

Jesus the Christ: High Priest of a New Order

by James D. Nickel

In the essay, *Yom Kippur*, we investigated many of the details surrounding the Day of Atonement. We also recognized that *every* detail of the events of that day were merely provisional as types of something greater. This great day set forth atonement, but not the atoner. The events of this day cried out for permanent resolution, a resolution that finds its surety in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The prophets of old recognized that a final Day of Atonement was coming. For example, Jeremiah proclaimed days were coming when a new covenant or a new way of approaching God would be cut.¹ There were four promises tied to this covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Hebrews 8:8-12). One term of the New Covenant was that God would not only forgive iniquity, He would remember His people's sins *no more*.² In other words, God would not just remove or cover sin. He would *permanently* wipe away the

transgressions of His people. Daniel, as a captive in ancient Babylon, announced that seventy weeks³ were determined in the counsel of God for "your people and for your holy city" in order "to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy" (Daniel 9:24). In the

"... by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He lives forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:22-25).

¹ Covenant, in Hebrew, is *berith*. It literally means "to cut" by the shedding of blood. In the Bible, a covenant ceremony between two people always involved the cutting of some type of animal in half. To each person, this "cut" represented both death (i.e., death to their rights to live for themselves) and life (i.e., entering into a new relationship with each other as blood brothers). See Genesis 15 and Jeremiah 34:18.

² To remember, in Biblical understanding, means to "bear in mind with the intent on some consequential action." For God to remember sins means that He bears them in mind with the intent to deal justly with them. For God to *not* remember sins means that He no longer hold sins to the account of the sinner with the intent to bless because justice has been realized.

³ Seventy weeks is a cryptic description of the length of the decreed judgment of God upon His people and the city of Jerusalem. This judgment began with the seventy year captivity of which Daniel was experiencing (cf. Daniel 9:2; II Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 25:9-12; 27:6-8; 29:10) and would be multiplied by seven in terms of the protracted curse of God (cf. Leviticus 26:18). Seventy weeks means seventy groups of one week where one week, being equal to seven calendrical days, is now associated with seven calendrical years (cf. Ezekiel 4:6 and Genesis 29:27). Therefore, doing the math, 70 weeks = 70 × 1 week = 70 × 7 days = 490 days = 490 years. It is also significant to note that 490 years equals 10 Jubilee years (God had commanded His people to celebrate a Jubilee, where all debts were released and all lands returned to their original owner, every 49 years).

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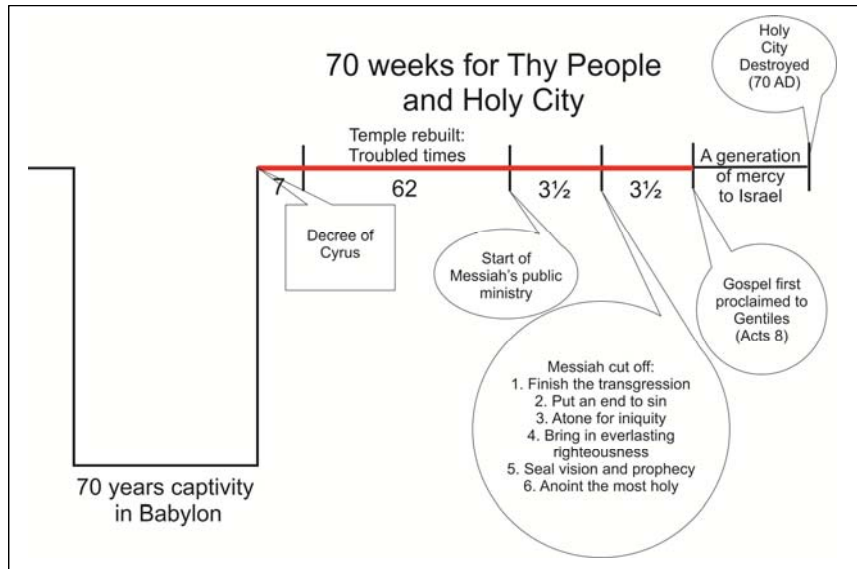
by James D. Nickel

fullness of time, the promised Messiah⁴ came and was “cut off” in the middle of Daniel’s seventieth week.⁵ This means that the Messiah would “cut a covenant” (Daniel 9:27) by offering Himself in sacrificial death.⁶ This death would not be for Himself (Daniel 9:26), but for His people (Isaiah 53); in fact, for the whole world (I John 2:1-2).⁷ In His death on the Cross, Jesus participated in the last Day of Atonement by acting *not* only as the *final* High Priest, *but also as the offering itself*.

In review, the High Priest of the Old Testament order acted as the representative of the people, the one for the many. What he did on the Day of Atonement, he did as proxy for and in solidarity with the nation. In Jesus, we encounter what the epistle to the Hebrews denotes as the *final* High Priest (Hebrews 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11). This High Priest, the second

person of the Trinity, was sent by His Father, the first person of the Trinity, to act as proxy for sins of a fallen world (John 1:29).

In the Incarnation⁸, Christ removed His glorious garments of majesty and clothed Himself in the ordinary garments of fallen humanity (cf. John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:5-8; Romans 8:3) just as the High Priest removed his glorious garments and clothed himself with ordinary linen garments. Jesus



⁴ Recall that *Messiah* is the English transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “anointed.” Christ is the Greek word that carries the same meaning. Messiah or Christ is the title of an office, not the name of a person. An angel of the Lord commanded Joseph and Mary to name their newborn baby Jesus meaning “Savior” (Matthew 1:20-21). God the Father has appointed to Jesus, on the basis of His death and resurrection, the offices of Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

⁵ Using Biblical dating parameters, from the proclamation of the Persian king Cyrus to rebuild the temple (Daniel 9:25; Ezra 1:1-4; cf. the amazing prophecy in Isaiah 44:28-45:13 where this pagan king is specifically named 150 years before his birth!) to Messiah the Prince was 69 weeks (or 483 years). Jesus was anointed as Messiah at age 30 after receiving baptism from John the Baptist (Luke 3:22-23; 4:18). Therefore, the Messiah was born 453 years (483 – 30) after the proclamation of Cyrus. The baptism of Christ occurred when He was 30 years old in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1, 23). Christ was “cut off” (i.e., crucified) in the middle of the 70th week (Daniel 9:26-27) after 3½ years of public ministry (½ of 7 years is 3½ years).

⁶ Death is what “cut off” means.

⁷ As a true priest, Christ is representative of all humanity, all races, all colors, Jew and Gentile. This is why the New Testament often compares Christ to Adam. *In Adam, all die*. The “all in Adam” means all humanity. *In Christ, all shall be made alive* (I Corinthians 15:22; cf. Romans 5:12-21). Likewise, the “all in Christ” means all humanity. Objectively, all humanity is in Christ and made alive in Him, but repentance and faith is the Biblical way to receive that life subjectively; i.e., to instantiate God’s saving life in one’s personal experience.

⁸ Incarnation means enfleshment ... God the Word taking on human flesh, fallen flesh (Romans 8:3; John 1:1-14). In the fullness of the appointed time (Galatians 4:4), God became man, born of his mother Mary, a virgin, in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. Jesus is at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man. He is of one substance with the Father in terms of His Godhead, God of God, Light of Light, and, at the same time, of one substance with humanity in terms of His manhood. He is like humanity in all respects except for sin.

Jesus the Christ: High Priest of a New Order

by James D. Nickel

became one with humanity in order to succor humanity (Hebrews 2:18). Jesus became our brother because a High Priest must be one, bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, with the people he represents (Hebrews 2:9-13; Romans 8:29).

Note also that Jesus represented a different order of High Priest. In the Old Testament, all High Priests had to be physical descendants of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. Jesus, however, was of the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:3; Hebrews 7:14). In Jesus, the office of High Priest was based not on genealogy, but on the worthiness of His person both as God and as man.⁹ The Bible identifies the order of Jesus Christ's priesthood as the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:5-6; Psalm 110:4). In the Old Testament (Genesis 14:18-20), Melchizedek, meaning "king of righteousness," was also the king of Salem, meaning "peace."¹⁰ He just "appears" on the scene. He does so "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually" (Hebrews 7:1-3). Unlike the Levitical priesthood, an order dependent upon genealogy and heredity,¹¹ Melchizedek represented a permanent order; i.e., the power of an endless life. When Abraham paid a "tenth of the spoils" (Hebrews 7:4) to Melchizedek he recognized that Melchizedek's priesthood was valid; i.e., ordained of God.¹² Also, since Melchizedek blessed Abraham and since Levi was in the loins of his father Abraham, then the priesthood of Melchizedek was superior to the priesthood of Levi (Hebrews 7:4-10). With Jesus came a change in the order or law of the priesthood and the sacrifices associated with it.¹³ Since perfection¹⁴ could not come through the weak and unprofitable Levitical order, Jesus introduced a *new order* based upon an atonement that was *efficacious*. This new arrangement of things¹⁵ is founded upon the power of Jesus Christ's endless life which provides a *better hope* by which His New Covenant people can have access or "draw near to God" (Hebrews 7:11-18).

Let's now look at the final Day of Atonement; i.e., the "cutting off" of Jesus Christ on Calvary's Cross. The first thing that the High Priest in the Old Testament had to do was to offer sacrifices for *his own sin*. Since Jesus Christ, the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, was sinless in His person, no such offering was necessary (Hebrews 7:26-28). But, *blood had to be shed for the sins of the human race* since, according to Hebrews 9:22, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission or forgiveness." Where was the offering? Where were the goats? As we have noted, Jesus Himself is the offering; His blood, not the blood of bulls or goats, is shed.¹⁶ Note also this twist of irony – it

⁹ It was important that the writer(s) of the epistle to the Hebrews establish the credentials of Jesus for the office of High Priest. In His person, Jesus is worthy of this office as God in terms of the perfections of the Godhead and as man in terms of His active, complete, perfect (i.e., righteous) obedience (cf. Hebrews 4:15).

¹⁰ Note the intimate connection between righteousness or justice (in the Hebrew, these English words are interchangeable) and peace. True peace can only be obtained through God's path of justice. Any vision of world peace that disregards God's righteousness is illusory.

¹¹ This is the context for understanding what the phrase "fleshly commandments" means in Hebrews 7:16.

¹² It is significant to note the Melchizedek, of Canaanite origin, was designated a priest of the Most High God, *El Elyon* in Hebrew (Genesis 14:19). This title signified that the God of Abraham had designated Melchizedek as a priest of the whole earth. This meaning reflects on the intent of God to bless "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3).

¹³ The phrase "change of the law" (Hebrews 7:12) means, in context, that the law referring to the priesthood and the sacrifices has been changed. It does not mean that the law as a whole has been set aside. To say it does is to rewrite the Bible by false exegesis. The Bible elsewhere makes it clear that God's moral law abides in the believer by being graciously and lovingly written on the heart through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 5:17-20; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16; Romans 8:1-4; 5:5; 13:8-10). The New Testament even commends of the lawful use of some civil law statutes and sanctions of the Old Testament (Matthew 15:3-4; John 8:1-11; Hebrews 2:2; I Timothy 1:8-11).

¹⁴ Perfection means a "coming to full maturity."

¹⁵ The New Testament often refers to this new arrangement of things as the "age or world to come" (Hebrews 2:5).

¹⁶ In Jesus is the finality of all the Old Testament sacrificial offerings.

Jesus the Christ: High Priest of a New Order

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was the High Priest of the old Levitical order, Caiaphas, who sanctioned Jesus as this final sin offering (Matthew 26; John 18). At the end of the ages, the *last* High Priest of the Old Covenant order offered the *final* sacrifice, a sacrifice that finished transgression and permanently put away sin (Daniel 9:24; Hebrews 9:26).

The bronze altar of the Tabernacle-Temple complex became a wooden cross. Upon this tree, Jesus Christ's body was nailed, a body naked, dishonored, smitten, afflicted, wounded, bruised, and chastised. Vicious blows that cut open His skin opened His veins and His blood, His freely shed blood, flowed from His body to the earth.¹⁷ Even though some people then present mocked the crucified One, all must have become increasingly alarmed as an inexplicable darkness descended upon the land at the sixth hour (Matthew 27:45).¹⁸ At the ninth hour, at the moment Jesus "yielded His spirit,"¹⁹ the physical creation convulsed in an earthquake, the graves opened, many bodies of the saints were resurrected, and the veil in the Temple, the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, was rent in two, from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50-51).

In the essay entitled *Father's House*, we shall explore the significance of this rending of the veil as it pertains to providing access, immediate, free, and permanent access, into the very presence of God.

¹⁷ Although historically it was the earth that physically supported the Cross, in reality, it is the Cross that supports the earth; in fact, the whole universe (cf. Colossians 1:15-20).

¹⁸ Darkness covered the land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour; i.e., 12 noon to 3:00 PM.

¹⁹ On Golgotha, after the True Shekinah Glory collapsed in the agony of crucifixion, to verify death, a Roman soldier took a lance and pierced His side, puncturing the pericardium. Immediately blood and water gushed out. The blood of Jesus to cleanse sins forever and for all time ... and water, from the True Temple (John 2:19-21), started its journey, a mere trickle at first, but in time a watershed of health to the nations, renewing the world in fulfillment of prophecy of Ezekiel 47.