

Psalms 110:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Analysis

This verse is the explicit foundation for Christian understanding of Christ's priesthood. 'The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever' presents God's irrevocable oath concerning the Messiah's eternal priesthood. The swearing of an oath emphasizes the solemnity and certainty of this declaration - God binds Himself with an oath, the strongest possible commitment. 'Will not repent' (Hebrew 'lo' yinahem') means God will not change His mind, reconsider, or withdraw this promise. This is absolute, unchangeable commitment. 'Thou art a priest for ever' establishes perpetual priesthood, contrasting sharply with the Levitical priesthood, which passed from priest to priest through successive generations and was interrupted by exile. The word 'ever' (Hebrew 'le'olam') means eternally, without end. 'After the order of Melchizedek' references Genesis 14:18-20, where Melchizedek, king of Salem, was both priest and king, and where Abraham paid him tithes, acknowledging his superiority. This phrase indicates that the Messiah's priesthood does not follow the Aaronic/Levitical pattern but rather a more ancient, superior order. Melchizedek appears suddenly in Scripture without genealogy, birth, or death, making him a fitting type of Christ's eternal priesthood. The Messiah's priesthood, like Melchizedek's, is based on personal dignity and God's direct appointment rather than on descent or dynastic succession.

Historical Context

Melchizedek appears in only two Old Testament passages before Psalm 110 - Genesis 14:18-20 and Psalm 110:4. Yet this brief mention proved extraordinarily

significant. The Letter to the Hebrews (chapters 5-7) contains the most extensive Christian commentary on this verse. Hebrews argues that Jesus' priesthood surpasses the Levitical priesthood because it is 'after the order of Melchizedek' rather than according to the law of fleshly descent. Levitical priests required genealogical proof and physical fitness; they were mortal and required successors; they offered sacrifices repeatedly. Christ, as priest after Melchizedek's order, is eternal, needs no successor, and offered one perfect sacrifice. The connection to Melchizedek also established Christ as priest-king, which was rejected in Jewish expectation that separated priestly and kingly offices. Psalm 110:4 became crucial in Reformation theology when Protestants argued that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26-28) superseded the entire sacrificial system. The phrase 'The LORD hath sworn' emphasizes the unilateral nature of God's covenant - the priesthood of Christ does not depend on human acceptance or maintenance but on God's unchangeable oath. This verse appears quoted in Hebrews 5:6, 6:20, 7:17, and 7:21.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does God's swearing an oath about Christ's priesthood reveal about the certainty and immutability of His work?
2. Why was the order of Melchizedek significant in addressing the separation of priestly and kingly offices in Jewish expectation?
3. How does Christ's eternal, personal priesthood (like Melchizedek's) contrast with the genealogical, temporary Levitical priesthood?
4. What is the theological significance of the Messiah being 'a priest for ever' rather than having successive priests?
5. In what ways does Christ's priesthood 'after the order of Melchizedek' supersede and fulfill the Levitical system?

Interlinear Text

נִשְׁבַּע ע	יְהוָה הוּא	וְלֹא א	יִנָּחֵם	אֶתְּהָ	כִּי אַתָּה
hath sworn	The LORD	H3808	and will not repent	H859	Thou art a priest
H7650	H3068		H5162		H3548
לְעוֹלָם	עַל	דֵּבַרְתָּ י	מִלְכִּי	צִדְקָה	
for ever	H5921	after the order	H0	of Melchizedek	
H5769		H1700		H4442	

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 7:17 (Parallel theme): For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Hebrews 5:6 (Parallel theme): As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Hebrews 7:21 (Repentance): (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)

Hebrews 7:28 (Parallel theme): For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

Hebrews 7:11 (Parallel theme): If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

Genesis 14:18 (Parallel theme): And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.

Numbers 23:19 (Repentance): God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

Revelation 1:6 (Parallel theme): And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Zechariah 6:13 (References Lord): Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Psalms 132:11 (References Lord): The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.

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