

Melchizedek, not something given to him by Melchizedek. Moreover, if the Psalmist had intended “after the words of Melchizedek,” he would have used the plural construct of דְּבָרָי, דְּבָרָה, not דְּבָרָתַי. As the Hebrew stands, it must be translated “after the manner of Melchizedek.”

JPS’s translation is possible from the Hebrew of the MT. “You are a priest forever, a rightful king according to my decree” takes מֶלֶךְ־יֶצֶדֶק, “king of righteousness,” not as a proper noun, but as a substantive, interpreting יֶצֶדֶק, “righteous/righteousness” as an adjectival absolute of the construct מֶלֶךְ, “king.” In theory this is possible (consider Lev 19:36, “just balance” [אֲזִנֵּי יֶצֶדֶק], “just weights” [אֲבָנֵי־יֶצֶדֶק], etc.). Obviously, the JPS follows the Targum here. But in light of the fact that the JPS translates מֶלֶךְ־יֶצֶדֶק in Gen 14:18 as “Mechizedek,” one has to presume that the translation of the current text by the JPS has been influenced by the application of Melchizedek to Yeshua in the Apostolic Scriptures themselves.

18–19 For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Torah made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

In these verses, our author makes some obvious and important contrasts between the “former commandment” and the “better hope.” We might list them this way:

Former commandment	Better hope
setting aside ----->	bringing in
weakness uselessness } ----->	better hope
makes no one perfect ----->	we draw near to God

The contrasts are obvious: the “former commandment” (*πραγαούσης ἐντολῆς*), which is the Torah requirement that a priest be from the tribe of Levi, and that the high priest be from the family of Aaron, is set aside (*ἀθέτησις*, *athetēsis*¹) as pertains to Yeshua’s priesthood. It is set aside because the heavenly High Priesthood functions at a different level and

1 *ἀθέτησις* is found only twice in the Apostolic Scriptures: here and in 9:26.

in a different realm, a realm in which lineage is not the qualifying factor, but rather an indestructible life.

Moreover, it is set aside as regards the heavenly High Priest because while it functioned to maintain the earthly priesthood, this priesthood was never designed nor purposed to bring about eternal salvation. Thus, while the earthly priesthood was given to reveal the ultimate and eternal High Priest, describing the essence of His work in dramatic revelation, as pertains to eternal salvation, the earthly priesthood was both “weak” and “useless” (*ἀσθενὲς καὶ ἀνωφελές*), meaning that the offering of the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, for the sacrificial system was not given by God for that purpose.

Indeed, the Torah which governed the earthly priesthood and established the requirements for functioning as a priest could not establish a priesthood that would make a person “perfect” (*τελειώω, teleiōō*), that is, fit to commune with God Who is holy. The parallels given above show what our author means by “perfect.” To be “perfect” means to be in a position acceptable by God Himself so that there might be true communion together: “we draw near to God.”

Most interesting, however, is that the “former commandment” is not paralleled by a “recent or current commandment.” Instead, we find the term “better hope” (*κρείττονος ἐλπίδος*). Our author wants us to see that the Levitical priesthood, rather than being an end in itself, or the goal to which redemptive history proceeds, had as its primary function the pointing-of-the-way to Yeshua. The priesthood, with all of its sacrifices and oblations, could only cause the worshiper to hope for the promised Messiah who would Himself offer the true sacrifice by which sins could actually be forgiven. It was just such hope which fixed the eyes of faith of the ancient believer upon the coming Messiah. Indeed, this was the hope which faith produced.

Note carefully that this “better hope” is not a commandment, not a regulation, not even a ritual governed by law. This “better hope” is found to be a person, the person of Yeshua Himself, Who is our hope. For it is in and through the person of Yeshua our Messiah that we draw near to God, as v. 25 makes clear (cf. Jn 14:6).

This was, of course, the whole purpose of the sacrificial system, the very focus of Yom Kippur—man drawing near to God. The cleansing of the body and soul was necessary because God is a holy God and cannot dwell in the midst of uncleanness. The sinner must be purified if he or she would “draw near to God.” The Levitical sacrifices were sufficient to do this only as they symbolically pointed to the ultimate sacrifice and aided the offerer to lay hold by faith of the sacrifice Messiah would offer.

That David understood this seems clear, for he, being a prophet, looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah (Ac 2:30). As such, he knew of Messiah's death and no doubt connected this to the promise God made to him that He would seat one of his descendants upon the throne forever (cf. 2 Sam 7:18-19; Ac 2:30ff).

20–22 And inasmuch as *it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "ADONAI HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER'")*; so much the more also Yeshua has become the guarantee of a better covenant.

The first line of v. 20 has "a better hope" of v. 19 as its antecedent. This "better hope" is now seen to be the fruit of Yeshua's heavenly priesthood as He is a priest "after the order of Melchizedek." In connecting to the "better hope," our author now stresses the fact that Yeshua's priesthood was confirmed with an oath in distinction from the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood.

Indeed, the initial giving of the priesthood to Aaron (cp. Ex 27) did not include an oath. God simply made the arrangement known to Moses and the children of Israel. The inclusion of an oath by God in connection with the priesthood which is after the order of Melchizedek is therefore of great significance. Yeshua's priesthood is based upon a solemn oath by God Himself rather than merely upon physical lineage.

The oath spoken of in Psalm 110 is rightly interpreted as a covenant oath (for all ancient covenants or treaties were confirmed through some form of an oath). Yeshua, the object of God's oath, is therefore the guarantor of the covenant itself, which is a "better covenant" (αρίτερος διαθήκης). But if our author speaks of a "better covenant," it is clear that he has at least one other covenant in mind by way of comparison. We may rightly ask, then, what are the covenants with which our author is dealing? It would seem quite obvious that we are contrasting two covenants of priesthood, one Levitical and the other that of Melchizedek. Was the Levitical priesthood given in the form of a covenant?

Consider the covenant made with Phinehas, the son of Aaron (Num 25:10-13). Here, a "covenant of peace" (בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם) is promised to Phinehas as a perpetual covenant of priesthood (בְּרִית כְּהֻנָּה עוֹלָם). Yet our author is very keen in regard to what the Torah says and what it does not say. While we might surmise that a covenant required some kind of oath, there is nothing in the Torah text itself which specifically mentioned an oath which ratified the covenant with Phinehas. In contrast,

the mention of an oath in Psalm 110 establishes the priesthood of David's Lord (Yeshua) as a covenant forever (אֶתְהַכִּיחַ לְעוֹלָם). Once again, the contrast is between the Levitical priesthood and that of Melchizedek. As long as there is a functioning priesthood in the "earthly tabernacle," it will be legitimate only when those who act as priests are from the lineage of Aaron. Thus, in the millennial Temple, we see the Zadokite priests functioning in their priestly role (Ezek 43:19ff).

"ADONAI HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER'" – For our author, the fact that Ps 110 describes the high priesthood of David's Lord (Yeshua) as being confirmed with an oath, adds yet another proof that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to that of the Levitical priests, for the earthly priests gain their office by way of physical lineage, but the heavenly high priest qualifies only on the basis of an indestructible life. Thus, the oath described in Ps 110 promises a given individual, David's Lord, that He would be a priest forever. Phinehas, on the other hand, was promised a perpetual priesthood passed on from generation to generation of his family. The one relates to an individual, the other to multiple descendants. So here again the contrast is made between the Levitical priests who function only for a life-time and then must pass the office to their successors, and the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in which a single individual, Yeshua, is Himself the eternal heavenly high priest, without beginning and without end.

so much the more also Yeshua has become the guarantee of a better covenant. – What is the "better covenant" to which our author now refers? It surely is the "new covenant" spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah, for in the next chapter our author quotes directly from Jeremiah to describe this "better covenant." It will be beneficial, then, to consider the texts of Scripture which speak directly of the "new covenant."

----- Excursus: The New Covenant -----

The term "new covenant" is found one time in the Tanach (Jer 31:31) and six times in the Apostolic Scriptures.

English	Greek
<p>For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:15)</p>	<p>Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο <u>διαθήκης καινῆς</u> μεσίτης ἐστίν, ὅπως θανάτου γενομένου εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῇ πρώτῃ διαθήκῃ παραβάσεων τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν λάβωσιν οἱ κεκλημένοι τῆς αἰωνίου κληρονομίας.</p>
<p>and to Yeshua, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:24)</p>	<p>καὶ <u>διαθήκης νέας</u> μεσίτη Ἰησοῦ καὶ αἵματι ῥαντισμοῦ κρεῖττον λαλοῦντι παρὰ τὸν Ἄβελ.</p>

Note: Heb 8:13 is not included in the above table for the simple reason that in the Greek text, the word “covenant” (*διαθήκη, diatheke*) is not actually present. The word “covenant” in Heb 8:13 has been added by the English translators in most of our English versions.

What exactly is the “new covenant” and how is it “new”? We might first begin with a brief study of the word translated “new.” In Jer 31:31, the Hebrew term translated “new” is *חֲדָשׁ* (*chadash*, fem. sg. of the adj. *חָדָשׁ, chadash*). The Greek term used in all of the Apostolic texts except for Heb 12:24 is the fem. sg. form of the adjective *καινός (kainos)*. In Heb 12:24, however, the word for “new” is *νέος (neos)*. Of the six times the phrase “new covenant” is used in the Apostolic Scriptures, two relate to the words of Yeshua at His final Pesach seder (Lk 22:20; 1Cor 11:25), three occur in our Epistle (the first in the quote from Jer 31 and the other two referring back to this quote), and one occurrence is found in Paul’s teaching on the new covenant in 2 Cor 3:6.

The fact that our author uses two different words for “new” in the phrase “new covenant” (*kainos* in 9:15 and *neos* in 12:24) has sometimes been taught to mean that he was emphasizing the recent appearance of the “new covenant,” suggesting that the Greek *neos* has been interpreted to mean “new” in the sense of “young,” or “something which has only recently appeared.” But such a conclusion is based upon the fallacious assertion that the two words are distinct in their meaning. A thorough study of the two terms, however, reveals that by the 1st century CE, the two words were being used interchangeably, and that *neos* did not mean “recent” or “newly formed” as over against *kainos* which

had a wider definition.¹ We should conclude that our author uses *neos* as a stylistic synonym of the more widely used *kainos*.

In Paul's epistles, the contrast between "new" and "old" is clearly a contrast between "saved" and "lost," or to use the terms he rather employs, "justified" and "condemned." The "old man"/"new man" contrast which Paul teaches (cf. Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9) is clearly that of faith contrasted with unbelief.

Further, we have every reason to believe that our author was familiar with Paul's teaching and that he agreed with it. It should not be a surprise, then, that our author should adopt the same terminology. Thus, when our author juxtaposes "new" and "old," he may well be contrasting that which brings eternal salvation and that which is unable to do so.

This leads us to consider the phrase "old covenant." Having looked at all the biblical texts which contain the phrase "new covenant," we should consider where the phrase "old covenant" occurs. Judging by how often the phrase "old covenant" is used in Christian theological discussions and literature, we might presume that the phrase "old covenant" would be something which occurs frequently in the Apostolic Scriptures. But to our surprise, we find it only one time in the whole of Scripture, at 2Cor 3:14.

But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant (*palaiās diathēkēs*) the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Messiah. (2Cor 3:14)

ἀλλὰ ἐπωρώθη τὰ νοήματα αὐτῶν. ἄχρι γὰρ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας τὸ αὐτὸ κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναγνώσει τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης μένει, μὴ ἀνακαλυπτόμενον ὅτι ἐν Χριστῷ καταργεῖται.

Here, Paul refers to the Tanach as the "old covenant," for when it is read with a veil covering the glory of Messiah (even as the veil worn by Moses covered the glory shining in his face), the Tanach is unable to lead the reader to its ultimate goal, which is to reveal the true Messiah and His work of accomplishing salvation for His people. Paul goes on in 2Cor 4:3–6 to say:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded

1 Note Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 376, n. 88; See the more extensive remarks in Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 551, n. 162.

the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Messiah, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Messiah Yeshua as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Messiah's sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Messiah. (2Cor 4:3-6)

Thus, in this text Paul uses "old" as he does elsewhere, of a life devoid of the Ruach and therefore a heart or mind which cannot see the glory of Messiah when the Tanach is read, for it is by the Ruach that Messiah is revealed and received for Who He is. For Paul, those who read the Tanach every Shabbat in the Synagogue but did so without the illuminating work of the Spirit, were reading an "old covenant," that is, the covenant which by itself is powerless to save. If the Spirit of God does not illumine the eyes of faith to the truth of the Scriptures, then the Scriptures are simply letters upon parchment—letters engraved on stone—rather than written on the heart.

In short, then, "old covenant" is not to be identified with the Torah of Moses or the (so-called) "Old Testament," nor is the "new covenant" to be viewed as the (so-called) "New Testament." Rather, as our author shows clearly, the contrast is between righteousness granted by God through faith in His Messiah (new covenant) as over against relying upon one's people-group status as counting for righteousness in God's eyes (old covenant). This is the very point of our author's argument: Israel, in unbelief, failed to obey God and enter into the rest He had provided for them. Furthermore, the majority of the nation, rather than seeking God through faith in His promised Messiah, sought rather to establish their own righteousness through observance of ritual. The Temple, established for true worship, had (as Yeshua Himself showed), become a place of thieves who, for their own gain, often prevented the sincere believer from worshiping as God had commanded. The priesthood had become corrupt, as was the service they rendered. It was not as though these rituals were somehow intrinsically bad. On the contrary, they were given by God for righteous worship. But in the hands of those who were attempting to establish their own righteousness, the rituals of divine origin had taken on an "old covenant" posture. They were not of faith, but of the flesh.

It was in the face of these realities that our author appeals to the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. This covenant would be of faith, for the Torah would be written on the heart by God Himself. The contrast,

then, between the new covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah, and the old covenant (the belief that simply being part of the people-group called Israel would render a person acceptable to God) was one of a changed heart, something only God could accomplish. In every era, whenever the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) wrote the Torah on the heart of a believer, that person became a member of the new covenant. The eschatological reality of the new covenant, then, is simply the national redemption of Israel in precisely the same manner in which individuals (who make up the remnant in every generation) have been born-from-above. It is when, by God's sovereign work, the nation of Israel as a whole turns in faith to God through confessing Yeshua to be the true Messiah and the only One through Whom true forgiveness of sins and righteous standing before God is possible.

----- End of Excursus -----

[vv. 20-22 continued]

...so much the more also Yeshua has become the guarantee of a better covenant. – Before we move on to the next verses, it is important that we consider the word translated “guarantee” by the NASB in v. 22. The Greek word here translated “guarantee”¹ is ἔγγυος (*enguos*) and is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. Though the noun form is found only here, its cognate verb and other forms (ἐγγύη, ἐγγύησις, ἐγγυάω) found outside of the Apostolic Scriptures² make it clear that the noun carries the meaning of “guarantor” or “one who stands surety for another.” In our context, the primary issue at hand is that of covenant, in which two parties covenant with each other to uphold their mutual part of the covenant. A person who therefore pledges himself as “surety” does so for one of the covenant members, promising that if he or she is unable to fulfill their promised part of the covenant, the “guarantor” will step in and fulfill that person’s obligations. As Sampson so well describes:

A surety is one who *engages for another*, so as to secure the performance of that for which he is bound, with the understanding that he shall perform for him, where he fails.³

1 ESV and CJB, “guarantor”; KJV, “surety”; NASB, NIV, NET, HCSB, NRSV, “guarantee.”

2 E.g., note the Lxx use of the verb ἐγγυάω in Prov 6:1, 3; 17:18; 19:28; 28:17; Sir 8:13; 29:14.

3 Francis Sampson, *Hebrews*, p. 276. (emphasis in the original)