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# The Great High Priest

*Margaret Barker*

This article was presented as a public lecture at Brigham Young University on May 9, 2003. Footnotes have been added that refer to places in the writings of Margaret Barker where the topics of this lecture are discussed in greater depth and with extensive documentation. This lecture develops the themes of several of her prior works and presents the essence of her most recent book, *The Great High Priest* (London: T&T Clark, 2003). Further information about specific topics can be located by consulting the index of persons, places, and subjects or the index of biblical and ancient texts found at the end of that book. The English translations of the ancient texts discussed in this lecture are by the author.

The ancient Israelite high priest—who he was and what he did—is at the center of Christian theology because Jesus is described in scripture as the “great high priest” (Heb. 4:14; see also 8:1; 10:21).<sup>1</sup> In order to understand this key figure, the high priest, we need to look first at the setting in which he frequently functioned, which was the temple,<sup>2</sup> and then at the theology of the temple. We also need to know the high priest’s duties and privileges as well as something of how his contemporaries perceived him. It is important always to read texts with the eyes of their ancient readers (insofar as this is possible) and to enter into their world.

## The Symbolism of the Temple

The symbolism of the tabernacle for the most part was identical to the symbolism of the temple, so what was prescribed for the one can usually be assumed for the other. The construction of the tabernacle corresponded to the six days of creation, and the completed structure represented the whole

creation, both the visible creation and the invisible creation.<sup>3</sup> Moses was told to construct the tabernacle in accordance with what he had been shown on the mountain, which was the vision of the six days recorded in the first chapter of Genesis. These six days were the spiritual creation. Day One corresponded to the Holy of Holies, the second day corresponded to the veil that screened the Holy of Holies and divided the tabernacle, and the remaining four stages corresponded to the visible creation of the third to sixth days. Thus the great hall of the temple, with the menorah and the table for the shewbread, represented the visible creation (plate 1). The pattern of these correspondences has not survived from antiquity complete in any one source, but scholars have been able to piece the pattern together from a variety of materials.<sup>4</sup>

The Holy of Holies represented Day One, a state outside time and matter as we experience them, and it was hidden from natural human eyes.<sup>5</sup> It was the state to which only the high priest had access; he alone had direct contact with eternity and knew the secrets of that state.<sup>6</sup> The beginning of creation was described in the Hebrew text of Genesis not as “the first day” but as “Day One” (*yom 'echad*), and Jewish tradition remembered this as the time of unity, the time when God was one with his creation.<sup>7</sup> This was the undivided or predivided state, the unity underlying the visible temporal creation.<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1 then goes on to describe how this unity was divided and separated, each according to its kind. “In the beginning,” represented in the temple by the Holy of Holies, was the state in which creation originated and not an indication of the time when it originated.<sup>9</sup>

The first phase of the creation was the creation of the angels. When the Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, He asked him, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth, when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4–7).<sup>10</sup> Job knew that the angels had been present at the first stage of the visible creation, because the angels were the sons of God and were part of the Holy of Holies. Isaiah saw angels around the throne of the Lord (Isa. 6) and in the Holy of Holies. The book of Jubilees, which is an ancient alternative version of Genesis, tells how the angels were created on Day One,<sup>11</sup> but the first chapter of Genesis does not mention the creation of angels.<sup>12</sup>

The tabernacle and the temple were divided by the veil, a huge curtain woven from four different colors—red, blue, purple, and white—representing the four elements from which the material world had been created.<sup>13</sup> There is no detailed information about the symbolism of these colors until the end of the Second Temple period, when both Philo and Josephus explained that the red symbolized fire, the blue the air, the purple

the sea, and the white the earth.<sup>14</sup> The veil as the screen of the glory, however, was an ancient tradition, known to Job (in Job 26:9, God covers the presence of his throne). The temple worldview was that God was present in the heart of the creation but was veiled from human eyes by matter.<sup>15</sup>

### The Sons of Elohim

The key to temple theology is to be aware that the earliest religion of Jerusalem was not monotheistic in the way that word is usually understood. In ancient Israel, there had been 'El Elyon, God Most High, and there had been his sons, the angels to whom he had entrusted the nations.<sup>16</sup> 'El Elyon was the God whom Melchizedek served in Salem; when Melchizedek blessed Abram (plate 2), he blessed him in the name of "God Most High, Father of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:19). The Hebrew word used here implies more than simply "possessor" (Gen. 14:19 KJV) or "maker" or "creator" (Gen. 14:19 NEB); it means literally "begetter," so we should expect that God Most High had sons and daughters.

The sons of God (literally, sons of 'elohim) are often mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. They are the morning stars who sang when the foundations of the earth were laid (Job 38:7). They are equated with the elohim in Psalm 82:6: "You are elohim, sons of God Most High." But most important of all is Deuteronomy 32:8: "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, . . . he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God ('el), and the Lord's portion is his people." *This implies that the Lord himself was one of the sons of God, the angel allocated to Israel.* The Lord, the God of Israel, was the Son of God Most High, and therefore the Second God.<sup>17</sup> This is certainly how the verse was understood by the early Christians. In a speech attributed by Clement to Peter, for example, Peter explains that every nation has its angel whom it regards as its God, and responsibility for Israel was committed to the greatest of the archangels.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the Lord, the God of Israel, was regarded as the greatest of the sons of God Most High. Isaiah called him the Holy One of Israel, which means the angel of Israel.<sup>19</sup>

When Gabriel announced to Mary that she was to have a son, he said, "He will be called the Son of the Most High," a Holy One who would reign as a king (Luke 1:32–33). The demons recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God (Mark 1:24) and as the Son of the Most High God (Mark 5:7). Paul declared that other nations acknowledged many gods, but for the Christian there was one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus the Messiah (1 Cor. 8:5–6). The earliest Christian proclamation was "Jesus is the Lord," which can only have meant that Jesus is the angel of Israel, the Lord who appeared

in the Old Testament. This is exactly how Jesus and the first Christians read the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup> "You search the scriptures," Jesus said to the Jews, "you search the scriptures and it is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39). John explained that Isaiah's vision of the Lord in the temple had been fulfilled in Jesus: "Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him" (John 12:41). Whenever the Lord appeared to Noah or Abraham or Moses or Daniel, the early Christian teachers explained that it was a pre-incarnation appearance of the Son of God Most High, an appearance of the Messiah recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>21</sup>

### The High Priest: The Lord among His People

For understandable reasons, the term *son of God* was controversial in the earliest years of Christianity. The key text for identifying the Lord as one of the sons of God Most High does not appear in the Masoretic Hebrew text, which is the basis of most English translations. Thus the key phrase *sons of God* is not found in the King James Bible. The angels as the sons of God Most High can, however, be found in the pre-Christian Old Greek text of Deuteronomy and in the pre-Christian Hebrew text of Deuteronomy found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>22</sup> One wonders how there came to be two versions of this sensitive Hebrew text.<sup>23</sup> The Lord as the Son of God Most High is the key to understanding temple theology because the Lord was believed to be present with his people in the person of the high priest.<sup>24</sup> Jesus was described in the letter to the Hebrews as a Son of God (Heb. 1:5) and the great high priest (Heb. 4:14).

The rights and duties exclusive to the high priest concerned his status as the Lord with his people. There are five specific ways the high priest represented the Lord: wearing the name of the Lord, wearing a vestment made of the same fabric as the temple veil, entering the Holy of Holies, eating the bread of the presence, and making the offering on the Day of Atonement.

**Wearing the Name of the Lord.** First, the high priest wore the name of the Lord on his forehead, inscribed on a golden plate (Ex. 28:36). Most translations say that he wore the words "Holy to the Lord," but Jesus' contemporaries understood the Hebrew words differently. Aristeeas, a visitor to Jerusalem in the first century before Christ, and Philo a few years later both record that the high priest simply wore the Name, the four Hebrew letters YHWH.<sup>25</sup> Wearing the Name enabled the high priest to take upon himself the uncleanness of the people's offerings. In other words, when he was the Lord, the high priest was also the sin bearer.<sup>26</sup> This must have been the original significance of the fourth commandment: "You shall not bear the Name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who

bears his Name in vain" (Ex. 20:7). The people who accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday acclaimed him as the high priest by quoting from Psalm 118:25–26: "Hosanna"—which means "save us"—"Blessed is he who comes with the Name of the Lord." This "he" was the high priest who would save them.

The high priest was the only person who wore an outer vestment made of the same fabric as the veil of the temple (Ex. 28:5–6)<sup>27</sup> and presumably with the same significance: it veiled the glory of the Lord. The vestment represented the matter in which the Lord clothed himself when he appeared with his people, so the veil and the vestment became symbols of the incarnation. In Hebrews, the flesh of Jesus is described as the temple veil: "He opened a new and living way for us through the veil, that is, through his flesh" (Heb. 10:20), and Christian tradition was to describe the priest's vestment as a symbol of the incarnation. The high priest wore this colored garment only when he was functioning in the visible creation as an incarnation of the Lord; within the veil, he wore the white linen robe of an angel.<sup>28</sup>

**Entering the Holy of Holies.** The third right of the high priest that shows him as the Lord among his people was that only the high priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies; even the lower ranks of the angels were not permitted to enter and stand before the heavenly throne.<sup>29</sup> The book of 1 Enoch, which has preserved much about the ancient high priesthood, says that none of the angels was able to enter and see the face of the Great Holy One,<sup>30</sup> but Enoch was summoned to stand before him, so he entered the Holy of Holies.<sup>31</sup> This passage reflects temple practice, where the priests could enter the great hall of the temple but only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies.

**Eating the Bread of the Presence.** Fourth, the high priest and his sons were the only people to eat the bread of the presence (Lev. 24:5–9). Later tradition permitted it to all the priests, but originally this bread was only for the high priest and his family. The bread "of the presence" did not mean that the bread was set out in the presence of the Lord, but that the bread in some way acquired the presence of the Lord while it was set out in the temple. We can deduce this from the later regulations for handling the bread. According to the Mishnah, which describes temple practice in the time of Jesus, when the bread was taken into the temple, it was set on a table of marble; when it was brought out again to be eaten by the priests, it had to be set on a table of gold, showing that it had become of higher status.<sup>32</sup> While it lay in the temple, it had become "most holy"; in other words, it had become an item that imparted holiness.<sup>33</sup> It was the vehicle of the Lord's presence, and it was eaten each week by the high priest and his family.

**Making the Sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.** Fifth, it was the high priest alone who entered the Holy of Holies to make the blood offering each year on the Day of Atonement.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Great High Priest in the Melchizedek Text**

Finally, before we begin to piece these elements together and try to glimpse the Great High Priest, we need to consider the figure of the great high priest as depicted in the Melchizedek text found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>35</sup> Only a fragment of this text survives, and it describes how Melchizedek was to appear in the first week (that is, in the first seven years) of the tenth Jubilee (each Jubilee being forty-nine years).<sup>36</sup> He would proclaim the liberty of the Jubilee year, rescue his own people from the power of the Evil One, and restore them to their rightful inheritance. The Anointed One would appear, and the kingdom of God would begin. At the end of the tenth Jubilee, there would be the great atonement, when the angels would be judged and the sons of heaven rescued.<sup>37</sup>

The Melchizedek text is constructed around a series of quotations: from the laws of the Jubilee year found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, which promise that the disinherited will return; from Psalm 7, which declares that God will judge the people; from Psalm 82, which declares that God has taken his place in the heavenly court to begin the judgment of the angels; from the prophecy of Daniel 9, which foretells the Messiah coming to Jerusalem; from Isaiah 52, where the prophet proclaims the messenger bringing good news to Zion; and from Isaiah 61, where the one anointed by the Spirit proclaims the liberty of the Jubilee year.

All these biblical texts seem to be describing the functions of one central figure: Melchizedek. If they do describe Melchizedek, then we have here a glimpse of a hitherto unknown figure: Melchizedek the Messiah, the anointed high priest who brings the judgment, releases his own people from the power of Belial and his evil ones, and restores the disinherited to their place. (What is implied is that the high priest of the Second Temple is the Evil One, Belial. Other texts describe that high priest as the Wicked Priest.<sup>38</sup>) Melchizedek the high priest is divine: God sitting in judgment on the angels in Psalm 82 becomes in this text Melchizedek sitting in judgment. One possible reconstruction of a damaged line (11Q13.II.5) is that teachers have been kept hidden and secret, implying that the return of Melchizedek is the restoration of teachings that have been preserved in secret.

It would be wonderful to know what was in the missing part of the Melchizedek text. The surviving pieces describe the tenth Jubilee, so we may perhaps assume that the whole text had described a period of ten

Jubilees, 490 years. Now 490 years also appears in the prophecy of Daniel 9:24, seventy weeks of years decreed concerning the people and the holy city. Daniel's prophecy also speaks of atonement "bringing in everlasting righteousness, fulfilling vision and prophecy and anointing the Most Holy One." This prophecy in Daniel is cited in the Melchizedek text, so it would not be unreasonable to use these two texts to illuminate each other. The Most Holy One in Daniel could have been Melchizedek, and the missing part of the Qumran text could have described the remainder of the 490 years. Both texts expected the great atonement at the end of 490 years.

And what were these 490 years? According to the traditional reckoning preserved in the Jewish Talmud<sup>39</sup> (and we must work with the data that the people of that time had at hand, not with the results of modern investigations), the first temple was destroyed in 422 B.C.E. (not in 586 B.C.E., as we state today). They also reckoned that the Second Temple was destroyed in 68 C.E.—in other words, that the Second Temple stood for exactly 490 years, ten Jubilees. This must have been Daniel's 490 years, at the end of which the city and the temple would be destroyed with desolation and war.

The Damascus Document, another text found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, describes the era after the destruction of the First Temple (Solomon's Temple) as "the age of wrath," during which only a remnant was left faithful. Wrath was the consequence of breaking the eternal covenant, so the era of the Second Temple was the time of the broken covenant. The time of renewal began when the Lord remembered the covenant and the faithful remnant became the community of the new covenant (or perhaps the community of the renewed covenant).<sup>40</sup> After 390 years, says the Damascus Document, the Lord caused a few to recognize that they were guilty men, and after a further twenty years, he sent them a teacher of righteousness.<sup>41</sup> If the Damascus Document were using the traditional calculation of history dates, then this teacher would have been sent in 12 B.C.E., 410 years after the fall of Jerusalem. Since it is now acknowledged that Jesus must have been born before 4 B.C.E., when Herod the Great died, this is an interesting date.

According to the Melchizedek text, the great high priest Melchizedek was to appear during the first seven years of the tenth Jubilee, between 19 and 25 C.E.<sup>42</sup>

Luke records that Jesus was about thirty years old at the time of his baptism (Luke 3:23), so Jesus would have begun his public ministry in the first seven years of that final tenth Jubilee. The link between Jesus and the Melchizedek text is confirmed by Luke's account of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth. He chose to read from Isaiah 61, the very text that was associated with Melchizedek coming to bring the good news of the Jubilee and



the Kingdom of God. "Today," said Jesus, "this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21), and he then went on to proclaim, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). Jesus then performed exorcisms to release people from the power of evil spirits, spoke about "binding the strong man" (Mark 3:27), brought in the outcasts, and declared that he would give his life as the great sacrifice (Mark 10:45). Jesus having thus declared himself to be Melchizedek the Great High Priest, it is no wonder that the high priests and chief priests in Jerusalem had him arrested and saw to it that he was put to death.

The era of wrath must have been associated with the loss of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the breach of the eternal covenant. Jewish tradition remembered that there had been no anointing oil in the Second Temple, and so the appearance of a Messianic high priest, that is, an anointed high priest, must have been part of the hope for the restoration of the true temple and the eternal covenant. Piecing together what can still be known about the Melchizedek priesthood is one way of recovering the teaching of the earlier temple.

### **Resurrected to the Eternal Priesthood**

The high priest was the Lord, the Holy One of Israel with his people.<sup>43</sup> He would have been born as a normal human being, so we have to ask how it was that the high priest became a great angel, how he became divine. The answer must lie in the rituals performed in the Holy of Holies, where only the high priest was allowed to enter. Several texts do describe how the king was "born" as son of God or "raised up/resurrected" in the Holy of Holies.<sup>44</sup> Being born as a son of God and being resurrected were both descriptions of the same process of becoming divine; Jesus himself used the terms interchangeably. Angels are the sons of God, the resurrected, he said (Luke 20:36).<sup>45</sup>

The author of the letter to the Hebrews knew that Melchizedek had become a priest through resurrection and that this distinguished his priesthood from that of Aaron. The Levitical priests—Aaron and his sons—held the priesthood "according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent" (Heb. 7:16), whereas Melchizedek had been raised up and had the power of an indestructible life. Melchizedek was therefore an eternal priest. These words, "he was raised up," are often understood to mean no more than that he was elevated to a high office, but the Greek word here is the word for resurrection. Melchizedek was resurrected to the eternal priesthood, which he held by the power of an indestructible life.<sup>46</sup>

Psalm 110 is an enthronement psalm, set in the Holy of Holies, and the king is declared to be an eternal priest after the order of Melchizedek. The text that precedes this pronouncement, however, is damaged and impossible to read in the Hebrew. Had we only the Hebrew text, we should never have known how the human king became the Melchizedek high priest. The Old Greek translation, however, says that he was begotten as a son of God. Part of the text once read, "In the glory of thy holy ones [*en tais lamprotēsi tōn hagion sou*] I have begotten you." The king had been born as an angel among the angels in the Holy of Holies. The damaged Hebrew text also mentions "dew" as part of the process, and dew was a symbol of resurrection (Ps. 110:3). The psalm known as the last words of King David (2 Sam. 23:1) describes him as the Anointed One of the God of Jacob, the man who was raised up/resurrected. Psalm 2 records that when the king was set on Mount Zion, he heard the words, "You are my son, today I have begotten you," and the angels in the Holy of Holies welcomed the birth of the new angels by singing, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6). The Old Greek here does not give four titles but one: "He shall be called the Angel of Great Counsel [*megalēs boulēs aggelos*]."<sup>47</sup> In this holy setting, the new angel is named.

In 1 Enoch we find a comparable picture: the Son of Man was named—that is, given the great Name—before the sun and stars were made,<sup>48</sup> in other words, in that state which preceded the creation of the sun and the stars. This state was the Holy of Holies.

The most remarkable description of the high priest's resurrection as son of God is found in the book of 2 Enoch. In that text, Enoch, a high priest figure, ascends through the heavens and stands before the throne. The Lord summons Michael to remove Enoch's earthly clothing, the symbol of his mortal body, and to dress him in the garments of glory, the symbol of the resurrection body. Enoch is then anointed with a fragrant myrrh oil, and he sees himself being transformed into an angel: "The appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, its ointment is like sweet dew, and its fragrance myrrh, and it is like the rays of the glittering sun."<sup>49</sup> The myrrh oil is prescribed in Exodus as the special oil for consecrating the high priest and the furnishings of the tabernacle. It was a most holy oil, which means that it imparted holiness, and anything it touched became holy (Ex. 30:29). Nothing like it was to be made for secular use. The penalty was being cut off from your people.

We assume that the newly consecrated high priest—and consecrated means "make holy"—the anointed newborn son of God, was then sent out

into the great hall of the temple, and so symbolically out into the world. This is exactly how Jesus described his own experience. When accused of blasphemy for claiming union with the Father—"I and the Father are one thing" (John 10:30)—Jesus reminded his accusers of the claims of the high priesthood. He quoted Psalm 82, that there were heavenly beings called Gods, sons of God Most High, and then described the making of the high priest: "Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world 'You are blaspheming' because I said 'I am the Son of God?'" (John 10:36). In Jesus' time, the high priest—or perhaps we should say the true high priest—was believed to be at one with God, the son of God.

### **Atonement: The Bonding Together of Creation**

This union was described as sharing Life or Spirit (John 6:57, 63), presumably sustained by the bread of the presence that the high priests ate. In John's Gospel, Jesus gives this teaching with reference to the bread from heaven: "He who eats me will live because of me"—the eternal life of the high priest sustained by the bread of the presence—"he who eats this bread will live for ever" (John 6:57–58). This unity was set within the context of temple and creation. In his prayer after the Last Supper—known as the great high priestly prayer—Jesus prays, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world was made" (John 17:5)—a reference to the glory in the Holy of Holies as the state before the visible creation. Jesus the high priest was returning to his place of origin.

Jesus prayed similarly for his disciples "that they may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). It was therefore the unity of the disciples that was proof of the divine origin of their mission and message. It was the high priest—here Jesus—who enabled the divided elements of the creation—here human beings—to recover their original unity with God. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus is described as the One who holds together all things, not just his disciples: "He is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation, for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15–17; see also Eph. 1:10). Paul describes this state of union as the goal of the redemptive process: "When all things are subjected to him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

This bonding together of the creation is the key to understanding the Day of Atonement, the great ritual performed exclusively by the high priest at the New Year. The eternal covenant, or the covenant of eternity, was also

described as the covenant of peace or wholeness. It bound all creation together in its bonds, but these bonds could be broken by human sin. Isaiah has a vivid picture of how the creation collapses under the weight of human sin: "The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the eternal covenant" (Isa. 24:4–5). The creation was fragmented and collapsing because it had lost its union with the Creator. The bonds of the covenant were restored by atonement, and thus the creation was reunited with the Creator and renewed at the start of the year.<sup>50</sup>

The ritual of the Day of Atonement is described in Leviticus 16. Two goats were chosen by lot, one for the Lord and one for Azazel. The one for the Lord was sacrificed, and its blood was taken by the high priest into the Holy of Holies. When the high priest had offered it upon the ark, the blood was brought out and sprinkled in various places around the tabernacle or temple "to cleanse it and consecrate it from all the uncleannesses of the people of Israel" (Lev. 16:19). Then the high priest put both his hands onto the head of the goat for Azazel and by this means transferred to the goat all the sins of Israel. The goat was then sent into the desert.

The creation was renewed by blood, by life. But whose life? The two goats were chosen by lot, one for the Lord and one for Azazel, the leader of the fallen angels. This is how Leviticus 16:8 is usually translated, but this translation raises some difficult questions, not the least of which asks why the people were commanded to send an offering to Azazel, the leader of the fallen angels. There is, however, a small clue in the writings of the third-century Christian scholar Origen, who worked in Palestine and had contacts with the Jewish scholars in Caesarea. He said that the goat sent out into the desert, the scapegoat, was sent out *as* Azazel, not as an offering for Azazel.<sup>51</sup> The Hebrew text can certainly be understood in that way. If Origen was correct, then the other goat was not sacrificed for the Lord but was sacrificed *as* the Lord, and the high priest, who also represented the Lord, would have carried a symbol of his own life/blood into the Holy of Holies. It was therefore the life of the Lord himself that renewed the broken covenant and restored the creation to unity with the Creator.<sup>52</sup>

Those who received the letter to the Hebrews must have known all this—it must have been current knowledge at the time—because the key point of the letter to the Hebrews is that Jesus, the high priest raised up after the order of Melchizedek, did not offer the blood of a goat as a substitute for himself, but instead "when the Anointed One appeared as a high priest . . . he entered once for all into the holy place, taking not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption"

(Heb. 9:11–12)(plate 3). This must have been the great atonement predicted in the Qumran Melchizedek text.

The outer part of the tabernacle or temple represented the visible creation, but since the people of Israel were not allowed into this area, it cannot have been literally polluted by their sinful presence. Rather, the temple was polluted by the sins committed elsewhere in the creation, and the cleansing of the temple was the cleansing and reconsecration of the creation. The high priest took blood—Leviticus 17:11 says that blood was the life or soul and thus it could make atonement—the high priest took the blood into the Holy of Holies, and having sprinkled it there, he sprinkled the same life/blood throughout the creation. This not only healed the bonds of material creation that had been destroyed by human sin, it also reunited the creation to the Creator. Thus Paul wrote of “the purpose set forth in Christ . . . to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10) and “through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20).

And what of the other goat, the scapegoat sent out as Azazel? The high priest placed both his hands on the head of the goat, and thus, we are told, he transferred to the goat all the sins of Israel. The logic of this ritual must be that when he placed his hands on the goat, the high priest himself must have been carrying the sins of Israel. He was the sin bearer.

Isaiah knew this complex role of the royal high priest on the Day of Atonement. It was the inspiration for the fourth of his Servant Songs,<sup>53</sup> which is familiar because the Christians saw it as a prophecy of the crucifixion. The Fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 53 and Psalm 110, the Melchizedek Psalm, are the texts most frequently cited in the New Testament. “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all,” wrote Isaiah, “. . . You make his soul an offering to restore the covenant [the literal meaning of words used here]. . . . He shall bear their iniquities. . . . He poured out his soul to death . . . and bore the sin of many” (Isa. 53:6, 10–12). The original poem was probably written as a result of King Hezekiah’s recovery from the plague, which explains the historical details in it,<sup>54</sup> but the overall theme is drawn from the Day of Atonement.

What is remarkable is that Christians immediately recognized this as a Messianic prophecy, even though the word Messiah does not appear in the Masoretic Hebrew text. The Targumist<sup>55</sup> also knew that this was a text about the Messiah, so the Aramaic version of the poem begins, “My Servant the Messiah.”<sup>56</sup> In the Isaiah scroll found at Qumran, this passage is also a poem about the Messiah: there is an extra letter in one verse that could change the whole meaning. Instead of describing someone who was “marred beyond recognition as a human being,” verse 52:14 reads, “I have

anointed him and he no longer has a human appearance.”<sup>57</sup> This text thus refers to the anointed and transfigured one, as Enoch became after his anointing. The Aramaic continues: “His appearance is not a common appearance . . . and his brilliance will be a holy brilliance.”<sup>58</sup> Isaiah’s radiant, angelic Messiah had not been forgotten by the early Christians. There is another word in the Qumran Isaiah scroll that is not in the Masoretic Hebrew text. After his suffering, the servant sees *the light*, presumably the light of the glory (Isa. 53:11). The word *light* does not appear in the Masoretic Hebrew, although it is in the old Greek. An Isaiah text similar to the one at Qumran must have been used by Jesus, because this is the prophecy he expounded to his disciples on the road to Emmaus: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer,” he said, “and enter into his glory?” There is no such prophecy in the Hebrew text underlying most English versions, but it is in the Qumran Isaiah.

Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song continues: “He shall sprinkle many peoples” (Isa. 52:15), the term for the high priest cleansing the temple with blood. (This is often translated, “He shall startle many peoples.”) “Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole” could also be translated as “the covenant bond of our peace was his responsibility”; and “with his stripes we are healed” could also be read as “by his joining us together we are healed” (Isa. 53:5).<sup>59</sup> This last passage has reference to the unifying role of the high priest, healing the damage to the covenant by joining all things together with his own life. When the Servant pours out his life, this offering is described as an *’asam*, the technical term for an offering to renew the covenant bond.<sup>60</sup>

There is good reason to believe that other information about the First Temple and the older high priesthood was deliberately suppressed in the Second Temple period. When the final form of Exodus was compiled, Moses was told that no person could make atonement for another. After the sin of the golden calf, he offered himself if the Lord would forgive the people’s sin, but he was told: “Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book” (Ex. 32:33). Why had Moses thought that such an atonement was possible? Perhaps the older ways were being superseded.

And how has it come about that so many important texts are damaged or have alternative versions? The sons of God text in Deuteronomy is vital for reconstructing the older religion of Israel, and yet it exists in two different versions, one without the sons of God. The verse in Psalm 110 that describes how the king became a son of God is damaged, and the vital messianic passage in Isaiah exists in two different forms. There are many more such examples. These are not random variations or unintentional damage. There is a pattern.<sup>61</sup>

This intentional alteration of ancient texts is why the Qumran Melchizedek text came as such a surprise. The Old Testament record gives no indication that Melchizedek was anything more than a minor character who makes two brief appearances. It was a mystery why the Christians claimed that Jesus was Melchizedek. It was even suggested that they wanted to have him as a high priest and, since Jesus was clearly not of the house of Aaron, Melchizedek was the best they could do!

The Qumran Melchizedek text has changed everything. We now see that the great high priest Melchizedek was the expected Messiah, that he was divine, that he would put an end to the era of wrath by releasing his people from the power of the Evil One, that he would gather in his dispossessed people and make the great atonement.<sup>62</sup> Jesus claimed to be Melchizedek, and thus to restore the ways of the original temple. He was the great high priest (plate 4).

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1. For an extensive discussion of the themes presented in the lecture, see Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).

2. For a convenient list of over thirty New Testament passages that report things Jesus said or did at the temple in Jerusalem, see John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo: FARMS, 2002), charts 8–12.

3. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 193–94.

4. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 194–201.

5. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 155–59, 208.

6. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 189.

7. See R. Judan in *Genesis Rabbah* 3.8.

8. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 198–99.

9. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 156, citing Philo, *On the Creation*, 26.

10. Biblical translations are the author's except where noted.

11. *Jubilees* 2:2.

12. There is reason to believe that angels were a controversial topic in the era of the Second Temple (422 B.C.E.–68 C.E.), when the present form of Genesis was compiled. Not only are there no angels in Genesis 1, but there is only the briefest reference to the fallen angels in Genesis 6. Later Jewish teachers were sensitive about both: the fallen sons of God in Genesis 6 had to be explained as the sons of noblemen or judges, they said. Thus in *Genesis Rabbah* 26.5, Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai called them sons of noblemen and cursed all who called them sons of God. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* has them as “sons of great ones”; *Targum Onkelos* and *Targum Neofiti*, as judges. Some said the angels had been created on the second day,

others on the fifth day, but they agreed on one thing: the angels were not created on Day One (Gen. Rabbah 1.3). There must have been something about the creation and fall of the angels that had become the subject of controversy after the advent of Christianity.

13. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 104–11.

14. Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.5; Philo, *Questions on Exodus* 2.85.

15. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 202–10.

16. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 4–10.

17. Barker, *Great Angel*, 4–10.

18. Clementine Recognitions 2.42, discussed in Barker, *Great Angel*, 190–91.

19. Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987), 104–7.

20. Barker, *Great Angel*, 190–231.

21. Barker, *Great Angel*, 193–200.

22. Barker, *Great Angel*, 7–8.

23. See Barker, *Great High Priest*, 294–315.

24. Margaret Barker, *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 81–84.

25. Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 116–17.

26. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 48–55.

27. Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 111–13.

28. Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 113–14.

29. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 221.

30. 1 Enoch 14:21. However, 1 Enoch 71:8–9 says that angels encircled the holy place, but “holy angels” and archangels could enter.

31. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 193.

32. Mishnah, Menahoth 11.7.

33. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 87–88.

34. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 49.

35. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 37–39. A discussion of this text and its relevance to Alma’s words about the holy priesthood after the order of the Son of God can be found in John W. Welch, “The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh Nibley on His 80th Birthday*, Stephen D. Ricks and John M. Lundquist, eds., 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:238–72.

36. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 4–5.

37. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 34–41.

38. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 40–41; Barker, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 292–93.

39. See *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1995), s.v. “Sabbatical Year and Jubilee.”

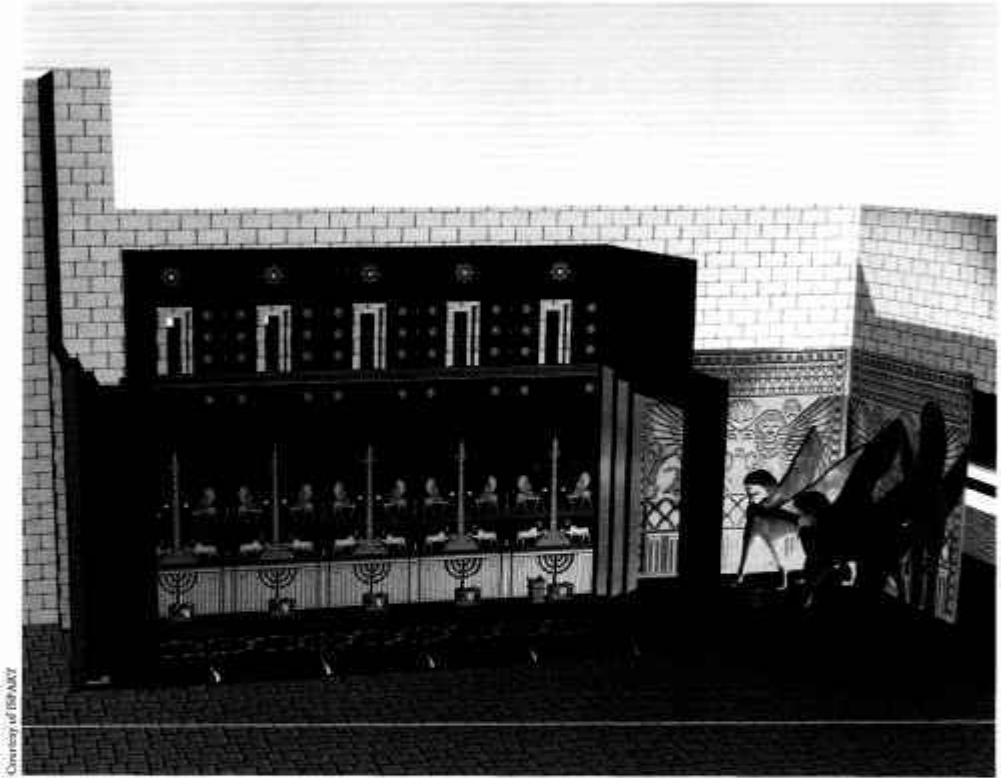
40. CD I, VIII.

41. CD I.

42. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 37–39.



43. Barker, *Older Testament*, 104–6.
44. See, for example, Psalm 110:3 in the old Greek text, where it is numbered as Psalm 109, and 2 Samuel 23:1.
45. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 124–29.
46. This is the theme throughout Barker, *Risen Lord*.
47. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 242.
48. 1 Enoch 48:2–3.
49. 2 Enoch 22:9.
50. Barker, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 41–46.
51. Against Celsus 6.43.
52. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 51–55.
53. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 53–54.
54. Barker, “Hezekiah’s Boil,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 26, no. 1 (September 2001), 31–42.
55. The Targum is an Aramaic translation of parts of the Old Testament.
56. Targum Isaiah 52:13.
57. For the reading of the Isaiah Scroll, see Donald W. Parry and Elisha Qimron, *The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa-a): A New Edition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), 89. The extra letter in the scroll’s reading of Isaiah 52:14 is a *yod*. Insofar as it is the smallest of Hebrew characters, it could have very easily been lost in the transmission of the text.
58. Targum Isaiah 53:2.
59. The Hebrew word *mwsr* in this passage means not chastisement but covenant bond; I read *librt*, “stripes,” as coming from *hbr*, “unite,” the primary meaning of this root. This translation preserves a poetic parallelism between the covenant bond and the binding together. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 53–54.
60. See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 339–45, 347.
61. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 302–4, 309–10.
62. Barker, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 4–7.



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**PLATE 1.** Digital image showing a reconstruction of part of the interior of the first temple of Israel. The design of the temple represented stages of the creation. The larger room contains the menorah and the table for the shewbread represents the visible creation. The smaller room to the right, the Holy of Holies, represents Day One of the spiritual creation. Created by Michael Lyon.



PLATE 2. Miniature illustrating Genesis 14:18–20, Vienna Genesis (ca. 600 C.E.).

The Vienna Genesis is one of the earliest extant illuminated Greek manuscripts of the Bible. Although its time and place of origin are unknown, the art on its pages shows a strong Byzantine influence (Emily Wellesz, *The Vienna Genesis* [New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960], 14.) This illustration consists of two parts, divided by a thin horizontal line. Below the text, Abram returns from war and presents a tithe of the spoils to the priest-king Melchizedek. At the bottom illustration, Melchizedek presents Abram with bread and wine.

In Genesis 14:17–24, Abram returns from a victorious battle and is rewarded by the king of Sodom. In the midst of this story, Genesis 14:18–20 relates that “Melchizedek king of Salem” and “priest of God Most High” (RSV) “brought out bread and wine” and blessed Abram. Then Abram paid “a tithe of his booty” to Melchizedek (Birger A. Pearson, “Melchizedek: Ancient Sources,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. [New York: Macmillan, 1992], 2:880.)

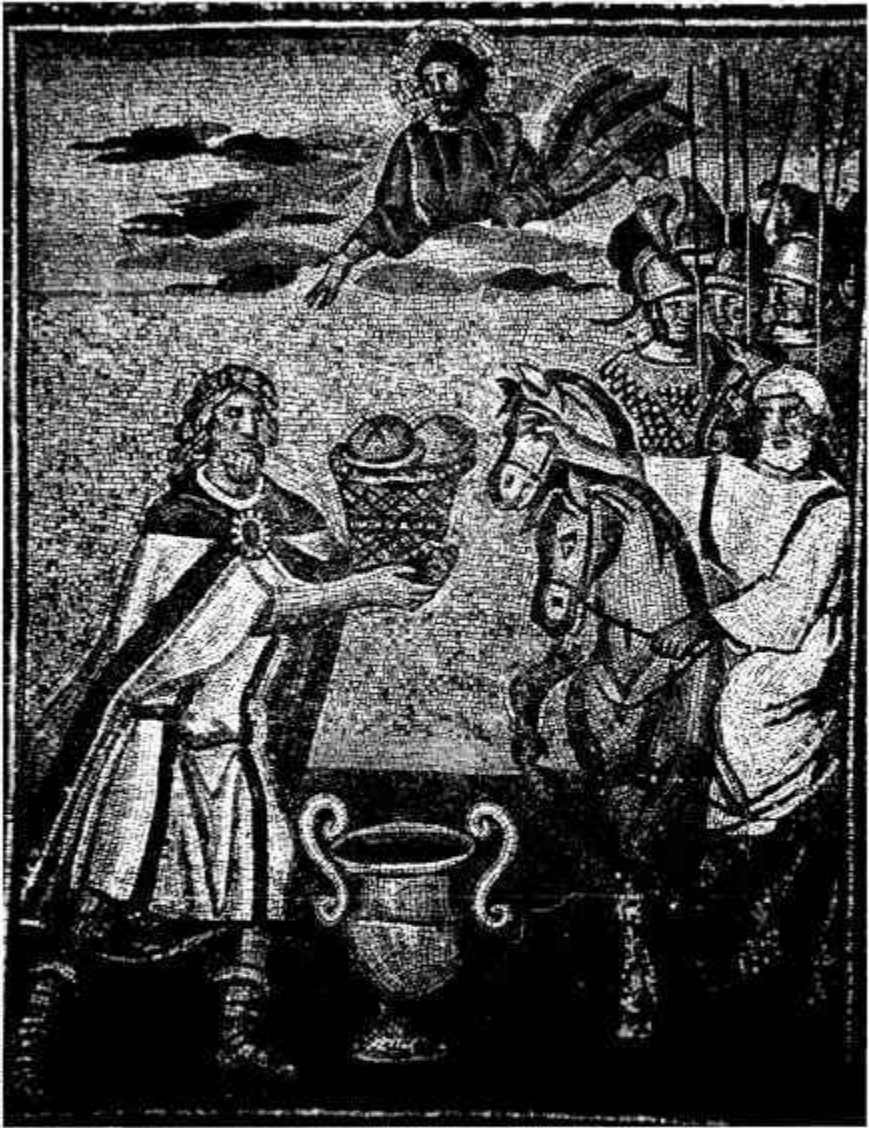


PLATE 3. Mosaic, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (ca. 300 C.E.). Melchizedek presents a gift of bread and wine to Abraham and his men, who are dressed as Roman soldiers. Christ in the heavenly realm points to Melchizedek, which seems to indicate that Melchizedek prefigures Christ with his eucharistic offering. In later mosaics, the representation of Christ is reduced to a hand, as in plate 4.



**PLATE 4.** Detail, mosaic in the Basilica of St. Vitale, Ravenna, Italy (ca. 520 c.e.). The iconography in this mosaic is rich with symbolism that links Christ with Melchizedek, the high priest of the temple. Here Abel and the priest-king Melchizedek are shown offering gifts at an altar; Melchizedek is placing bread on the table, where the wine chalice already sits. Christ's hand penetrating the veil of heaven seems to indicate that both Abel's and Melchizedek's sacrifices are types of Christ.

Melchizedek wears a royal purple robe; Christ was given a purple robe during part of his trials. Melchizedek has a halo, usually reserved for Deity and angels in Christian art. On the altar cloth are *gammadia*, right angles or compass-shaped markings, which appear in many works of art from the early Christian period, particularly on the garments of holy people. Hugh Nibley notes that "they can also be associated with . . . the veil of the temple." (John W. Welch and Claire Foley, "Gammadia on Early Christian and Jewish Garments," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 3 [1996–97]: 256.) In the center of the altar cloth is the "seal of Melchizedek," which consists of two intersecting squares—eight right angles.

Continuing the symbolism of Christ, Moses and Isaiah appear in the two corners above Abel and Melchizedek. Moses the lawgiver and Isaiah the prophet represent Christ's fulfillment of all that was written in the law and the prophets. "The theme is the great sacrifice of Christ, which brings together the righteous prophets from the past as well as the four corners of the present world, uniting time and space." (Hugh W. Nibley, "Sacred Vestments," in *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond this Ignorant Present*, ed. Don Norton, vol. 12 of *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992], 109.)