

## **7:1 Priest of the Most High God**

### **Not in the Line of Aaron.**

Augustine: On receiving this promise <sup>10</sup> Abraham moved on and stayed in another place in the same land, Hebron, near the Oak of Mamre.... But he received at the same time a public blessing from Melchizedek, who was “a priest of the Most High God.” <sup>11</sup> Many important things are written about Melchizedek in the epistle entitled “To the Hebrews,” which the majority attribute to the apostle Paul, though many deny the attribution. Here we certainly see the first manifestation of the sacrifice which is now offered to God by Christians in the whole world, in which is fulfilled what was said in prophecy, long after this event, to Christ who was yet to come in the flesh: “you are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” <sup>12</sup> Not, it is observed, in the line of Aaron, for that line was to be abolished when the events prefigured by these shadows came to the light of day. *City of God* 16.22.13

### **Melchizedek’s Priesthood.**

Severian of Gabala: It is for a reason that we are reminded how Melchizedek met with Abraham after his victory over the Assyrians and gave him one-tenth of all the spoils. This indicates that Melchizedek, the priest, was a forefather of the tribe of the Levites. However, the priesthood without the law is greater than that under the law. *Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews* 7.1–2.14

### **Priest of Those in Uncircumcision.**

Justin Martyr: And Melchizedek was priest of those who were in uncircumcision, and he blessed Abraham who was in circumcision, who offered him tithes. Thus God has shown that his eternal priest, also called “Lord” by the Holy Spirit, would become priest of those in uncircumcision. *Dialogue with Trypho* 33.15

### **Melchizedek Bore a Type of Christ.**

Cyprian: Also in the priest Melchizedek we see prefigured the sacrament of the sacrifice of the Lord, according to what divine Scripture testifies and says, “And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine.” <sup>21</sup> Now he was a priest of the Most High God and blessed Abraham. And that Melchizedek bore a type of Christ, the Holy Spirit declares in the psalms, saying from the person of the Father to the Son, “Before the morning star I begat you; you are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” <sup>22</sup> That order is assuredly this, coming from that sacrifice and thence descending, that Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God; that he offered wine and bread; that he blessed Abraham. For who is more a priest of the Most High God than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered a sacrifice to God the Father and offered

that very same thing which Melchizedek had offered, that is, bread and wine, to wit, his body and blood? And with respect to Abraham, that blessing going before belonged to our people. For if Abraham believed in God and it was accounted unto him as righteousness, assuredly whosoever believes in God and lives in faith is found righteous and already is blessed in faithful Abraham and is set forth as justified. This the blessed apostle Paul proves, when he says, "Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' So you see that it is people of faith who are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith." <sup>23</sup> Thus in the Gospel we find that "children of Abraham are raised from stones, that is, are gathered from the Gentiles." <sup>24</sup> And when the Lord praised Zacchaeus, he answered and said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham." <sup>25</sup> In Genesis, therefore, that the benediction, in respect of Abraham by Melchizedek the priest, might be duly celebrated, the figure of Christ's sacrifice precedes, namely, as ordained in bread and wine. The Lord, completing and fulfilling, offered bread and the cup mixed with wine, and so he who is the fullness of truth fulfilled the truth of the image prefigured. Letter 62.4.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Things They Imagine About Melchizedek.**

Epiphanius of Salamis: These people honor Melchizedek, the one mentioned in the Scriptures, and regard him as some great power. They consider him to be [in the heavens] above, in places that cannot be named, and in their error they claim as truth not only that he is not just a power, but also that he is greater than Christ. Also, supposedly based on a literal reading of the saying "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," they believe that Christ merely came and was deemed worthy of the order [of Melchizedek]. Therefore, they say, Christ is inferior to Melchizedek. For if his status were not somehow secondary, he would not need the order of [Melchizedek].

As for Melchizedek himself, they say that he came into being "without mother, without father, without genealogy," as they would like to show from St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews. They also fabricate spurious books for their own use, and so deceive themselves.

Yet, their refutation comes from the very writings themselves. After all, at the same time David prophesies that the Lord will be established a priest after the order of Melchizedek, <sup>27</sup> the sacred Scripture is also saying that Christ will be a priest. What we find is that [speaking of Melchizedek, St. Paul] adds immediately, "resembling the Son of God he remains a priest for ever." If he resembles the Son of God,

he is not equal to the Son of God. For how can the servant be equal to the master? You see, Melchizedek was a man, and the designation “without father, without mother,” is not said because he did not have a father or a mother, but because they were not explicitly named in the sacred Scripture....

Remember that, even though some give an account of Melchizedek’s father and mother, there is no basis for this in the canonical and established Scriptures.... And of how many others is the genealogy not clearly given [in the Scriptures]? Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Elijah the Tishbite—neither their fathers nor their mothers are mentioned anywhere in the canonical Scriptures....

What are we, then, to say? Will the examples of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego force our imagination to consider what we ought not and marvel with excessive awe, beyond all measure, at each of their cases, considering them to be without father and without mother? Let it not be so! After all, the traditions of the apostles and the holy Scriptures and the successions of teachers have been set as our boundaries and foundations for the building up of our faith; and the truth of God is has been protected from every side, so that no one would be deceived by empty myths. Panarion 4, Against Melchizedekians 1.1–3.8.<sup>28</sup>

#### **Melchizedek Not Part of the Heavenly Order.**

Epiphanius of Salamis: But I return to the matter at hand, namely, the things these people imagine about Melchizedek. On the one hand, it is clear that he was a holy man, a priest of God, and the king of Salem, and on the other, that he was not of the heavenly order, nor did he descend from heaven; for, as the holy God, the Word, who does not lie, says: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”<sup>29</sup> As for the order of Melchizedek, when the divine Scripture proclaimed and the Spirit clearly taught about it, they revealed the transposition of the priesthood from the ancient synagogue and the nation onto the finest and best nation, which is not united by descent from the [same] flesh. You see, this holy man, Melchizedek, had neither descendants after him nor was his priesthood removed. For he remained a priest all the days of his life and even still he is praised in Scripture as a priest, since no one either succeeded him or abolished the priesthood during the time of his service. So also our Lord, though he was not a human being—but the holy divine Word of God, Son of God, begotten without beginning nor in time, being always with the Father, who for us became a human being, of Mary and not by the seed of man—offers the priesthood to the Father, having taken the clay from his humanity, so that, on our behalf, he may be established a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, which has no succession. And he remains [as such], forever offering gifts on our behalf, having first offered himself through the cross, so that he may abolish every sacrifice of the old covenant, offering the most perfect

and living sacrifice on behalf of the whole world: he is the sacrificial victim, he is the offering, he is the priest, he is the altar, he is God, he is human, he is King, he is High Priest, he is sheep, he is lamb, having become all in all on our behalf, so that life may be ours in every way, and so that the unmovable foundation of his priesthood may be established forever, no longer allotting it according to the flesh and successions, but granting that it might be preserved by the Holy Spirit, according to his decree. Panarion 4, Against Melchizedekians 4.1–7.<sup>30</sup>

### **Melchizedek as Holy Spirit?**

Epiphanius of Salamis: And then again, others come to imagine various things by what they say about this Melchizedek. You see, since they do not understand spiritually what is being said by the holy apostle in the same letter to the Hebrews, they are condemned to an [understanding that is] according to the flesh. The Egyptian heresiarch Hieracas considers this Melchizedek to be the Holy Spirit because of the phrase “Resembling the Son of God he remains a priest forever,” as though this ought to be interpreted by the words of the apostle when he said, “the Spirit intercedes for us through wordless sighs.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, the one who is able to understand the mind of the Spirit knows that he intercedes with God on behalf of the elect.<sup>32</sup> In this way [Hieracas] has fallen completely off the prescribed path. For the Spirit never took on flesh, and, not having taken on flesh, he could not be king of Salem and priest of any place. Panarion 4, Against Melchizedekians 5.1–4.<sup>33</sup>

### **Melchizedek as Shem?**

Epiphanius of Salamis: And how many things about this Melchizedek others also imagine! The Samaritans, for example, consider him to be Shem, the son of Noah; but they, too, will be found to be absurd. For the sacred Scripture, which safeguards everything with good order, has fortified the truth from all sides, and it has not set the order of the times and the years of the lives of each of the patriarchs and enumerated their successions in vain. After all, when Abraham was eighty-eight or, more or less, ninety years old, Melchizedek met him and offered him loaves of bread and wine,<sup>34</sup> prefiguring the mysteries through the types; types, that is, of the Lord’s body—since the Lord himself says, “I am the living bread”—and types of his blood, which flowed from his side for the cleansing of those who have been defiled and the sprinkling and salvation of our souls....

Shem, however, of whom we spoke before, and whom the Samaritans imagine to be Melchizedek, fathered Arpachshad<sup>35</sup> in the one hundred second year of his life, and altogether there were 1,241 years

until the time of Abraham, when he met Melchizedek on his return from the slaughter of the kings, <sup>36</sup> Amraphel, Arioch, Chedorlaomer, and Tidal.

And Shem did not live as many years as their silly imagination thinks, but he was 102 years old when he fathered Arpachshad, in the second year after the flood. “And after these events, he lived,” as the sacred Scripture says, “for five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters, and he died.” Now then, since he lived for 602 years and then died, how is it possible for him to reach the span of 1,241 years, so that Shem, the son of Noah, who preceded Abraham by ten generations, may be called Melchizedek by them, after ten generations, after 1,241 years? O, the great deceit of men! And according to the evidence of other manuscripts, from the age of Shem—from the time in which Shem lived—until the time at which Abraham met Melchizedek, as was stated before, which was during [Abraham’s] eighty-eight or ninetieth year of life, 628 years passed, more or less. All of this evidence, therefore, means that it is impossible for Shem to have reached the period of Abraham, so as to be identified with Melchizedek. Thus, the nonsense of the Samaritans is destroyed in every way. Panarion 4, Against Melchizedekians 6.1–11. <sup>37</sup>

### **Melchizedek a Son of a Harlot?**

Epiphanius of Salamis: And then again, the Jews say that though he himself was a righteous man and good and a priest of the Most High, just as the sacred Scripture says, it is because he was the son of a prostitute that his mother is not recorded and his father is not known. But their silly assertion, too, has been deposed. After all, Rahab was a prostitute and she is recorded, <sup>38</sup> so also Zimri, who committed fornication, is recorded, as well as Cozbi after him, even though she was a foreigner and she did not descent from the nation of Israel. <sup>39</sup> ... “Everyone who does not enter by the door,” as the holy Gospel said, “is a thief and not a shepherd.” <sup>40</sup> Panarion 4, Against Melchizedekians 7.1–2. <sup>41</sup>

### **Melchizedek the Son of God?**

Epiphanius of Salamis: And even in the church there are some who consider this Melchizedek to be by nature different. That is, they consider him to be essentially the Son of God, who appeared to Abraham in the form of a man. They, too, fall away from the path; for no one ever became like [the Son of God] just as the sacred Scripture states, that “resembling the Son of God he remains a priest forever.” Indeed, “this man who does not belong to their genealogy collected tithes from Abraham”; and since he is not counted to have descended from the Israelites themselves, he is counted as having descended from other people....

And so the ideas of all the heresies are shown to be futile. See now, even these have denied their master who “bought them with his own blood,” <sup>42</sup> who did not begin to exist since Mary, as they think, but who

is the divine Word, always with the Father, begotten of the Father without a beginning and not in time, just as the whole Scripture attests. It was him, and not to Melchizedek, that the Father also said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." <sup>43</sup> For even though he [Melchizedek] was a priest of God Most High in his own generation and had no successors who came after him, he did not come down from heaven. After all, the Scripture did not say that he "brought down" bread and wine, but that he "brought them out" <sup>44</sup> to [Abraham] and those with him when he received the patriarch who was passing by, coming from [the battle with] the kings. And he blessed [Abraham] because of his righteousness and because of the faithfulness and the piety of the man. For, even though he was tested in all things, the patriarch did not fall away from righteousness in the slightest, but God was his helper even against those who truly fell upon the land of Sodom and carried away even his own nephew, the holy Lot, whom [Abraham] brought back with all the spoil and booty. <sup>45</sup>

Where, then, can we not find that the Son was always with the Father? For it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," <sup>46</sup> and not "In the beginning was Melchizedek," or "Melchizedek was God." Panarion 4, Against Melchizedekians 7.3–9.6. <sup>47</sup>

### **Melchizedek the Father of Jesus?**

Epiphanius of Salamis: Again, it has been reported to us that some, who have been deceived more than anything that we have said before and have been inflamed by greater pride of intellect, have dared to turn to an unthinkable notion and have arrived to a blasphemous idea, saying that this Melchizedek is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. O, what careless minds people have, and what deceitful hearts, not having a place for truth! Since the apostle says that Melchizedek is "without father" and "without mother" and "without genealogy," because of the exaggeration of the phrase these people misunderstand the notion and think that what is said corresponds to the Father of all, and thus describe for themselves a blasphemous error. Because the Father of all, God the almighty, has neither father nor mother nor beginning of days nor end of life—and this is confessed by all—they have fallen into the foolish blasphemy of comparing him to Melchizedek, because the apostle has spoken of him like this, not understanding the other things said about him. That is, concerning Melchizedek it is said that "he was a priest of the Most High." <sup>48</sup> Now, if [Melchizedek] is the "Most High" and "Father," then, as the priest of another "Most High," he cannot be himself the "Father of all," for he serves another "Most High" as priest.

O, the confusion of people, who do not understand what is true but bend themselves towards error! To give the final solution to the whole affair, the holy apostle brought together everything and said: "This

man who does not have his descent from them” (clearly meaning “but from others”), “received tithes from Abraham,” and again he said, “who, in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and petitions, to him who was able to save him” <sup>49</sup>—it is obvious that the Father did not take on flesh.

And now that we have discussed sufficiently, let us leave this heresy, for we have struck it with the firm faith that is supported, as if we had struck down a field-mouse with a stone, and have avoided its deadly poison. For they say that the field-mouse does not harm immediately the one it bites but, in time, it destroys the body and infects with leprosy every limb of the one who is injured. Likewise, even though this heresy may not sound as much to the minds of those who first hear it, as it dwells in their minds, it creates questions and, from there, leads to the destruction of those who have not happened on the remedy of this antidote, namely, the refutation and counterargument I have given against it.

The mouse is not seen readily. It walks about at night and so works its harm, especially in the land of the Egyptians. Those who know about the animal understand that I do not make mention of it either incidentally or sycophantically, but from this they can compare the harm done by the heresy: for such is the damage it does. Panarion 4, Against Melchizedekians 9.11–18. <sup>50</sup>

## ***7:2 The Name of Melchizedek***

### **Translation of His Name.**

Gregory of Nazianzus: Using the principles of pastoral science, he gathers us into his heavenly fold. <sup>52</sup> He is called “sheep,” <sup>53</sup> because he was sacrificed, a “Lamb,” <sup>54</sup> because he was without blemish. <sup>55</sup> He is the “high priest” because he presented the offering. “Melchizedek,” because on the transcendent level he had no mother, on the human level no father, and his high estate is without genealogy. “Who,” it says, “can recount his generation?” <sup>56</sup> He is “Melchizedek” too, as king of Salem or peace, as king of righteousness, and because he tithes the patriarchs who prevailed over evil powers. On the Son, Theological Oration 4(30).21. <sup>57</sup>

### **In This Name the Mystery Was Inscribed.**

Ephrem the Syrian: Now the interpretation of the name Melchizedek is “king of justice” and “king of peace.” The apostle indeed demonstrated that in this name the mystery of the grace and justice of the Son, Lord of Melchizedek, was inscribed. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. <sup>58</sup>

### **Righteous King.**

Clement of Alexandria: For Salem is, by interpretation, peace; of which our Savior is enrolled King, as Moses says, Melchizedek king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who gave bread and wine, furnishing consecrated food for a type of the Eucharist. And Melchizedek is interpreted “righteous king”; and the name is a synonym for righteousness and peace. Stromateis 4.25. <sup>59</sup>

### ***7:3 Resembling the Son of God***

#### **Melchizedek Signifies Priesthood.**

Severian of Gabala: Without father, without mother, without genealogy, according to the Scripture. Later, among the Levites it is always clear who were the parents of a priest. They also had allotted times and periods of service, and the total length of their service and of their life is known. All these data exist for each priest under the law, even if not for every year. However, it is said that Melchizedek is without father, without mother, without genealogy, having no beginning and no end of life according to the word of Scripture. He does not belong to a priestly family; we do not know when he started his priesthood or what kind of a priest he was, or whether he was a priest all his life. We do not know any information that is available for those priests under the law. It is said that, likened to the Son of God, he continues his priesthood forever. And how does Melchizedek remain a priest? Here is a solution to that question. As Moses sometimes signifies the law, so Melchizedek, a human being, signifies the priesthood. Now, if he is likened [to the Son of God] through the priesthood in Christ, he remains forever, not as a mortal man but as a pattern of the priesthood. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 7.3. <sup>60</sup>

#### **Likeness and Difference.**

Chrysostom: And what does Paul say? “For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God.” And, what is especially noteworthy, he shows the difference to be great by the type itself. For as I said, he continually confirms the truth from the type, from things past, on account of the weakness of the hearers. “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek,” whereas Melchizedek was dead and was not “priest forever,” see how he explained it mystically....

“And who can say this concerning a man?” He does not assert this, in fact, Paul says; the meaning is that we do not know when or what father he had, nor what mother, nor when he received his beginning, nor when he died. And what of this, one says? For does it follow, because we do not know it, that he did not



die, or had no parents? You say well; he both died and had parents. How then was he “without father or mother”? How, “having neither beginning of days nor end of life”? How? From its not being expressed. And what of this? That as this man is, from his genealogy not being given, so is Christ from the very nature of the reality....

Where is the likeness to the Son of God? That we know not of the one or of the other either the end or the beginning. Of the one because they are not written; of the other, because they do not exist. Here is the likeness. But if the likeness were to exist in all respects, there would no longer be type and reality; but both would be type. Here then, just as in representations by painting or drawing, there is something that is like and something that is unlike. By means of the lines, indeed, there is a likeness of features, but when the colors are put on, then the difference is plainly shown, both the likeness and the unlikeness. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 12.2–3.<sup>61</sup>

### **Melchizedek Modeled on Christ.**

Ambrose: Let no one claim Divinity resides in an order established by human beings when he encounters such an order. For the church does not consider even Melchizedek, by whose office Abraham offered sacrifice, an angel (as some Jewish interpreters do). It rather considers him a holy man and priest of God who, prefiguring our Lord, is described as “without father or mother, without history of his descent, without beginning and without end.” It does this in order to show beforehand the coming into this world of the eternal Son of God who was likewise incarnate and then brought forth without any father, begotten as God without mother, and was without history of descent. For it is written: “Who shall declare his generation?”<sup>63</sup>

This Melchizedek, then, we have received as a priest of God based upon the model of Christ. However, the one we regard as the type, the other as the original. Now, a type is a shadow of the truth. We have accepted the royalty of the one [Melchizedek] in the name of a single city [Jerusalem], but that of the other [Jesus] as shown in the reconciliation of the whole world. For it is written: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,”<sup>64</sup> that is to say, the eternal Godhead was in Christ. Or, if the Father is in the Son, even as the Son is in the Father, then their unity in both nature and operation is plainly not denied. On the Christian Faith 3.11 [88–89].<sup>65</sup>

## **The Priesthood of All Nations.**

Ephrem the Syrian: Some say that this Melchizedek was actually Shem, son of Noah; in fact, they say the book of Genesis clearly shows that he lived in the days of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Moreover, from the sortitions of those tribes who inherited the land of the house of Shem, it looks clear that he lived in Salem in his own inheritance.

Not only Melchizedek but also the name Melchizedek are “without father, and mother and without genealogy” because neither the name Melchizedek nor the name Israel were written in the genealogy, whereas Shem and Jacob had father and mother, and a beginning and an end, and were inscribed in the genealogy. But the names of Melchizedek and Israel did not have any of these things. God glorified them both with names equally imposed by him. He “was made similar to the Son of God” through his priesthood, so that the priesthood of Melchizedek might last forever, not in Melchizedek himself but in the Lord of Melchizedek.

And the apostle highly praises the priesthood of all nations rather than that of his people, when he says, “Consider how great this man is to whom even our patriarch Abraham gave the tenth part of everything.”  
Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>68</sup>

## **Was Melchizedek Shem?**

Jerome: The Jews say that Melchizedek was Shem, Noah’s son, and, counting up the total years of his lifetime, <sup>70</sup> they demonstrate that he would have lived up to the time of Isaac; and they say that all the firstborn sons of Noah were priests before Aaron performed the priestly office. Also, by “king of Salem” is meant the king of Jerusalem, which was formerly called Salem. And the blessed apostle writing to the Hebrews makes mention of Melchizedek as “without father or mother” and refers him to Christ and, through Christ, to the church of the Gentiles, for all the glory of the head is assigned to the members.... While he was uncircumcised, he blessed Abraham who had been circumcised; and in Abraham he blessed Levi; and through Levi he blessed Aaron from whom the priesthood afterwards descended. For this reason, he maintains, one should infer that the priesthood of the church, which is uncircumcised, blessed the priesthood of the synagogue, which is circumcised. And as to the Scripture which says, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” our mystery is foreshown in the word order; not at all, indeed, in the sacrifice of non-rational victims through Aaron’s agency, but when bread and wine, that is, the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, were offered in sacrifice. Hebrew Questions on Genesis 14.18–19.

### **Melchizedek Sprang from Cursed Seed.**

Photius: He calls Melchizedek “without genealogy” because he was not from the seed of Abraham nor was he given a genealogy by Moses, but his race was Canaanite and he sprang from that cursed seed. He was pronounced righteous in regards to his deeds. Yet because he had not sprung from righteous forebears or from some righteous seed, it was not proper to give the genealogy of this man who inclined to the epitome of righteousness. Now Melchizedek demonstrates that he was of Canaanite origin and it also can be proved positively from those regions that he ruled and reigned over and the regions with which he was associated. For he was a neighbor of Sodom, and he was very close to Abraham when he lived near “the oak of Mamre.” <sup>76</sup> And one must also reckon that he happens to be king of that “Salem,” <sup>77</sup> which is Jerusalem. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 7.3. <sup>78</sup>

### **The Twofold Birth of Christ.**

John Cassian: Listen, you heretic, to the passage you have garbled: hear in full and completely, what you quoted mutilated and hacked about. The apostle wants to make clear to everyone the twofold birth of God. In order to show how the Lord was born [both] in the Godhead and in flesh, he says, “Without father, without mother.” The one belongs to the birth of divinity, the other to that of the flesh. For, as he was begotten in his divine nature “without mother,” so he is in the body “without father.” Though he is neither without father nor without mother, we must believe in him “without father and without mother.” For, if you regard him as begotten of the Father, he is without mother. If you regard him as born of his mother, he is without father. And so in each of these births he has one [parent]: in both [births] together he is without each. For, the birth of divinity had no need of mother; and for the birth of his body, he was himself sufficient, without a father. Therefore says the apostle “Without [father or] mother, without genealogy.” Incarnation of the Lord, Against Nestorius 7.14. <sup>83</sup>

### **The Shadows Flee, the Truth Breaks In.**

Gregory of Nazianzus: The old has passed away,

behold all things have been made anew.

The letter withdraws, the Spirit advances.

The shadows flee, the truth breaks in.

Melchizedek is summed up; the motherless becomes fatherless.

The first without a mother,

The second without a father,

The laws of nature are abrogated

that the cosmos above be brought to perfection.

On the Birth of Christ, Oration 38.2. 84

### ***7:4 See How Great He Is***

#### **The Superiority of Melchizedek.**

Chrysostom: "Now consider," Paul says, "how great this man is to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils." Up to this point he has been applying the type; henceforward, he boldly shows Melchizedek to be more glorious than the Aaronic priesthood. But if he who bears a type of Christ is so much better not merely than the priests, but even than the forefather himself of the priests, what should one say of the reality? You see how superabundantly he shows the superiority.... Have you seen the superiority? Have you seen how great is the interval between Abraham and Melchizedek, who bears the type of our High Priest? And he shows that the superiority had been caused by authority, not necessity. For the one paid the tithe, which indicates the priest; the other gave the blessing, which indicates the superior. This superiority passes on also to the descendants. On the Epistle to the Hebrews 12.4. 85

#### **From Shem to Rebekah.**

Ephrem the Syrian: This Melchizedek is Shem, 86 who became a king due to his greatness; he was the head of fourteen nations. In addition, he was a priest. He received this from Noah, his father, through the rights of succession. Shem lived not only to the time of Abraham, as Scripture says, but even to the time of Jacob and Esau, the grandsons of Abraham. It was to him that Rebekah went to ask and was told, "Two nations are in your womb, and the elder shall serve the younger." 87 Rebekah would not have bypassed her husband, who had been delivered at the high place, or her father-in-law, to whom revelations of the divinity came continually, and gone straight to ask Melchizedek unless she had learned of his greatness from Abraham or Abraham's son. Abraham would not have given him a tenth of everything unless he knew that Melchizedek was infinitely greater than himself. Would Rebekah have asked one of the

Canaanites or one of the Sodomites? Would Abraham have given a tenth of his possessions to any one of these? One ought not even entertain such ideas.

Because the length of Melchizedek's life extended to the time of Jacob and Esau, it has been stated, with much probability, that he was Shem. His father Noah was dwelling in the east, and Melchizedek was dwelling between two tribes, that is, between the sons of Ham and his own sons. Melchizedek was like a partition between the two, for he was afraid that the sons of Ham would turn his own sons to idolatry.

Commentary on Genesis 11.2.2–4.<sup>88</sup>

### **7:5–10 *Tithes from Abraham***

#### **A Witness for Abraham.**

Ephrem the Syrian: Through Abraham, who gave him the tenth part, the house of Levi, which had to be generated by him, took the tenth part in him. The Levites, even though they took the tenth part, did not take it from strangers but received the tenth part from themselves; in fact, they took the tenth part from their brothers, the sons of Abraham. Therefore, Abraham, to whom the promise of priesthood was made, gave the tenth part to Melchizedek, who was not inscribed in the Levitic generation. And to Abraham it had been promised that all nations would have been blessed in him. So why did he need the blessing of an uncircumcised man? <sup>91</sup> Does not this show and prove that, if Abraham had not been inferior to Melchizedek, he would not have demanded to be blessed by him? And so the mortal sons receive the tenth part, and in the same manner Melchizedek, who was mortal, lived at that time to be a witness for Abraham, for the indisputably true Melchizedek's blessing destined to the seed of Abraham. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. <sup>92</sup>

#### **The Type Is Greater Than Abraham.**

Photius: He says, "even though they have come out of the loins of Abraham." <sup>93</sup> Although the Levites are in all other respects equal in rank with the other tribes, nonetheless because the other tribes give tithes while the Levites receive them, the Levites are clearly superior. But if this is the case, then clearly also the same principle applies to Abraham and Melchizedek, the giver and recipient, respectively. <sup>94</sup> Consequently, the type of Christ [Melchizedek] is greater than the patriarch Abraham. But if he is greater than Abraham, he is much greater than the priests. And if the type is greater than Abraham, what would anyone say concerning Christ himself? Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 7.5. <sup>95</sup>

### **He Who Receives Tithes Was Made to Tithe.**

Photius: He says, that because Abraham paid tithes, also Levi “who receives tithes himself was made to tithe,” that is, he gave a tithe. We must underscore the phrase “through Abraham,” so that the meaning does not suffer violence. For because Abraham was made to tithe, in a certain sense also Levi, being still “in his loins” has been made to tithe. Fragments on the Epistle to the Hebrews 7.9–10.<sup>96</sup>

### **According to the Flesh, in the Loins of Abraham.**

Augustine: Why is it that Scripture reports, for the sake of the tremendous difference between the priesthood of Christ and that of Levi, that Levi paid a tithe to Melchizedek when he was in the loins of Abraham, since Christ was also there, and so both Levi and Christ paid the tithe? Unless it is because we should understand that, in some other way, Christ was not there? But who would deny that Christ was there according to the flesh? Then he was not there according to the soul, for the soul of Christ did not originate through the transmission of the sin of Adam, or else he would have been there....

Levi was surely there in the loins of Abraham in accordance with the transmission of human seed by which he would enter into his mother; Christ was not there through that cause, although the flesh of Mary was. Thus, neither Levi nor Christ were present there according to the soul, but both of them were there according to the flesh. Levi was there according to fleshly desire, while Christ was there only according to his physical substance. For in a seed, there is both a visible physicality and an invisible principle. Both ran their course from Abraham, even from Adam himself, all the way to the body of Mary, since that too was conceived and born in the normal way. So Christ assumed the physical substance of flesh from the flesh of the virgin, but the reason for his conception did not come from a man’s seed, but from a much different source—from above. So for this reason, the flesh which he assumed from his mother was also present in the loins of Abraham.

So Levi paid a tithe in Abraham, who, although he was only there according to the flesh, was still there in the loins of Abraham, as Abraham also was once in the loins of his own father. In other words, he was born of his father Abraham in the same way that Abraham was born of his own father, namely through the law at work in his members fighting against the “law of his mind”<sup>97</sup> and an invisible concupiscence, though the chaste and noble rights of marriage do not permit it to grow strong except insofar as these things are able to make provision for the continuation of the human race.

But he who acquired his flesh not as a rotting wound, but as the source of healing, did not himself also pay a tithe in that way. Since the paying of the tithe served to prefigure the source of healing, the one

who would be cured paid the tithe in the flesh of Abraham, but not the one from whom healing would come. For the same flesh, not only that of Abraham, but also that of the first man taken from the earth, contained in itself at the same time both the wound caused by transgression and the medicine for that wound. The wound of sin was at work in the law of the fleshly members fighting against the law of the mind; this law was being transcribed upon all flesh begotten by the principle of a human seed. But the medicine for the wound was also in that flesh, which was assumed without any deed of concupiscence, assumed only in the physical material of the flesh from the Virgin through a divine principle of conception and formation for the sake of a participation in our death not due to his own iniquity and as an example of resurrection that is not deceptive....

The soul of Christ is from the original soul only if it has not contracted the stain of sin; but if it could not be from that source without the guilt of sin, it has not come from that soul. On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis 10.19.34–21.37. <sup>98</sup>

### **Why Baptize Children of the Baptized?**

Augustine: We now advance in reply to those who argue that one who is born of a baptized man ought himself to be regarded as already baptized. “For why,” they ask, “could he not have been baptized in the loins of his father, when, according to the epistle to the Hebrews, Levi was able to pay tithes in the loins of Abraham?” They who propose this argument ought to observe that it was not because he had paid tithes already in the loins of Abraham that Levi did not subsequently pay tithes, but because he was ordained to the office of the priesthood in order to receive tithes, not pay them. Otherwise, neither would his brethren, who all contributed their tithes to him, have been tithed—because they too, while in the loins of Abraham, had already paid tithes to Melchizedek. On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism 2.39.<sup>99</sup>

### ***7:11–12 If Perfection Had Been Attainable***

### ***7:13–15 Another Priest in the Likeness of Melchizedek***

## ***7:16 The Power of an Indestructible Life***

### **Not Broken Down by Death.**

Ephrem the Syrian: Paul says, “If perfection had been attainable” through the Levitic house, “for under it the people received the law”—that is, through its agency the law of the people was declared—“what further need would there have been” to elevate another priest from another place, “rather than one named after the order of Aaron,” who was the patriarch of those priests, “but after the order of” the uncircumcised “Melchizedek”?

After thus proving the necessity to change priesthood, Paul begins again to prove that, with this change in the priesthood, the law is changed too. “When there is a change in the priesthood,” he says, “there is necessarily a change in the law as well.” Is there need of a sacrificial law, if sacrifices and priesthood have been abolished?

So Melchizedek, “of whom these things are spoken” even though he was from that generation, came “from another tribe from which no one has ever served at the altar,” and the one who received his priesthood was certainly not from the Levites, lest he might be estranged from Melchizedek because of his origin.

In fact, “it is evident that our Lord” Jesus Christ “was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.”

For this reason Uzziah was stricken with leprosy, <sup>21</sup> because he wanted to transfer priesthood by his action and move it to the house of Judah, before Jesus, who was from Judah, came and took it in his hour.

“This becomes even more evident” because “another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent,” that is, not by being appointed before the people through the aspersion, sanctification, and blood and anointment of priesthood, and through its garments. Our Lord, on the contrary, was appointed and accepted the priesthood “by the power of a life” which is not broken down by death.

He accepted the priesthood through the oath proffered by David, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” Therefore, “a former commandment is set aside,” as well as the previous priesthood, “because of its weakness and uselessness” as a rule. Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>22</sup>



## **7:17 A Priest Forever, in the Order of Melchizedek**

### **Aaron and Melchizedek as Priestly Types.**

Origen: Just as the people of old, who were called the people of God, 25 were divided into twelve tribes plus the levitical order, and this order itself, which engaged in service of the Divine, was divided into additional priestly and levitical orders, so, I think, all the people of Christ according to “the hidden person of the heart,”<sup>26</sup> who bear the name “Jew inwardly” and who have been circumcised “in spirit,” possess the characteristics of the tribes in a more mystical manner....

Most of us who approach the teachings of Christ, since we have much time for the activities of life and offer a few acts to God, would perhaps be those from the tribes who have a little fellowship with the priests and support the service of God in a few things. But those who devote themselves to the divine Word and truly exist by the service of God alone will properly be said to be Levites and priests in accordance with the excellence of their activities in this work.

And, perhaps, those who excel all others and who hold, as it were, the first places of their generation will be high priests according to the order of Aaron, but not according to the order of Melchizedek. If someone should object to this, thinking that we are impious when we prescribe the title of high priest for humans, since Jesus is proclaimed as great priest in many places—for we have “a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God”<sup>27</sup>—we would have to say to him that the apostle indicated this when he said that the prophet said of Christ, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” and not after the order of Aaron. On this basis, we too say that humans can be high priests according to the order of Aaron, but only the Christ of God according to the order of Melchizedek. Commentary on the Gospel of John 1.1, 1.10–11.28