZEDEK

INTRODUCTION

Hebrews (c. 60 – 100 C.E.) comes from a time in which the Church was in transition. The followers of Christ had worshipped along with their Jewish brothers and sisters and there was now a movement from being a subsection of the synagogue to becoming the independent Christian *ekklēsia*.⁸⁵ The audience of

⁸⁵ Barrett distinguishes the Christian *ekklēsia* from the Jewish synagogue at the time of Hebrews' authorship. He perceives the author of Hebrews as attempting to instill a proper Christology in the belief of the audience in contrast to the Christology of an overly Jewish Christianity. He claims that whereas other documents make no attempt "to relate the Old Testament material directly to the Christian story" (111), Hebrews attempts to reconcile Christ with the figures of the Old Testament. Barrett attempts to describe the situation of the Diaspora Jews, and in some ways misses the mark. He seems to forget to reconcile how their situation relates in the writing of Hebrews. He simply does not give enough information about the Diaspora Jews to advance anything regarding Hebrews. Further, he performs what some call *eisegesis*, a form of interpretation in which the interpreter attempts to force meaning from one's preexisting belief. He places a specific eschatology in Hebrews that cannot be ascertained from the text alone. C. K. Barrett, "The Christology of Hebrews," in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays in Christology*, ed. Mark Allan Powell and David R. Bauer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 110.

the document was most likely a group of Hellenized Jewish-Christians who were being taunted by the Jews of the synagogue about the insufficiency of this newly forming *Christianity*.⁸⁶ Christianity could not lay claim to Moses (exclusively) or even to a high priest; it was of the utmost importance for the author of Hebrews to prevent the Jewish-Christian recipients of the document from leaving the *assembly*.

Before beginning the discussion regarding the nature of Melchizedek in Hebrews, it is necessary first to discuss the details of the document itself. Who are its possible authors? To whom was the document written? When was it written? Many of these questions remain unanswered. It is, nonetheless, as important as ever to discuss the known options for all of these questions. The following subsections will discuss Hebrews in a brief rhetorical interpretation.

⁸⁶ I understand the problems with using this word to describe the followers of Christ in the first century. I have been quite careful not to do so until this point. In fact, the use of this word, as anachronistic as it may be, is for simplicity. Late-medieval and early-modern Church scholars used the word for the newly forming community. For further details, see Kenneth Hagen, *Hebrews Commenting from Erasmus to Bezé* (Tubingen, Ger: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981), 9.

HISTORICAL AND RHETORICAL SITUATION

AUTHORSHIP

Of all the difficult questions Hebrews gives us, authorship is doubtless the most hotly debated. While some modern authors have given up on ever having an answer to the question of authorship,⁸⁷ early Christian scholars made it the subject of many arguments.

In order to be considered for the newly emerging canon, a document had to be considered apostolic. Even in the fourth century, there was little information to be found about the author; there were more questions than answers. In the East, the work was generally accepted to be Pauline. For example, St. John Chrysostom (347-407 C.E.) believed the work to be Paul's. When writing his commentary on Hebrews, Chrysostom continually calls the author "blessed Paul"⁸⁸ and introduces his homilies on Hebrews with an argument toward a Pauline authorship.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 6.

⁸⁸ Chrysostom, *Argument and Summary of the Epistle*, In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers – Vol. 14*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 363.

⁸⁹ Chrysostom poses the question, "What had he to do with the Hebrews?" meaning the Hebrew people, and continues

The foremost problem with the idea of Pauline authorship is the vastly different style Hebrews uses from the other Pauline letters. Origen (b. 185 C.E.) and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 C.E.) both found significant differences in style between Hebrews and the Pauline letters. “There is not in the Pauline corpus, even in such a relatively reflective and carefully composed work as Romans, anything that matches the studied prose of Hebrews with its careful structure and rich rhetorical embellishment.”⁹⁰ In a similar vein, Hebrews is not a letter. Can the same be said of any Pauline work? Another problem in overcoming opposition to a Pauline authorship is that the document is unsigned. All of Paul’s other works were signed; why would he not have signed this text? Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 C.E.) answers this question, “Paul was an ‘apostle to the Gentiles’; out of tact and appropriate deference to apostles called to the ministry to the historic people of Israel, Paul’s authorship is not explicitly mentioned in the Epistle to

for many pages answering the question (*Argument and Summary of the Epistle*, 363-365).

⁹⁰ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 2.

the ‘Hebrews.’”⁹¹ Why then is it so different from the rest of the Pauline letters? Some have speculated that Hebrews was written by Paul in Hebrew for the “Hebrews” and was later translated into Greek by Luke.⁹²

In the West, Pauline authorship was never completely accepted, but was generally ignored until the end of the medieval period.⁹³ Origen apparently created a compromise on the issue. He claimed that the thoughts laid out were definitely the work of Paul, but he did not believe Paul himself wrote Hebrews. He acquiesced, “Who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia’s views on authorship are discussed in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Hebrews*, ed. Erik M. Heen and Philip D.W. Krey (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 1.

⁹² Attridge, *Hebrews*, 1.

⁹³ Heen & Krey, *Hebrews*, xvii-xviii.

⁹⁴ Upon further study, it has become apparent that some have considered this interpretation to be a misreading of Origen. I wish to acknowledge this dissent here. Some wish Origen’s statement to be read as if he is saying, “Paul composed the letter, but a number of people could have copied or translated it.” I can accept this interpretation; I do wish to use his statement to inject a healthy dose of skepticism to the authorship debate (Eusibius, *HE*, 6.25.13-14).

In the sixteenth century, Pauline authorship came under debate again. Martin Luther (1483-1546 C.E.) was fond of the idea that Apollos wrote Hebrews.⁹⁵ He continued, however, in calling the author Paul. Of all the possible authors, this suggestion of Apollos as the author is the most compelling of any other option. Apollos was Alexandrian (Acts 18:24), “was a learned man” (Acts 18:24), was popular in Corinth (I Cor. 1:12), and he was adept at using the scriptures and arguing Christianity while ‘refuting the Jews’ (Acts 18:27-28).

John Bugenhagen (1485-1558 C.E.) says of Pauline authorship, “That Paul did not write this epistle is clear from Hebrews 2, where it says that he heard the gospel of Christ from the preaching of others and the showing of miracles. Paul strongly denies this regarding himself in Galatians 1.”⁹⁶ Cajetan (1469-1534 C.E.) writes of the Lukan translation model, “If [Hebrews] were written in Hebrew, in what language, I

⁹⁵ Attridge shows Luther to be the first one to propose Apollos as a possible author. Hagen downplays this assertion. He cites Luther as saying, “Who wrote it is not known and will probably not be known for a while; it makes no difference” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 4). And also, Hagen, *Hebrews Commenting*, 9.

⁹⁶ Hagen, *Hebrews Commenting*, 9.

ask, is Melchisedec interpreted as ‘king of justice?’ For Melchisedec in Hebrew is a compound word from ‘king’ and ‘justice.’ Thus in Hebrew he would have had to say, Melchisedec means Melchisedec.”⁹⁷

There have been many others who have been nominated as possible authors. Tertullian (c. 155-225 C.E.) suggested that Barnabas could have been the author. Attridge claims Tertullian advanced this hypothesis because it was probably “on the basis of some tradition” and finds the suggestion “as unlikely as Paul.”⁹⁸ Adolph von Harnack places authorship with Pricilla, “perhaps with the help of her husband, Aquila... [who had] many of the same qualifications as Apollos.” Attridge concludes this is unlikely; “the author’s masculine singular self-reference at 11:32 would seem to preclude her, either alone or with her husband.”⁹⁹ While there are many others, the list is long and few are interesting in any plausible way.

⁹⁷ Cajetan quoted in Hagen, *Hebrews Commenting*, 18. Attridge claims “Hebrews was originally written in Greek is patently obvious, not only because of the close dependence on the Greek Old Testament, but also because of its etymological plays on Greek terms” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 20).

⁹⁸ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 3.

⁹⁹ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 4.

Without the introduction of new evidence, we must follow the lead of Origen and say, “Who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows.” A quote from Harold Attridge can allow us to discontinue discussion on the issue: “[W]hoever wrote Hebrews, it was certainly not Paul.”¹⁰⁰

DATE

P.E. Hughes writes concerning the date, “The consistent use of the present tense when speaking of the ministry of the levitical priesthood points to a date for the writing of Hebrews prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.”¹⁰¹ He asks why the author would refrain from immediately drawing the attention of the audience to the non-functioning high priesthood. With the lack of this language, Hughes wishes to place the date in the sixties C.E.

H. Orton Wiley, considering the possibility that Paul wrote Hebrews, wished to restrict the upper date to the traditional year in which Paul died, prior to the destruction of the Temple. He writes,

¹⁰⁰ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 2.

¹⁰¹ P.E. Hughes, *Hebrews*, 30.

It is evident that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, if written or dictated by St. Paul, for the apostle had died before this date.... The probable date of this Epistle is placed between the years A.D. 64 and A.D. 67, when the Jewish war began, and probably just before the fall of Jerusalem.¹⁰²

Bruce also claims that if Hebrews had been written after 70 CE, the office of high priest would have been crippled. Similar to Hughes, if this were the case, it makes one wonder why the author made the fervent argument for Christ's high priesthood. If the office of high priest meant very little at the time of composition, why did the author make so much of Christ's priesthood? F. F. Bruce makes much of this argument in his commentary: "In short, there are several passages which, while they do not demand a date before A.D. 70, would have special point if in fact the Temple was still standing and the cultus still going

¹⁰² Wiley also believed Hebrews implies the Temple was still standing because of internal textual evidence. He continues, "Yet it could not have been written many years before this time, for there were those who had long been Christians (5:12), and it may be also inferred from 13:7 that their first teachers were already dead." H. Orton Wiley, *Epistle to the Hebrews* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1959), 19.

on...”¹⁰³ This assertion is not accepted by many, but to this author, it is quite compelling. If Hebrews were written after 70 C.E., why is the destruction of the Temple ignored? That is not to say that I am confident in a pre-70 C.E. date. But still, I do find this argument to have plausibility.

Attridge claims a date is attainable only in a general sense; it is only important for him to create a range in which the composition of Hebrews must fall. Attridge uses Hebrews’ internal statements as evidence that “at least several decades have elapsed since the Christian movement began.”¹⁰⁴ “[Salvation] was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him” (Heb. 2:3) and “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God.” Attridge further states, “Very few commentators would want to date the work much before 60 CE,”¹⁰⁵ thus setting the lower date range. 1

¹⁰³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), xlv.

¹⁰⁴ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁵ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 6.

Clement helps us to find an upper date range. Clement is the first document we have that shows familiarity with Hebrews. Traditionally this work is dated 96 C.E.,¹⁰⁶ but Attridge has his doubts. The date is based upon the phrase “the sudden and repeated misfortunes and calamities which have befallen us” (I Clement 1:1). The statement is said to refer to the Domitian persecution. Attridge says this evidence is “extremely weak.” He dates 1 Clement between 70 and 140 C.E. With the traditional date for 1 Clement removed, arguments toward a definite pre-96 C.E. date for Hebrews are also weakened. Attridge sets his date range for Hebrews as being between 60-100 C.E.¹⁰⁷

AUDIENCE

Discussing the possibilities regarding the audience is also difficult; we have no real evidence of authorship and, as such, have no real evidence as to who the audience might have been. If one were to try

¹⁰⁶ For Cyril C. Richardson the date (96 C.E.) is accepted, at least in a general way. “It was written about A.D. 96, and was so highly esteemed in Christian antiquity that for a while it was even reckoned as part of the canon in Egypt and Syria.” *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 33.

¹⁰⁷ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 6-7.

to hold strictly to what the early fathers had to say on the issue, it would be easy. The fathers overwhelmingly believed the only option for the audience would be a Palestinian audience, probably in or around Jerusalem. The reason for voicing so few locations and communities was because many were reticent to voice their opinions, fearing their opinions might take away the possibility of a Pauline authorship.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, I will be voicing the views of both those who claim a Palestinian audience and that of a Roman audience, even though the first major scholar to speak on a Roman audience did not come until the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Attridge claims that although the West was not willing to concede that the author of Hebrews was Paul, nonetheless, those in the West were slow to speak in regard to a Roman audience. The reason for this was that if the audience were Roman, it would mean Paul was probably not the author and would take Hebrews out of contention for the canon. “The remembrance in Rome that the work was not Pauline would readily account for its exclusion from the emerging canon” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 10).

¹⁰⁹ It is not my intention to assert that there are no other options, whether today or in antiquity. It is merely for the sake of brevity that I have left the other options out. “Other candidates have not been lacking, including Samaria, Antioch, Corinth, Cypress, Ephesus, Bithynia and Pontus, and Colossae” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 10).

In one of the earliest commentaries on Hebrews, Chrysostom points toward a Jewish-Christian audience that was “situated in Palestine generally or, more specifically[,] in Jerusalem.”¹¹⁰ This argument was based on the document’s modified label, *To the Hebrews*.¹¹¹ Internally, the use of Hebrew heroes would generally rule out a Gentile audience and furthers the Palestinian argument. This Palestinian option continued to be virtually the only alternative for an audience until the eighteenth century.¹¹²

Clement of Rome (fl. c. 90-140 C.E.) was the first to cite Hebrews (I Clement 17:1, 36:2-5), possibly within 20-30 years of the composition of Hebrews. While this in itself is not a particularly good proof for a Roman audience, the line, “Those from Italy send you greetings...” (Heb. 13:24), has been used as evidence that the greeters were “sending greetings back

¹¹⁰ Chrysostom quoted in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 9.

¹¹¹ This is a very old title; by as early as the second century Hebrews was known as the Epistle to the Hebrews in Alexandria (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 12).

¹¹² It was then, in the eighteenth century, that J.J. Wettstein proposed the Roman alternative (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 9-10).

home.”¹¹³ Other than this line, there is little to no evidence from within the text. Some claim that the same author wrote Hebrews and I Peter, and, therefore both were written in Babylon, which at that time was used as code for Rome (I Pet. 5:13).¹¹⁴ However, the answer would probably once again be best left at “in truth God knows.”

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

In order to fully appreciate the rhetorical tools the author of Hebrews has used, it is first important to decide whether there was, in fact, one author and one document. II Corinthians, for example, has been examined to such a degree that some have found three or more distinct letters within the one text.¹¹⁵ Can we possibly say that Hebrews is even a letter? What kind of document is Hebrews? All of these questions must be considered.

Hebrews would be quite odd as a letter; there is not an introduction with salutations and the conclusion

¹¹³ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 10.

¹¹⁴ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 10.

¹¹⁵ For an exposition of scholarship’s reading of II Corinthians in regard to its structure, see Jerry McCant, 2 *Corinthians* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 20-23.

is tiny. Although Hebrews ends similarly to an epistle (Heb. 13:20-25), that ending does not quite make up for the absence of a formal opening and the absence of signature in either salutation or conclusion. Some have proposed the idea of a missing introduction that has been lost.¹¹⁶ And others have proposed that Hebrews 13 was added later. Attridge states that both ideas are not generally accepted.¹¹⁷ If the conclusion was added later, it was most likely composed by the hand of the original author. Attridge also claims Hebrews is generally accepted to be intact and in complete unity.¹¹⁸

Craig Koester explains why the so-called letter doesn't quite resemble a letter. He claims Hebrews is not a letter at all, but a speech or a sermon. He believes the lack of signature would be a normal occurrence in a speech or sermon. Introductions are often made before the giving of a speech or sermon and therefore, in Hebrews, an introduction would be unneeded. The conclusion would seem almost

¹¹⁶ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 13.

¹¹⁷ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 15.

¹¹⁸ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 13-14.

microscopic when compared to the conclusion of letters. Hebrews does, however, have a conclusion; it is found in 13:22-25 and is of an acceptable size for an orally given speech.¹¹⁹

If Hebrews is a speech or sermon, in what rhetorical genre could it be classified? There are three distinct genres, or *species*,¹²⁰ of rhetoric: epideictic, judicial, and deliberative. For epideictic rhetoric to be present, it must ask the audience for “a change of attitude or deepening of values such as the honorable and the good, or in a Christian context, belief and faith.”¹²¹ Judicial rhetoric exists when a “basic argument involves the question of truth or justice.”¹²² Deliberative rhetoric occurs when the question involves “self-interest and future benefits.”¹²³ To simplify these definitions, one could say, although not always correctly, epideictic attempts to teach;

¹¹⁹ Koester, “Hebrews Rhetoric,” 103.

¹²⁰ Aristotle, 3.1.1358a, cited in George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 19.

¹²¹ Kennedy, *NT Interpretation*, 20.

¹²² Kennedy, *NT Interpretation*, 20.

¹²³ Kennedy, *NT Interpretation*, 20.

deliberative attempts to change an audience's mind; judicial attempts to either prosecute or defend. This is a supreme oversimplification. Yet for us this definition will function perfectly. It must be understood that there are no pure genres. In the same work, one might find all three genres present.

In order to properly identify the genres, a few signposts or identifying marks might be helpful. In judicial rhetoric, one will invariably be able to locate either defense speech (apology) or prosecutorial speech. Deliberative rhetoric will present either exhortative speech or dissuasive speech. Epideictic rhetoric will put forward either encomium (praising language) or invective (shaming language). It seeks to teach using examples of either good or bad. If one notices, "The three species have both positive and negative forms."¹²⁴

Hebrews' rhetorical genre could be classified as either epideictic or deliberative in almost equally convincing arguments. Koester writes, "Interpreters have debated whether Hebrews might be a form of deliberative rhetoric, since it attempts to persuade listeners to follow the course of faithfulness, or

¹²⁴ Kennedy, *NT Interpretation*, 20.

whether it might better be considered epideictic, since its examples praise those who have shown faithfulness and reprove those who are unfaithful.”¹²⁵

The author begins Hebrews by proclaiming the superiority of Christ to angels. As a result of Christ’s superiority, “we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it” (Heb. 2:1, RSV; cf. 4:14). In this way, and in these phrases, Hebrews functions as deliberative.

Hebrews then moves to the faithfulness of Christ, in the pattern of Moses. “He was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses was also faithful in God’s house” (Heb. 3:2, RSV). The use of encomium for Moses’ faithfulness (a pattern that is continued throughout the text with different characters) could easily lead to linking Hebrews with the epideictic genre. Koester is somewhat unconcerned with the genre of Hebrews: “Neatly categorizing Hebrews is not necessary, since deliberative and epideictic elements were often interwoven in speeches.”¹²⁶ While not exactly conclusive, this is our

¹²⁵ Koester, “Hebrews Rhetoric,” 104.

¹²⁶ Koester, “Hebrews Rhetoric,” 104.

best option. Hebrews has both deliberative and epideictic passages and/or elements.

RHETORICAL SITUATION

The rhetorical situation, as first defined by Lloyd F. Bitzer, is the reason an author needs to write. Bitzer writes that “a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance. The situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution.”¹²⁷ The rhetorical situation could also be known as the *exigent* situation.

The mysterious nature of the document in question leads us to the realm of speculation in regard to the rhetorical situation. No one knows who the author was. No one knows to whom it was addressed. No one knows the location in which it was written or the location of its readers. With all these mysteries, we must rely heavily on the text while at the same time injecting our own theories of authorship, audience, and location.

¹²⁷ Lloyd F. Bitzer quoted in Kennedy, *NT Interpretation*, 34.

“Let us hold fast to our confession” (Heb. 4:14-16). The entire document hinges on this statement; it asks the audience to stay with its confession of faith in Christ. It is likely the audience of Hebrews was a group of Hellenized Jews who had converted at some time or another from synagogue to church group and were now part of second generation Christianity (Heb. 2:3). The members of this community left their comfort zone and were now faced with adversity; they were being persecuted by “being exposed to abuse and affliction”¹²⁸ (Heb. 10:32-33). The group did not wish to be persecuted any longer, no matter how minimally. They were most likely drifting back to the synagogue. As a result of Judaism’s *religio licita* status, it was an uphill battle for the author to preserve the membership of the *ekklēsia*.

Heinrich Bullinger writes that “those who had left Moses for Christ were considerably tormented.”¹²⁹ Taunts used by the Jews evidently concerned the lack

¹²⁸ Attridge’s translation reads, “But remember the previous days, in which, once you were enlightened, you endured a great contest with sufferings, in part by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and afflictions and in part by becoming sharers with those who were so treated” (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 297).

¹²⁹ Heinrich Bullinger, quoted in Hagen, *Hebrews Commenting*, 25.

of a high priest in the Christian faith. It is important to know that the members of the audience of Hebrews were most likely considered apostates as they left the synagogue in favor of the *ekklēsia*. The members of the synagogue would have called them to come back. This left a difficult task for the author of Hebrews. He had to convince the audience of the vast superiority of their new confession.

ANALYSIS

To summarize, little is known about the background of Hebrews. Scholarship does not know the identity of the author. It is not known to whom it was addressed. In many ways, an attempt at deciphering its meaning is hopeless. However, it is my view that these uncertainties are much better than the false certainty of some. Now that these preliminary issues have been engaged, we can discuss the author of Hebrews' position on Melchizedek.

SOLUTION OF PARADOX AS HERESY

There are a number of tasks to complete before continuing with the argument to follow. First, the notion of paradox, mentioned briefly in the introduction, requires further definition. Second, we must discuss Hebrews 1 – 2 in order to uncover the ontological statement found within. The author of Hebrews, in Hebrews 1 – 2, draws a line between the creator and the created order. The reasons the author may have done this must be considered.

Paradox is traditionally defined as two apparently true statements whose conjunctions lead to a contradiction. While this is a satisfactory definition for matters of philosophy, in matters of faith, *contradiction* is not necessarily a word one would want to use purposefully. A better definition is one based on Henri de Lubac's definition of heresy. Paradox, in matters of faith, occurs when one is confronted with two truths of faith that, when placed together, produce dissonance.¹³⁰ Like the *koan*,¹³¹ a paradox of faith cannot be resolved.

¹³⁰ See Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1998), 169, 175.

Before beginning a discussion about Melchizedek, it is important to note the tools the author of Hebrews uses to subordinate Melchizedek under Christ from the very beginning. Hebrews begins by making an ontological statement about Christ, called “Son” in Hebrews 1. There is not a univocal ontology employed by the author of Hebrews. By making a statement about Christ as creator, he draws an ontological line between beings (Being) who create and those who are created.

While it is probable that the author of Hebrews knew the traditions concerning the veneration of Melchizedek as an angelic figure, we have no direct textual evidence to prove this with any certainty. Regardless of the absence of direct textual evidence, utilizing this supposed tradition could prove useful as a tool to recognize not only that the author of Hebrews has elevated Jesus Christ above Melchizedek (without actually demoting Melchizedek from his own elevated status), but also to recognize the ontological framework the author has used in order to do so.

¹³¹ A *koan* is a paradoxical riddle used in Zen Buddhism to show the insufficiency of logic.

Henri de Lubac claims heresy occurs when one is confronted with two seemingly contradictory “truths of faith” and instead of accepting the paradox, one denies one truth in favor of the other.¹³² De Lubac was quite familiar with Buddhism; one of his first teaching assignments was to teach a class on Buddhism. After the class was completed, he published a book, *Aspects du Bouddhisme I*, calling the religion “without a doubt the greatest spiritual fact in the history of man.”¹³³ By this, he means the religion is the greatest spiritual achievement created completely by human beings. It is obvious de Lubac had a great appreciation for the religion, as well as other religions and philosophies; he saw them as being pre-Christian and their tools as useful to the Christian faith.¹³⁴

¹³² De Lubac quotes Scheeben in regard to free will and predestination: “two teachings in the Church which appear to be contradictory, and have nevertheless both been held firmly by her.” And also, “When it is between two truths of faith that the ultimate harmony cannot be seen, to choose one and reject the other then becomes heresy so called” (De Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, 169, 175).

¹³³ Henri de Lubac, *Aspects du Bouddhisme I*, quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 46.

¹³⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 40-41.

The notion of paradox is of utmost importance in the Christian faith. In the doctrines of the Church there are paradoxes for good reason; they facilitate faith in ways no scientific method or math equation could. The central doctrine and paradox to the faith is that of the hypostatic union. This paradox states Christ is fully human and fully divine. This union cannot be worked out as a math equation or a Venn diagram. As de Lubac has written, to choose one truth and deny the other is “heresy properly so called.”¹³⁵ To teach the humanity of Christ, while denying his divinity, is to advance heresy. To teach the divinity of Christ, while denying his humanity, is to advance heresy. To attempt to make this doctrine logical is to deny one of the natures of Christ.

If, in fact, the hypostatic union were a legitimate way of speaking about Christ at the time of the Council of Chalcedon, wouldn't it be necessary to see it evinced in the New Testament? Indeed, John 1 is clear about the dual-natured Christ:

¹³⁵ “The results of such scrutiny may well be negative, but even so they are enough to remove the scandal of contradiction by enabling the mind to affirm the existence of an ultimate harmony even when it cannot see it” (De Lubac, *Mystery of the Supernatural*, 174).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth... For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (Jn. 1:1-5, 14, 16-18)

The document begins by telling of the Word's (λόγος) presence in the moment of creation. It continues by attesting to the Word having become flesh. It is not only in John that the natures are evident. In fact, where is the hypostatic union more visible than in Hebrews?

I fully understand that Hebrews was written before the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) and before the creed¹³⁶ associated with that meeting. However, theology does not come out of nowhere. It is based on the discoveries and work of others; it flows through generations and centuries. The thought composed in that council came from a time prior to the council. Of course each person introduces new ideas, but knowledge grows from and is built upon the knowledge of each previous generation.

The author of Hebrews demonstrates Christ's divinity when he writes that Christ is "as much

¹³⁶ "We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us" (*Chalcedonian Creed*, 451 C.E.).

superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” (Heb. 1:4). The author also writes that the Son “created the worlds,” “is the reflection of God’s glory,” is “the exact imprint of God’s very being,” and he “sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:2-3). Christ’s humanity is also evident in Hebrews:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest to the order of Melchizedek. (Heb. 5:7-10)

In reading the previous passage, Christ’s humanity is clearly evident, but so is his divinity. Thus, in Hebrews, we see paradox as a central thrust. The author of Hebrews is attempting to instill a proper Christology in a group of Jewish-Christians who were overly influenced by their Judaism. He is trying to

keep the Christian *ekklesia* from moving back to the Jewish synagogue.¹³⁷ How does the author do this? He utilizes Jewish heroes, in their heroism, to prove the superiority of Jesus. He is not asking the Jewish-Christians to deny Judaism; he is asking them to accept Judaism fulfilled. To deny Judaism, or to deny Christianity, would prove to be heresy. To accept the paradox is to accept orthodoxy. Paradox is not so much an irresolvability or hole, but is fullness, a transcendent fulfillment.

CONFLICTING TRADITIONS

When reading Hebrews 5, it is striking to see Jesus placed in the line of anyone; he is exceedingly unique. It is more surprising to see Jesus placed in the line of priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. By this I mean it is rare to see the divine nature of Christ placed in a line of a human figure, or any figure for that matter. But was Melchizedek merely a human figure? We have seen a number of traditions in which Melchizedek was definitely more than human. Was

¹³⁷ C. K. Barrett, "The Christology of Hebrews," 110.

the author of Hebrews aware of these traditions? Is Melchizedek more than human in Hebrews?

In his humanity, Jesus was born in the line of David, but generally speaking, this is not applied to the divinity. However, what is said of Christ's humanity must be said also of his divinity. It is important to note that bifurcation of the natures of Christ is specifically what the author of Hebrews was attempting to avoid, and as a result, denounce.

As I have demonstrated, prior to Christianity, Melchizedek was portrayed in a number of ways. To recapitulate: In Genesis, he is shown as a human figure who meets Abram after a decisive battle. Abram had just defeated Chedorlaomer and his allies. Upon Abram's return, Melchizedek prays a prayer of blessing for Abram and ten percent of what he owned was given.¹³⁸ Psalm 110 may or may not display Melchizedek as a legitimizer of non-levitical priests. To the Qumranites, as seen in the 11QMelchizedek document, Melchizedek, in the opinion of many scholars, is portrayed as a warrior angel with messianic implications.¹³⁹ While that interpretation is not the

¹³⁸ For the discussion concerning to whom the title was given, refer back to chapter one.

opinion of this author, it is significant to note. In the work of modern authors who blur the categories between angelic and messianic natures, there is apparently a lack of understanding in regard to first-century Hebrew thought concerning messianism and angelology.¹⁴⁰ Melchizedek was, to the Qumranites, more than human. The author of Hebrews, having knowledge of both traditions, has apparently taken aspects of both traditions and created a paradox in order to harmonize the disharmony. The question must have been asked, “Was Melchizedek angel or human, immortal or historical?” The author of Hebrews answers that question with an unapologetic “yes.” That is to say, Melchizedek is both heavenly *and* human. As a result, in terms of the possibility of creating an orthodox position concerning Melchizedek, Hebrews was the only moment in which there was a possibility for an orthodox position other than the human of the Genesis 14 narrative. The author of Hebrews harmonizes two traditions that were apparently opposed.

¹³⁹ For example, Richard Longenecker, “The Melchizedek Argument of Hebrews,” 80.

¹⁴⁰ For further discussion on the issue, one can refer back to chapter one or see also, Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*.

HEBREWS AS A HARMONIZATION TEXT

Hebrews begins by announcing the superiority of Christ to the angels. As we have noted, in some traditions, Melchizedek was believed to be a heavenly being. It is imperative to consider the sections on Melchizedek later in Hebrews as being dependent on this passage. The Son became “as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” (Heb. 1:4). The author of Hebrews, if we read his passages on Melchizedek divorced from this verse, could easily be categorized with those in the ensuing Melchizedekian heresies. He could have been read like those who believed Melchizedek was a heavenly or angelic figure *only* and, as a result of his lack of human weakness, was greater than Christ. In fact, without this passage, he could be judged as advancing the very Christology, or even the Melchizedekian thought, he was opposing. As I shall later discuss, Melchizedek, in Hebrews 7, is glorified. He is described as if he is the greatest of all. In fact, some of the heresies to be considered in chapter three utilized Hebrews 7 in order to arrive at a heretical veneration of Melchizedek. However, knowing the traditions about Melchizedek, and

knowing the subordination of the angels to Christ, when we hear the glorification language, we can know the author of Hebrews was in no way deifying Melchizedek on the same level as, or above, Christ.

Before moving forward to an interpretation of Melchizedek based on the notion of paradox that is apparent in Hebrews, it is important to first look at the two sections of the Hebrews text in which Melchizedek is discussed by the author.

HEBREWS 5:5-6, 10

In the first instance in which the author of Hebrews presents Melchizedek, he utilizes the Genesis narrative and Psalm 110:4. Melchizedek is employed to legitimize the priesthood of Christ.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.” In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and

he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Heb. 5:5-6, 10)

When the author of Hebrews portrays Christ as “a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek,” he is quoting from Psalm 110:4, thereby exhausting all resources from the Psalms concerning Melchizedek. It is in this passage that the aforementioned hypostatic union is most evident in Hebrews. This passage could just as easily be used to accentuate the humanity of Christ, as it would be to accentuate his divinity. The author begins by speaking of Christ’s appointed glory, moves directly into a mode of speaking about the extreme humanity of Christ, writes of Christ as a “Son,” a deified term, and continues to speak of him as the “source of eternal salvation.” To the author of Hebrews, in this passage, then, what is the nature of Jesus Christ? Is he divine or human? The answer is “yes” to both.

HEBREWS 7:1-10

Melchizedek is not only mentioned, but is given complete analysis in Hebrews 7.¹⁴¹ The Melchizedek we see in Hebrews 7 is much more than just a name or legitimizer. The author of Hebrews writes,

This “King Melchizedek of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him”; and to him Abraham apportioned “one-tenth of everything.” His name, in the first place, means “king of righteousness”; next he is also king of Salem, that is, “king of peace.” (Heb. 7:1-2)

In these first two verses, a historical picture of Melchizedek is revealed. These verses completely exhaust all information given about Melchizedek from the Genesis narrative. As a result, it is at this point in the text in which there is a move from the ‘historical’ Melchizedek to the immortal.

¹⁴¹ Hebrews 6:20 reiterates what has been written in regard to Christ’s priesthood in chapter 5: “...where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

The author of Hebrews continues his discussion about Melchizedek into the realm of speculation. He continues, “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever” (Heb. 7:3). Some scholars have suggested that the speculation in which the author of Hebrews engages is merely a result of a lack of information regarding Melchizedek. Horton finds this to be improbable.¹⁴² Ultimately, their argument seems to break down as a result of the shared traditions that seem evident in the work of Philo and others.¹⁴³ The assertion that the author of Hebrews participated in speculation that was en vogue at the time of his composition could prove worthy of more discussion.

The author of Hebrews continues to subordinate the levitical priesthood to the priesthood established in the order of Melchizedek. As a result,

¹⁴² Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 153-154.

¹⁴³ The Qumran document 11QMelchizedek depicts Melchizedek as a heavenly figure, a picture that is not unlike Hebrews 7:3. Josephus, although he generally remains grounded in the Genesis narrative, uses an allegorical method in regard to Melchizedek, not unlike that of the author of Hebrews (*Antiquities I*: 179-181).

Christ, in the order of Melchizedek's priesthood, is exalted.

See how great he is! Even Abraham the patriarch gave him a tenth of the spoils. And those descendents of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to collect tithes from the people, that is, from their kindred, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man, who does not belong to their ancestry, collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case, tithes are received by those who are mortal; in the other, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives the tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. (Heb. 7:1-10)

Hebrews 5 speaks of the inferiority of the levitical priesthood; this passage demonstrates that while Christ is superior to the angels, and as a result is superior to Melchizedek, he is also superior to all human high

priests because of the lineage of his own priesthood.¹⁴⁴ If Christ is superior to the angels and therefore superior to Melchizedek – and if Melchizedek, as a result of Abraham’s tithing to him, is superior to his descendants – then Christ is superior to the Levites. The author proceeds,

Now if perfection had been attainable through the levitical priesthood – for the people received the law under this priesthood – what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek,¹⁴⁵ rather than one according to the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. Now the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Heb. 5:1-5.

¹⁴⁵ I have discussed the possibility that this is a historical interpretation of Psalm 110:4. The author has interpreted it allegorically in Hebrews 5 and now has referenced it in its historical framework. Psalm 110:4, in the opinion of the author of Hebrews, is most likely referring to a legitimization of king/priests from the Davidic line. It seems the author of Hebrews, at the very least, views the Psalm as a legitimizer of non-Aaronic priests.

For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. (Heb. 7:11-14)¹⁴⁶

By simply making the human Melchizedek indistinguishable from the heavenly or immortal Melchizedek, the author of Hebrews has harmonized the two separate traditions previously mentioned. From the exaltation language (e.g., 7:3), we are able to distinguish the immortality of Melchizedek from the human Melchizedek (e.g., 7:1-2, 4-15). It is imperative to understand, however, that the two natures of Melchizedek cannot be separated. To the

¹⁴⁶ The rest of the chapter simply continues the same argument. “It is even more obvious when another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek, one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of him, ‘You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.’ This is on the one hand, the abrogation of an earlier commandment because it was weak and ineffectual (for the law made nothing perfect); there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God. This was confirmed with an oath; for others who became priests took office without an oath, but this one became a priest with an oath, because of the one who said to him, ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever’ – accordingly Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant. Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever” (Heb. 7:15-24).

author of Hebrews, Melchizedek is both the angelic/immortal figure, and the human/historical figure. There is no need for further harmony.

What proof can there be that, just as in the hypostatic union as presented in Hebrews (as anachronistic as this sounds), there is a dual-natured Melchizedek in Hebrews? There is, in fact, a way to show that Melchizedek and Christ are described in parallel frameworks. Hebrews 7:3 states, "...having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever." Hebrews 7:15 states, "It is even more obvious when another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek, one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life." According to the author of Hebrews, Melchizedek resembles Christ – but more than resembles Christ. Melchizedek prepared the way for Christ in his establishment of the non-levitical priesthood. Christ resembles Melchizedek. Christ, once again, more than resembles Melchizedek. Christ is the fulfillment of the priesthood Melchizedek began. Melchizedek is immortal, "having neither beginning of

days nor end of life.” Christ is immortal and is shown to be so because he became a priest as a result of “the power of an indestructible life.”

Henri de Lubac uses a similar method when speaking of Søren Kierkegaard. He expresses that the purpose of philosophy is to describe the created order, the immanent, and that the purpose of theology is to describe the things of God, the transcendent. When he begins to discuss the philosophy and theology of Søren Kierkegaard, de Lubac writes about Kierkegaard, “As he is the philosopher of transcendence, Kierkegaard is the theologian of objectivity [immanence].”¹⁴⁷ To mix categories is to connect them and at the same time to create a paradox. The above statement about Kierkegaard’s thought is a perfect example.

Paradoxes, like the hypostatic union, are difficult for the human mind to entertain. In fact, paradox is meant to be impossible to fully understand. When I spoke of the Buddhist *koan* above, I had Christian doctrine in mind. To attempt to grasp, or to logically reconcile the hypostatic union, or even the person of Melchizedek, is to commit heresy. Ask a

¹⁴⁷ Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1983), 103.

group of elementary school students the question, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” and inevitably one kid in the room will smack his fingers into his palm, thus creating a poor, but still audible, clap. This child has missed the point of the exercise. The riddle is created to show the inadequacy of logic. To attempt to solve this puzzle, to give it a concrete answer, is to completely misunderstand its true meaning.

THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS

In the following chapter, I will discuss the various traditions concerning Melchizedek after Hebrews was written. The Melchizedekians viewed Melchizedek as the highest power in the universe, greater than Christ. Hierakas believed Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit. Many of the early fathers, apparently unaware of Hebrews, continued to follow the Genesis 14 narrative to answer the questions of his nature.

It is easy to see why the heretical speculations about Melchizedek were fueled by the statements of Hebrews 7:3. If one divorces the passages concerning Melchizedek from Hebrews 1, it becomes easy to

conclude Melchizedek was at least equal to Christ and was greater than Christ. Having read Hebrews 7 in light of Hebrews 1, it is evident the author of Hebrews does not interpret Melchizedek in this manner. To the author of Hebrews, Christ is greater than everyone else. As the Son, he is on the transcendent side of the line between created and Creator. Angels and humans are created and Christ is the creator (Heb. 1:2). To attempt to place Melchizedek outside of the created order is to commit heresy.

CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING HEBREWS'

INTERPRETATION OF MELCHIZEDEK

It is difficult for the human mind to allow paradox to function as it is meant to, as paradox. Human beings often have a logical mind and have great faith in logic. When an idea, or in our case, a “truth of faith,” transcends logic, our human minds attempt to *solve* the puzzle. It is our duty, in the Church, to reject human solutions and accept the paradoxes of faith. To smack our fingers into our palms and proclaim the riddle solved is, at best, to miss the point and, at worst, to be heretical. Hebrews has revealed a number of paradoxes: the hypostatic union, an argument refuting – while continuing the cause of – Judaism, and the dual natured Melchizedek. The point of paradox is to allow the mind a journey in thought, to allow contemplation. Attempting to *solve for x* and place Melchizedek into one category or the other is to miss the point completely and lose the beauty of this harmonization.

CHAPTER THREE:
VARIOUS TRADITIONS REGARDING MELCHIZEDEK
AFTER HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION

Who was Melchizedek to the writers of religious documents after Hebrews? Unfortunately, he was once again either only human or only angelic. Hebrews' position regarding Melchizedek was misunderstood, forgotten, or ignored. As stated previously, we find in Hebrews the only moment in which Melchizedek could be viewed as anything other than strictly human and remain orthodox. The Church fathers, and the ensuing heresies alike, follow patterns just like the traditions recorded before the authorship of Hebrews: Melchizedek is either only human or only angelic. Both views on Melchizedek will be displayed, whether in the discussion about Justin Martyr's *Dialogue With Trypho*, or in which Melchizedek is definitely a mere human, or in the Nag Hammadi text, in which Melchizedek is most definitely more than human. It is important to see that except for the moment Hebrews was written, never again was there a

view on Melchizedek in which the possibility of a human *and* angelic Melchizedek could exist. The following documents display a number of single-natured Melchizedekian interpretations.

One of the most difficult hurdles to overcome in regard to the assertion of this thesis will become evident in the following chapter. If Hebrews attempted to place the two natures of Melchizedek into one figure, why does a dual-natured Melchizedek not appear in other literature? Was this view discounted upon receipt? Even though the author of Hebrews is most definitely persuasive, was he not persuasive on this point? Even though the author of Hebrews was clear in other places, was he not clear on this point? It will be made plain that there were definite misunderstandings of the Hebrews text by Gnostics, among others. Other than this possibility, the questions above will have to remain unanswered.

These misunderstandings are discussed in order to show that Hebrews' Melchizedekian interpretation was apparently never accepted in these contexts (or possibly never understood), whether it was as a result of any of the following categories: (1) an inability to grasp Hebrews' Melchizedekian interpretation, (2) an

absence of exposure, or (3) the work's being ignored. The selection of documents to follow will exhibit possibilities from each category.¹⁴⁸ Justin, for example, may have never been exposed to Hebrews or, for whatever reason, may have simply ignored its interpretation. The heresies, on the other hand, assuredly did read Hebrews. They simply read it with a wrong interpretation. One conspicuous omission is that of the Rabbis in the Talmud. Their interpretations of Melchizedek are quite similar to those found in early Christianity. For the purposes of this thesis, I wish to narrow the sources to include only Christian or Gnostic-Christian writings.

¹⁴⁸ For an explanation of these interpretations, including the Talmudic interpretations of Melchizedek, see Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 114-130.

JUSTIN MARTYR

(c. 100 – 165 C.E.)

Justin's treatment of Melchizedek is minimal and adds very little to Melchizedekian speculation. It is important to look at his text in order to attempt to decipher whether or not Justin, as an early Christian theologian, was familiar with Hebrews' interpretation of Melchizedek. Also, for the purposes of this study it is essential to recognize any differences in Melchizedekian interpretation from author to author.

DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO, CHAPTER XIX

Nothing in Justin's handling of Melchizedek in this passage is particularly earth shattering; Melchizedek is simply placed in a long list of the uncircumcised. Justin is attempting to discuss the merits of circumcision for his audience while, at the same time, attempting to prevent his audience from looking down on the uncircumcised. The passage reads,

For if it were necessary, as you suppose, God would not have made Adam uncircumcised; would not have had respect to the gifts of Abel

when, being uncircumcised, he offered sacrifice; and would not have been pleased with the uncircumcision of Enoch, who was not found, because God had translated him... Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High, was uncircumcised; to whom also Abraham the first who received circumcision after the flesh, gave tithes, and he blessed him: after whose order God declared, by the mouth of David, that He would establish the everlasting priest. Therefore to you alone this circumcision was necessary, in order that the people may be no people, and the nation no nation; as also Hosea, one of the twelve prophets, declares.¹⁴⁹

Melchizedek is simply mentioned.

To Justin, Melchizedek is most likely the human being first written about in Genesis 14. Justin describes Melchizedek as “priest of the Most High,” the receiver of Abraham’s tithe and, most intriguing, “uncircumcised.” It would make sense to think of Melchizedek as uncircumcised because it was Abraham who was the first (Gen. 17:10-24), but this is

¹⁴⁹ Justin Martyr, “Dialogue With Trypho,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers – Vol. 1*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 203-204.

apparently a new expounding of the text. However, for the most part, nothing new is learned from this passage in regard to Melchizedek. He is evidently the human being of Genesis 14.

DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO, CHAPTER XXXIII

The similarities between the interpretation of Psalm 110 by the author of Hebrews and Justin Martyr are incredible. In this text, Justin endeavors to prove Hezekiah is not the priest spoken of in Psalm 110; just like the author of Hebrews, he wishes to make Jesus Christ that priest. Justin writes,

"And," I continued, "I am not ignorant that you venture to expound this psalm as if it referred to king Hezekiah; but that you are mistaken, I shall prove to you from these very words forthwith. 'The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent,' it is said; and, 'Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek,' with what follows and precedes. Not even you will venture to object that Hezekiah was either a priest, or is the everlasting priest of God; but that this is spoken of our Jesus, these expressions show.... For by this statement, 'The

Lord hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek,' with an oath God has shown Him (on account of your unbelief) to be the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek; i.e., as Melchizedek was described by Moses as the priest of the Most High, and he was a priest of those who were in uncircumcision, and blessed the circumcised Abraham who brought him tithes, so God has shown that His everlasting Priest, called also by the Holy Spirit Lord, would be Priest of those in uncircumcision. Those too in circumcision who approach Him, that is, believing Him and seeking blessings from Him, He will both receive and bless. And that He shall be first humble as a man, and then exalted, these words at the end of the Psalm show: 'He shall drink of the brook in the way,' and then, 'Therefore shall He lift up the head.'¹⁵⁰

Nonetheless, it would be too much to say that Justin depends on Hebrews. Much of the Melchizedekian interpretation is missing from the

¹⁵⁰ Justin Martyr, "Dialogue With Trypho," 211.

above passage. While Justin was apparently familiar with the synoptic gospels and a number of the Pauline letters, he did not appear to have access to Hebrews. Could Justin and Hebrews have shared a tradition?

Who was Melchizedek to Justin? Just like the psalm he is examining, Justin's interpretation of Melchizedek is ambiguous. Yet, it is still evident that this Melchizedek was human, the human of Genesis 14. Were the Genesis narrative not discussed, we would have no choice but to leave the question unanswered. But Melchizedek has been given responsibilities beyond those afforded him by Psalms or Genesis. Also, he has been called the priest of the uncircumcised. Considering all of this, it is probable that Justin believed Melchizedek to be a great human being and nothing more. Melchizedek was the founder of the non-Aaronic priesthood. That alone made Melchizedek worthy of reverence, but reverence not unlike that placed upon Abraham, a mere mortal.

THE MELCHIZEDEKIANS

(c. 190 C.E.)

The Melchizedekians, if they ever existed, were most likely a splinter group of the Theodotians. I say *if they ever existed* because Harnack believes their existence to be a fabrication by Hippolytus (fl. c. 200 C.E.) “as a result of Theodotian exegesis of Hebrews.”¹⁵¹ This is assuming a lot. Let us begin at the beginning of the story. There are a number of works in which the existence of the Melchizedekians is assumed. However, we do not have one text in existence that was actually written by a member of the group. The pages to follow will be a presentation and discussion of a number of texts written about the Melchizedekians. Questions regarding their very existence will be asked; but most importantly, their supposed views on Melchizedek will be examined and it will be determined whether or not they viewed Melchizedek as heavenly or human.

¹⁵¹ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma – Vol. 3*, quoted in Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 98.

REFUTATION OF ALL HERESIES – VII:23-24¹⁵²

The first work to be examined is Hippolytus's *Refutation of All Heresies*, VII:23-24.¹⁵³ Section 23 is a commentary on the Theodotians and, section 24 a commentary on the Melchizedekians. *Refutation of All Heresies*, VII:23-24 reads,

But there was a certain Theodotus, a native of Byzantium, who introduced a novel heresy... (According to this, Theodotus maintains) that Jesus was a (mere) man, born of a virgin, according to the counsel of the Father, and that after he had lived promiscuously with all men, and had become pre-eminently religious, he subsequently at his baptism in Jordan received Christ, who came from above and descended

¹⁵² This subsection heading is taken from Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* In *Ante-Nicene Fathers – Vol. 5: Fathers of the Third Century*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Company, 1886), 9-153.

¹⁵³ Horton cites this passage as coming from VII: 35-36, but as that section is not existent, he must have meant VII:23-24 (Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 90). There is one more section regarding the Melchizedekians from Hippolytus' *Refutation* found in X:19-20, but as it is mostly redundant with the passage above, for the sake of brevity, I will restrict discussion to VII:23-34. Horton has listed this work as having come from the wrong section also, he says it is to be found in X: 23-24 (Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 90).

(upon him) in the form of a dove. And this was the reason, (according to Theodotus,) why (miraculous) powers did not operate within him prior to the manifestation in him of that Spirit which descended, (and) which proclaims him to be the Christ. But (among the followers of Theodotus) some are disposed (to think) that never was this man made God, (even) at the descent of the Spirit; whereas others (maintain that he was made God) after the resurrection from the dead.¹⁵⁴

The passage concerning the Melchizedekians reads as follows:

While, however different questions have arisen among them, a certain (heretic), who himself also was styled Theodotus, and who was by trade a banker, attempted to establish (the doctrine) that a certain Melchisedec constitutes the greatest power, and that this one is greater than Christ. And they allege that Christ happens to be according to the likeness (of this Melchisedec). And they themselves, similarly

¹⁵⁴ Hyppolytus, *Refutation*, VII:23. All quotations are taken from *Ante-Nicene Fathers – Vol. 5*.

with those who have been previously spoken of as adherents of Theodotus, assert that Jesus is a (mere) man, and that, in conformity with the same account (already given), Christ descended upon him.¹⁵⁵

There are a number of preliminary observations to be made at this point. The placement of the Melchizedekians in proximity to the Theodotians has caused many who follow Hippolytus to assume the Melchizedekians were a splinter group from the Theodotians. That reason, along with their similar doctrines, is actually a somewhat compelling rationale, as we shall see later.

To recapitulate the belief system regarding Christ and Melchizedek within the two groups, the Theodotians and the Melchizedekians, one must first discuss what is different. When Hippolytus begins to discuss the Melchizedekians, he assumes much is the same when discussing the two groups (e.g., “similarly with those who have been previously spoken of as adherents of Theodotus...”). The Melchizedekians evidently venerated Melchizedek to such a degree it separated them from the Theodotians, not only in

¹⁵⁵ Hippolytus, *Refutation*, VII:24.

doctrine, but in community as well. The Melchizedekians believed Melchizedek was the great power, greater than Christ. This is most likely a position which would alienate them from the Theodotians who, while being adoptionistic, revered Christ as the highest power under God.

The similarities in Christological doctrines are probably the same. However, as a result of Hippolytus's similar treatment of both groups, all we can ascertain in terms of similarities is to say they were both apparently adoptionistic; they both believe "Christ descended upon [Jesus]" at baptism. Some members of both groups believed Christ was never God, or only became God after the resurrection. No more about the group can be deciphered using Hippolytus's work. There are a number of texts that can help us better view the Melchizedekians, but as a result of their time periods, these authors may not be as well equipped as Hippolytus was to discuss the group. In certain ways, we are about to tread in murky waters. It seems Hippolytus considered them very similar in regard to Christology; they were different only in regard to Melchizedek.

AGAINST ALL HERESIES – CHAPTER VIII¹⁵⁶

Pseudo-Tertullian (c. 250 – 350 C.E.) gives a number of original statements regarding the Melchizedekians. For example, he wrote that the Melchizedekians believed Melchizedek acted as an advocate for heavenly beings similarly to the way Christ acts as an advocate for human beings.¹⁵⁷ The following is a selection from *Against All Heresies*:

Add to these Theodotus the Byzantine, who, after being apprehended for Christ's Name, and apostatizing, ceased not to blaspheme against Christ. For he introduced a doctrine by which to affirm that Christ was merely a human being, but to deny his deity; teaching that He was born of the Holy Spirit indeed of a virgin, but was a solitary and bare human being, with no pre-eminence above the rest (of mankind), but only that of righteousness.

After him brake out a second heretical Theodotus, who again himself introduced a

¹⁵⁶ Title taken from Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against All Heresies* In *Ante-Nicene Fathers – Vol. 3*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 649-654.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 93.

sister-sect, and says that the human being Christ Himself was merely conceived alike, and born, of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, but that He was inferior to Melchizedek; because it is said of Christ, “Thou art a priest unto eternity, after the order of Melchizedek” [Ps. 110:4, Heb. 5:6]. For that Melchizedek, he says, was a heavenly virtue of pre-eminent grace; in that Christ acts for human beings, being made their Deprecator and Advocate: Melchizedek does so for heavenly angels and Virtues. For to such a degree, he says, is he better than Christ, that he is [without father], [without mother], [and without genealogy], of whom neither the beginning nor the end has been comprehended, nor can be comprehended.¹⁵⁸

Following the pattern of Hippolytus, Pseudo-Tertullian begins by discussing the Theodotus of Byzantium first, then Theodotus the banker and the Melchizedekians. Pseudo-Tertullian, like Epiphanius to follow, interprets Hippolytus’s writings to mean that the Melchizedekians were a sub-sect of the

¹⁵⁸ Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against All Heresies - VIII*, 654.

Theodotians. He does not consider the possibility that Hyppolytus was commenting on another Melchizedek tradition.

This passage apparently assumes that the heresy did not depend upon Hebrews – in that it does not quote Hebrews directly (Ps. 110:4 is quoted directly). Advancing a position where Melchizedek acts as an advocate for heavenly beings attempts to answer a question of the nature of Melchizedek quite similar to the question asked in this thesis. However, this heresy does not keep in mind Melchizedek’s mortal history, as witnessed in the Genesis 14 narrative.

PANARION – LV¹⁵⁹

Epiphanius’s treatment of the Melchizedekians (c. 377 C.E.), while measuring a mere four pages, is expansive when compared to that of Hyppolytus’s. Horton accuses Epiphanius of being “so far away from historical reality as to be totally dependent upon older

¹⁵⁹ Title taken from Epiphanius, *Panarion* in *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis: Selected Passages*, ed. tr. Philip R. Amidon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

sources.”¹⁶⁰ Epiphanius is the first to call the group *Melchizedekians*, even though he writes that they “call themselves Melchizedekians.”¹⁶¹ His account gives much more detail about their theology as well. He writes,

There are others who call themselves Melchizedekians, and who are probably an offshoot of those called Theodotians. These people glorify the Melchizedek mentioned in the scriptures, considering him to be some great power. In their error they say he is above in the unnameable [sic] places and is [tru]ly not only a power, but is greater than Christ. Christ they consider simply to have come and been granted to be of his order. Their proof is this sentence: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” [Ps. 110:4, Heb. 5:6]. Thus he is, they say, inferior to Melchizedek. For if he had not been brought in in some secondary position, he would not have needed to belong to

¹⁶⁰ Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 98.

¹⁶¹ Horton states that he created this name after the model of Theodotians. “This name he coined on the model of the name ‘Theodotians’ which he had already found in Hyppolytus” (*Refutation* VII. 35 [sic]; *Melchizedek Tradition*, 98).

his order. But about Melchizedek himself they say that [he was] “without mother, father, or genealogy” [Heb. 7:3], as they wish to show from St. Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews. They also make for themselves faked books by which they deceive themselves.

The dependence on Hebrews, unlike many other documents, is explicit here. It must be remembered this is a later Christian scholar commenting on a heresy of which he had no first-hand knowledge.

It is important to notice Hyppolytus has said little concerning the relationship between the Theodotians and the Melchizedekians, and Epiphanius assumes the Melchizedekians are an “off-shoot” of the Theodotians. Pseudo-Tertullian shows a direct link from Hebrews to their heresy, although he also lays blame on their “faked books by which they deceive themselves.” It would be amazing if those texts, assuming they actually exist, somehow surfaced.¹⁶²

Who was Melchizedek to the Melchizedekians? Was he heavenly or human? Unlike most other interpretative ventures, the answer to that question

¹⁶² While there are a number of other texts concerning the Melchizedekians, these are the most relevant for this study.

appears not to depend on which author is writing. They are unanimous in terms of displaying Melchizedek as a heavenly figure.

HIERAKAS

(fl. c. 275 C.E.)

Hierakas, a native Egyptian, is an odd figure in Christian history. Like the Melchizedekians, he is another from whom we have no writings. According to Horton, “[We] are dependent upon Epiphanius, *Panarion* LV and LXVII for almost all of our information about him.”¹⁶³ Epiphanius writes of him in the first of two treatments,

Hieracas the Egyptian heresiarch thinks that Melchizedek is the Holy Spirit, on account of the words: “made like the Son of God, he remains a priest forever” [Heb. 7:3], as also on account of the passage where the holy apostle says, “But the Spirit pleads for us with inarticulate groans” [Rom. 8:26]. But the one who understands the Spirit’s purposes knows that he pleads with God for the elect.¹⁶⁴

In very few words, we learn much in regard to Hierakas’s beliefs about Melchizedek. Epiphanius writes that Hierakas believed Melchizedek to be the

¹⁶³ Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 102.

¹⁶⁴ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, LV: 5.2-3.

Holy Spirit¹⁶⁵ based on two unrelated texts (although Hebrews, at this time, was considered to be Pauline by most) from New Testament works.

In the second, much larger, treatment of Hierakas and the movement that followed him, Epiphanius treats Hierakas quite favorably in many ways. Epiphanius is most impressed by Hierakas's education. He writes in regard to his life as follows:

He lived in Leontopolis in Egypt, had a sound elementary education, was well versed in all pagan subjects, and mastered as well medicine and the other sciences of the Egyptians and Greeks, to which he added astrology and magic. For he was quite skilled in many disciplines, including exegesis, as his writings show... He was in fact a Christian, but he did not persevere in the Christian way of life; he slipped, fell, and ran aground. To put it plainly, he memorized the Old and New Testament, and in commenting on them he taught doctrines he got from his own empty ideas, things which he

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 103.

considered true which suggested themselves to him...¹⁶⁶

If we can take Epiphanius' biographical writings as factual, apparently Hierakas was a very educated man. He memorized both testaments (in whatever state the New Testament was in at the time). While Epiphanius is not satisfied with Hierakas's thought, he apparently respected his education.

Epiphanius is less complimentary when it comes to his commenting on Hierakas's heresies. Concerning Hierakas's theology, Epiphanius writes,

But he says, as I explained in the chapter on the Melchizedekian sect, concerning the Holy Spirit that he is Melchizedek, because of what [the apostle] says: "He intercedes for us with inarticulate groans" [Rom. 8:26]. Who does this refer to but [the one "who has been made like the Son of God, who] remains a priest forever" [Heb.7:3]? But the words, "a priest forever" refers to his interceding. This spirit met Abraham on that occasion because he is like the Son. For this reason, he says, the apostle [uses the words] "without father,

¹⁶⁶ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, LXVII: 1.

without mother, without genealogy” [Heb. 7:3].
“Without mother” because he has no mother.
“Without father” because he has no father on
earth, ‘but having been made like the Son of
God, he remains a priest forever.’ And he
babbles on at great length about the Holy Spirit,
developing his topic in detail.¹⁶⁷

Epiphanius is noticeably negative about Hierakas’s
thought (e.g., “he babbles on at great length”) whereas
he was not negative when discussing Hierakas the
man. There is little new information covered in this
later work.

Interestingly, here we have another
misunderstanding of Hebrews’ Melchizedekian
theology. Who was Melchizedek to Hierakas? We
need not look further. To Hierakas, Melchizedek was
the Holy Spirit. In chapter two, we discussed the
author of Hebrews’ and his use of ontological
differences (i.e., the distinction between created and
creator) to subordinate Melchizedek to Christ; this is a
perfect example of a person who missed the point of
the following verse of Hebrews: “God... has spoken to

¹⁶⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, LXVII: 3.

us in His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things,
through whom also He made the world” (1:2 NASB).

NAG HAMMADI

(c. 300 C.E.)

The Nag Hammadi has a number of similarities to the Qumran texts in terms of modern scholarship. First, they were discovered at nearly the same time.¹⁶⁸ Second, both texts, once published, sparked a renewed interest in Melchizedekian study. As a result of the unearthing of the Qumran texts and the Nag Hammadi Library, much more is known about sectarian Jews and Gnosticism respectively. For example, prior to 1945, it was assumed that Gnosticism was found strictly in the Christian community. Then the text *Eugnostus the Blessed* was found in the Nag Hammadi Library, and Jewish Gnosticism was unearthed.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ The Nag Hammadi was discovered in 1945 while the Qumran scrolls were discovered in 1947.

¹⁶⁹ Eugnostus, a.k.a. Egnostos, was a Jewish Gnostic whose work was discovered in the Nag Hammadi library in 1945. His work, entitled *Eugnostus the Blessed*, contains Greek philosophical elements similar to Philo's. For further explanation see Roelof Van Den Broek, "Jewish and Platonic Speculations in Early Alexandrian Theology: Eugnostus, Philo, Valentinus, and Origen," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson & James E. Goehring (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1986), 190-203.

There are a number of things to keep in mind before beginning to discuss the Nag Hammadi Melchizedek document. This is a badly deteriorated text; less than fifty percent of it is preserved. Of 745 lines, 19 are complete. Much of the published text is replete with ellipses, denoting missing text. In other places missing words are recreated based on the surrounding text but are still the educated guesses of the translator. This makes an accurate interpretation difficult.

*THE APOCALYPSE OF MELCHIZEDEK*¹⁷⁰

The Melchizedek text found in codex IX was originally written in Greek, “probably in Egypt.”¹⁷¹ The translators are of the opinion that the writers of this text might be the theological descendants of the Melchizedekians. They arrive at this conclusion by comparing this text with the belief system outlined by

¹⁷⁰ From this point forward, this text will be known as Melch-IX (an abbreviation of the name Melchizedek with the codex number of this document attached) or *The Apocalypse of Melchizedek*, a title I have derived from a phrase in the body of Birger Pearson’s introduction to the text in “Melchizedek,” *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 438.

¹⁷¹ Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 439.

Epiphanius.¹⁷² I am unconvinced of this heritage, but will allow the reader to come to his or her own conclusions on this matter after having reviewed my commentary and the selections from Melch-IX, to follow.

Pearson claims the text begins with Melchizedek speaking to Jesus Christ. It is difficult to decipher – a result of the broken manner in which the text flows, a problem that may result from the condition the text – whether this statement is completely accurate. However, the speaker is discussing matters concerning the aeons (long, indefinite time periods), friendship, truth in proverbs and parables, mortal rulers, and heavenly figures. The next figure to speak, Gamaliel (a name Pearson has recovered from degraded text), prophesies the persecution, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Gamaliel’s address is evidently directed toward Melchizedek. Even at this early stage in the writing, it is becoming difficult to discern a separation or

¹⁷² “A comparison of Epiphanius’ account with *Melchizedek* reveals enough features in common to suggest that the latter may have originated in a group of ‘Melchizedekians,’ features such as the glorification of the priesthood of Melchizedek and a Christology that insisted on the true humanity of Christ” (Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 439).

difference between the figures of Melchizedek and Jesus Christ.

Although the phrase “priest of God Most High” (Gen. 14:18) is used to address Melchizedek, this is definitely not the same Melchizedek the Genesis narrative presents. One portion of the text reads,

And [immediately, I] arose, [I, Melchizedek], and I began to [...] God [...] that I should [rejoice ...] while he [is acting ...] living [... I said], "I [... and I] will not cease, from [now on, for ever], O Father of the [All, because] you have had pity on men, and [you have sent the] angel of light [...] from your [aeons ... to] reveal [...] when he came he [caused] me [to be raised up] from ignorance, and (from) the fructification of death to life. For I have a name: I am Melchizedek, the Priest of [God] Most High; I [know] that it is I who am truly [the image of] the true High-Priest [of] God Most High, and [...] the world. For it is not [a] small [thing that] God [...] with [...] while he [...]. And [... the angels that dwell upon the] earth [...] is the [sacrifice] of [...], whom Death deceived. When he [died], he bound them with

the natures which are [leading them astray]. Yet he offered up offerings [...] cattle [...] "I gave them to [Death, and the angels] and the [...] demons [...] living offering [...] I have offered up myself to you as an offering, together with those that are mine, to you yourself, (O) Father of the All, and those whom you love, who have come forth from you who are holy (and) [living]. And [according to] the [perfect] laws, I shall pronounce my name as I receive baptism [now] (and) for ever, (as a name) among the living (and) holy [names], and (now) in the [waters]. Amen."¹⁷³

There are a number of ways to interpret such a passage. Pearson tends to seek an interpretation that venerates Melchizedek further. He concludes that this section – and sections like it found in the rest of the body of the text – means that Melchizedek is greater than or, even more shocking, *is* Christ.¹⁷⁴ I have not especially concerned myself with deciding to what degree Melchizedek, in the text, is venerated, whether

¹⁷³ Pearson, "Melchizedek," 442.

¹⁷⁴ Pearson, "Melchizedek," 439.

he be elevated above, or below, or equated with, Christ. Having said that, I must discuss Melchizedek's role to the author.

Later in the document, the fulfillment of the earlier prophecy is narrated. However, it is not evident who is being crucified or resurrected. The figure pictured is called Melchizedek at times when, in the orthodox Christian narratives, Jesus should be the figure depicted in the crucifixion, etc. Pearson believes this is proof that Melchizedek and Christ in this text are one person:

A second set of revelations transports Melchizedek into the future, again centering on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But this time – if our reconstruction of the fragmentary text is correct – Melchizedek is given to understand that the spiritual triumph of Christ over his enemies will be that of Melchizedek himself!¹⁷⁵

While I am unwilling to make the same leaps as Pearson has, I am intrigued by the possibilities. I am simply concerned the degradation of the text has allowed other meanings to remain concealed.

¹⁷⁵ Pearson, "Melchizedek," 439.

In this text, is Melchizedek heavenly or human? He is undoubtedly more than human. He is apparently the most highly regarded heavenly figure to the author, probably higher than Christ. If Pearson is correct in his interpretation of the text, to the Gnostic authors or editors¹⁷⁶ of the text, Melchizedek could have been viewed as the pre-incarnate Christ – as can be seen in other heresies.¹⁷⁷ In fact, I would find minimal problems with one comparing the thought displayed in this text with that of the Melchizedekians. With that said, I must continue to use caution and remember the central point of “Parallelomania.” We must not draw parallels, especially not direct parallels, where there may be no parallels to be found. Furthermore, with the condition of the text in mind, it is quite difficult to draw any conclusions beyond an obvious veneration of Melchizedek.

That *The Apocalypse of Melchizedek* draws upon Melchizedekian statements from Hebrews is,

¹⁷⁶ Pearson is not sure if Gnostics originally wrote the text or if the text was later edited by Gnostics (Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 439).

¹⁷⁷ “In the church at present some people have different ideas about who Melchizedek is. Some think that he is by nature the Son of God who appeared to Abraham back then in human form....” (Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 55.7.3).

although not undeniable, quite probable. Similar to the Melchizedekians, this text is an example of a massive misunderstanding. Without grasping the rhetoric involved in the placement of Hebrews 1:2, wrong conclusions can easily be drawn. For our purposes, this is a good illustration of what Melchizedek can become as a result of theological misunderstandings.

**CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING POST-HEBREWS
LITERATURE**

Who was Melchizedek to the writers of religious documents after Hebrews? Unfortunately, he was once again either only human on the one hand or only angelic or divine, on the other. To Justin, Melchizedek was the human who met Abraham in the Valley of Shevah. The Melchizedekians interpreted Melchizedek as the supreme power, greater than Christ. Hierakas believed Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit. The Gnostics, in the *Apocalypse of Melchizedek*, viewed Melchizedek as at least heavenly, possibly even Christ himself! Have we unearthed a single document in which Melchizedek was viewed as both human and divine in the post-Hebrews world? No. The heretics, especially the Melchizedekians, attempted to interpret Hebrews, but as a result of their extreme veneration of Melchizedek, they subordinated Christ to Melchizedek and thus completely missed the point.

IMPLICATIONS

In the course of these pages, we have discussed the beliefs regarding the nature of Melchizedek prior to Hebrews, as well as those beliefs after Hebrews. Before the composition of Hebrews, with the exception of 2 Enoch, all extant sources display a single-natured Melchizedek. Even though 2 Enoch does not follow this pattern, its methods for harmonizing conflicting Melchizedekian traditions were overly conventional. In order to discuss a human Melchizedek (albeit with a miraculous birth) and heavenly Melchizedek, the author had to separate the natures into two people. Hebrews does not follow these traditions regarding Melchizedek; he expands on the traditions.

After Hebrews, all extant sources display a single-natured Melchizedek. Justin Martyr apparently, for whatever reason, never had access to Hebrews and discussed Melchizedek from only Genesis and Psalm 110. To him, Melchizedek was merely human. The Melchizedekians believed Melchizedek was the greatest power. To Hierakas, Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit. To the Gnostics, Melchizedek may have been equated with Christ. Whether the interpretations

are caused by misunderstanding or ignorance of Hebrews' approach for Melchizedekian interpretation, they were not, in my view, what the author of Hebrews evidently would have wanted to occur. None of these interpretations can be considered the same as Hebrews. Those interpretations, like the Melchizedekians, that morphed from an interpretation of Hebrews 7:3 misunderstand the Hebrews 7 passage as a result of their divorcing the text from its surrounding framework. Melchizedek may be immortal to the author of Hebrews, but he is not greater than Christ.

Hebrews attempts to harmonize the conflicting Melchizedekian traditions by collapsing the traditions into a paradox. He answers a question with a fullness that cannot be provided through logic. The question cannot be answered like a math problem. In this case, two plus two equals five, or possibly more accurately, one plus one equals one. Melchizedek the heavenly being and Melchizedek the human being are one. Christ the human and Christ our Lord are one. The author of Hebrews, before this doctrine was standard and orthodox, laid the foundation for not only Chalcedon, but also for a Melchizedekian interpretation not completely based on Genesis 14. To

the author of Hebrews, Melchizedek is one, human and heavenly.

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