

MELCHIZEDEK

by G. H. LANG

IN our April-June issue of last year, a paper appeared from the pen of Mr. Lang, entitled "God's Covenants are Conditional", which was recognized by a number of our readers as being scarcely in line with Reformed orthodoxy. However, for writer and readers alike Scripture must be the one and final court of appeal in all such matters, and it is salutary for us to have our thinking challenged and be sent back to search the sacred writings in Berean fashion, to see whether these things are so. This consideration applies with even greater force to the following paper, which is the sequel to the earlier one. It is probably one of the last things Mr. Lang wrote before his death on October 20, 1958, and, since it represents the culmination of his distinctive ministry over many years, may be regarded in a sense as his testament. The principles set out in this paper are those by which he lived. At the end of his former paper he pointed out that in the New Testament the earthly inheritance which Abraham is promised in Genesis gives place to a heavenly country and an eternal city, and asked how this prospect became his, and how it becomes ours. "Is not the answer this", he concluded, "—through Melchizedek?" What follows is an expansion of this suggestion.

I.

IN a previous article (April-June, 1958) it was laid down:

1. That it would be incompatible with the moral nature of God that He should enter into covenant with a moral creature irrespective of moral conditions in the latter.

2. That in consequence no divine covenant with a moral agent is without conditions, and therefore the covenant with Abraham was conditional, as is explicitly shown in the records in Genesis (12: 1-3, 6, 7; 13: 14-17; 15; 17: 1-4; 18: 17-19; 22: 15-18; 26: 2-6).

3. That, by consequence, conditions attach to the relations with God of every person who by faith comes into that covenant made with Abraham.

4. That God's covenant with Abraham was not concerned with his justification as a sinner, since righteousness by faith had already been reckoned to him before God proposed a *covenant* relationship (Gen. 15: 6, 18). It results that for Abraham's spiritual descendants also justification is a *free gift* (Rom. 3: 24), assured upon repentance and faith, and therefore is not dependent

upon the covenant conditions after established, upon the fulfilment of which *covenanted* benefits depend.

5. That, moreover, God's covenant with Abraham, vast as was its scope and rich its benefits, was limited to privileges, spiritual and temporal, to be enjoyed on this earth. It did not include any possible privileges the sphere of which would be in the heavenly regions.

This raises the question as to the basis upon which Abraham and his sons by faith may aspire to a place and benefits in the heavenly world. Man made of the earth was intended and fitted to live on earth. That right he forfeited by sin, but it is restored to believers under the covenant with Abraham; but it confers no hope of being transferred from earth to heaven—"going to heaven" far exceeds the mere fact of being saved from the judgment on sin. Then upon what does this prospect of a place and portion in the heavenly realm depend? It was suggested in our article that it is through relationship with *Melchizedek* that the heavenly prospect is opened and acquired.

II.

The history of no other person of such profound significance is narrated so briefly in Holy Scripture. It reads as follows:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all (Gen. 14: 18-20).

Nine centuries pass before he is mentioned again. Speaking of the promised Messiah David records a transaction between God and His Son (Ps. 110: 4):

Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent [change His mind],
Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

The writer to the Hebrews quotes this promise as applying to Christ (Heb. 5: 6, 10). He intimates that there are many things to be said concerning this man so briefly mentioned, and that these are hard to explain to any who are dull of hearing (5: 10, 11). In ch. 7 he proceeds with his explanation.

1. The name is significant: Melchizedek means king of righteousness (ver. 2).

2. The name of his city is significant, Peace, so that he is king of peace (ver. 2).

Thus in him righteousness and peace had kissed each other (Ps. 85: 10). How did this man sustain such a character for himself

and his city seeing that he lived amidst peoples so cruel, so fearfully vile that before long God would find it needful to destroy them? The answer is found in ver. 11 of the psalm; truth sprang out of the earth in him because righteousness had looked down from heaven. He was in contact with the upper world where righteousness prevails and its effect is peace, and these conditions he reproduced on earth.

3. For Melchizedek was "priest of God Most High". The knowledge of that great God had been deliberately rejected by the human race, because He was inflexibly holy and they loved wickedness (Rom. 1: 18-32). Yet they could not wholly banish the recollection of His existence and supremacy. They had invented gods many, but He remained God Most High. This recollection continued among the nations throughout the millenniums, and so Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, fourteen centuries later than Melchizedek, could own Him to be the Most High (Dan. 4: 24, 25, 32, 34).

4. Of this infinitely holy and exalted Majesty in the heavens (Heb. 8: 1) Melchizedek was representative on earth. He was the survivor of an original ordinance among men copied from the heavenly order. In the beginning the head man of a people was also their priest in approach to God, and His lawgiver for their good—prophet, priest, and king in one person.

This continued on into later times. In Babylon the king was also the chief of the college of priests. This passed to other nations. It continued in China to modern times, when annually, on behalf of all his people, the Emperor offered a sacrifice to the unknown supreme deity. It is the original basis of the doctrine of the divine right of kings; which will receive revived right and force in the ages to come, when Christ shall have a company of co-regents in whom His righteousness and peace shall be perfectly developed (Rev. 1: 5, 6; 5: 9, 10).

Like other original appointments of the Creator for mankind this arrangement as to kings was a copy of things in the heavens. Before the universe had been created the Father had appointed the Son as His heir to possess it entire. Thus the Son was the Proprietor and Ruler of all that the Father made through Him (Heb. 1: 2). The same place shows that He was also the chief Messenger through whom God spoke, the divine Priest and Mediator. Always true had been His announcement: "no one cometh unto the Father but through Me" (John 14: 6). Thus when the dread question arose of the sinful universe being reconciled to God, the

task fell naturally to the Son as the divine, and only competent, Mediator.

The heavenly world therefore was ruled by the divine Priest-King and Prophet. Of this heavenly order Melchizedek in his day was the solitary representative on earth. There is no actual mention that Abraham and he had been in contact prior to the incident narrated; but it would be against all likelihood that Abraham had been some years in the land and not have paid his respects to the king who stood officially and publicly for the same God that Abraham himself worshipped. This is suggested by the almost incidental manner in which the narrative speaks of their meeting on that occasion, and by the fact that Abraham recognized his superior status by giving him the tenth of the spoils taken in war (Heb. 7: 4-7). With what divine complaisance must the Most High have watched that meeting and seen His chosen servant Abraham, the holder of such vast promises, recognize the superiority of the heavenly over the earthly!

5. It is now easy to understand in what sense Melchizedek was "made like unto the Son of God". His three-fold office was the exhibition on earth of the dignities of the Son of God in the world above; and to display their likeness his very narrative was drawn by the Spirit as if he had no parents or ancestry, had neither begun nor closed his life. By this device he was conformed historically to the One of whom this was absolutely true (Heb. 7: 3). What is *not* said in Scripture is as inspired and instructive as what the Spirit *has* said. Its silences and omissions are from Him. That Melchizedek is given no close to his career implies that he "abideth a priest in continuity". They who attain to this royal and priestly status retain it for ever (Rev. 22: 5).

6. When therefore Abraham received the blessing of Melchizedek he was blessed by the official representative of heaven, and it was blessing of a heavenly order that he obtained. It was not in the power of Melchizedek to grant to him earthly blessings; indeed it would have been out of place; for of these, in the fullest conceivable measure, he was already possessor by prior grant from the Most High Himself Who had guaranteed that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed (Gen. 12: 1-3). As we saw in our earlier study, this included the earth for all coming time. It was the blessing of Him Who possesses heaven as well as earth which Melchizedek pronounced (Gen. 14: 19). Here, then, it would seem was the occasion when blessing of a heavenly order reached Abraham, and Melchizedek was the agent for this.

7. When the Son of God became man He relinquished that noble form of God in which He had exercised His prerogative as God. He emptied Himself and took the form of man, of a bond-slave. Yet even here He displayed enough of His dignities to show that He was that Royal Priest of the universe. He ruled the storm, multiplied food, controlled the demon denizens of that invisible realm. As Prophet He spake from God as no other man had done, and as Priest He reconciled the world unto God by His atoning death. He interceded for men with the Father and introduced them to Him. In resurrection He has received again as man that full glory which He had with the Father before creation, and in particular, by the oath of God, He has received again His office, dignity, and authority as the Royal Priest after that order of which Melchizedek had been the representative known by men and owned by God. And as even Abraham, the servant of God, received heavenly blessing through Melchizedek, so must believers now secure their heavenly portion through the true Melchizedek.

8. It is evident that innumerable believers have no acquaintance with Christ as Melchizedek. They trust Him as the divine Substitute that put away their sin by the sacrifice of the cross, on whom their hope of future welfare rests. Here very many stay. Others have gone further, and known the present blessedness of that renewing of the Spirit of which Jeremiah and Ezekiel had spoken, bringing a new inward nature, with some knowledge of God's law in the heart (Jer. 31 ; Ezek. 36 ; Heb. 8). This is good and real, but it belongs equally to believers as connected with earth. In days to come the saved of Israel and the nations will experience this benefit of the new covenant though dwelling on the earth. All this is enjoyed under the covenant of God with Abraham, the new covenant spoken of in Hebrews, as contrasted with that made at Sinai. Thus far the Christians addressed in Hebrews had come, and moreover they had some foretaste of a heavenly portion, sufficient to strengthen against the loss of earthly possessions (Heb. 10: 32 ff.). Yet to even these last the truth concerning Melchizedek was strange, and for lack of it their spiritual experience had been halted and was fading.

9. When Abraham left Chaldea he had no further promise or hope than of an inheritance in another region of the earth, though even this he never actually possessed. But at some later point there was shown to him that heavenly country where is the dwelling-place of God Most High, and that heavenly city which is His capital, and he was offered a place in that exalted region (Heb.

11: 9, 10, 13-16). The most that the generality of believers, and their teachers, know of this sublime prospect is that "going to heaven" is looked forward to as the happy lot of all the redeemed. This expectation is entertained on the ground that Christ is trusted as Redeemer, though the soul may have no acquaintance whatever with Him as Melchizedek. In the former office the Lord does indeed secure to the believer pardon, deliverance from eternal doom, and the new nature; but it is as the heavenly Man, the Royal Priest, the Ruler of that upper world that He has authority to introduce men of the earth to that heavenly realm, to bring them to God in His own proper dwelling-place.

10. The writer of Hebrews was concerned with a "salvation which was first spoken through the Lord" and was confirmed by them that had heard Him, and attested by God at Pentecost (Heb. 2: 3, 4). It is clear that the doctrine of forgiveness of sins through atoning sacrifice was not first announced by Christ. It had been declared from the beginning of human history when God accepted Abel on that ground, and it had been elaborated and enforced by the Mosaic ritual. And the doctrine of a new birth leading to a new life had been declared by the prophets, which Nicodemus, an official teacher of Israel, ought to have known (John 3: 10). What, then, characterized the ministry of the Lord Jesus which was a new development of salvation? For our present purpose it had two chief features. First, it did not stay at the aspect of the Old Testament that God descended to deal graciously with man as on earth; but the emphasis was that men could get to know Him as *Father*, and as the Father who is *in heaven*. More than twenty times is this declared in Matthew alone. Secondly, the Lord emphasized that those who would espouse His cause, with the loss and opposition this would certainly bring, should have a great reward *in heaven* (Matt. 5: 12; etc., etc.). In other words, the ideal Melchizedek, while yet on earth, was offering to men the blessing which the earlier Melchizedek had pronounced on Abraham, which was additional to all his earthly prospects.

11. The diligent must study this throughout the Gospels. It was Christ's main message. To the "little flock", which few alone would accept His terms, it is the Father's good pleasure to *give the kingdom*. To give a person a kingdom is to confer on him royal estate and authority (Luke 12: 32; comp. 19: 15; Dan. 5: 31, one man to rule millions). The grand aggregate of the saved of all the ages will not be a "little flock". One group of them alone is described as "a great multitude that no man could

number" (Rev. 7: 9). Were all the saved to reign, it would be a kingdom of sovereigns without subjects. Not all the saved will dwell in heaven. There is to be a new, eternal earth with saved nations on it (Rev. 21: 1-5, 24-26). And as the Lord was about to leave the disciples to face the stern conflict of faith, as His representatives in this hostile world, He said: "I go to prepare a place for you" in my Father's house, and will surely come again to take you thither; that is, that they might behold His glory and, yet more, might share it (John 17: 22-24). This unique conception the apostles understood well. Paul: "God calleth you through our gospel to the *obtaining of the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ"; "God calleth you into *His own kingdom and glory*" (2 Thess. 2: 14; 1 Thess. 2: 12). So Peter: "The God of all grace calleth you unto *His eternal glory* in Christ. . . . Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure" (1 Pet. 5: 10; 2 Pet. 1: 10). The doctrine that eternal security from perdition is insecure unless the believer gives life-long diligence in securing it is false. The doctrine that the heavenly kingdom and glory is secure without life-long diligence is equally false. The initial, indispensable benefit of deliverance from damnation does not depend on the effort or merit of the saint; but the final benefit, the gaining the prize of the high calling of God, the sharing in the regal glory of the Son of God, in His own world above, does demand the entire and unceasing devotion of the disciple, through the inward grace that is secured by constant faith. To this the New Testament bears repeated and emphatic testimony, though too many ignore or deny its searching witness. There is no "if" attached to justification or eternal life, they are free gifts upon repentance and faith; there is no *post*-regeneration privilege that is without an "if", stated or implied.

12. This is seen in the case of Abraham. At what point in Abraham's career did Melchizedek meet him and bless him? The writer of Hebrews particularly points out that it was as he was "returning from the slaughter of the kings" (Heb. 7: 1). Four monarchs, then supreme in the Middle East, had joined forces to reassert their authority over five insubordinate rulers. They had succeeded, had ravaged wide and wealthy territories, and were returning home laden with booty and flushed with victory. Abraham, the man of faith in God Most High, ventured to follow and attack them with a puny Gideon's force of 318 men, plus a few neighbours. This desperate venture succeeded, the captives taken were released and the spoils recovered. It was at this point that

the representative of heaven came forth and blessed him.

Let the careful student now search the New Testament to see how often and how plainly the heavenly glories are spoken of as the reward of faithful service in the wars of the Lord. Let him hear that noble warrior Paul, as he lays down his life in his final battle, cry: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 7, 8). Let him attend diligently to the final words of the Lord speaking from heaven to His people on earth: "*He that conquereth*, I will give *to him* to sit down with Me in My throne, as I also conquered, and sat down with My Father in His throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 3: 21). This is Melchizedek blessing Abraham the soldier, the liberator of captives. What captives of sin and Satan have I set free by spiritual warfare?

13. The narrative emphasizes another dominant quality of Abraham at that crucial hour, even his *absolute separation from the world*. The king of Sodom by defeat had lost all, subjects and property. Abraham had recovered all, and by the usage of war they were now his subjects and riches. The king proposes a compromise: will Abraham surrender to him the persons, that he may rebuild his kingdom, while Abraham retains the spoils? It would have been generous enough had Abraham agreed; but this servant of God Most High had been in contact with the Possessor of heaven and earth, the true and absolute Owner of all the persons and all the property, and had gained His mind upon the matter. He had taken oath to Him that he would not retain the smallest item of Sodom's wealth or people. The reason is most noteworthy: "lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (Gen. 14: 21-24). The heavenly man declines to be enriched by the men of the world. It may be imagined that the king was piqued at what he might consider Abraham's haughtiness; but to counter this God said to His faithful servant, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy reward shall be exceeding great" (Gen. 15: 1).

This, then, is a quality required in the aspirant for the heavenly portion. Let the reader search the New Testament for the relation to the godless expected of the followers of Christ, especially studying John 14-17. There is no inherent evil in threads and shoelatches, save as they are connected with Sodom; but the man of heaven has heard the call, "Come ye out from among them and

be ye separate, saith the Lord, and *touch no unclean thing*, and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6: 17-7: 1).

A well-known philanthropist justified his street collections by the plea that as the world benefited by his work the world should pay for it. But the world greatly benefited by the toil and bravery of Abraham, yet he would take nothing whatever from it. He would not retain the spoils on the specious plea that he would use them in good and pious works, which the king of Sodom would not do. The spoils of five cities must have been vast, but the man of heaven surrendered all without a care. To the man of the world he said: It shall not be said that thou hast made Abraham rich! The pleasures, glories, and riches of Egypt were incalculable, as he may see who goes through the jewel room of the Cairo Museum; but Moses readily renounced all, for he had seen the heavenly portion that could be thus secured (Heb. 11: 24-27).

14. This leads to the third characteristic of the heavenly man. *He no more regards the earth as his sphere.* He looks on no portion of land as his country. His heart seeks the world above as his native land. On the whole earth he feels and owns himself a pilgrim, a passer-by, an alien by his heavenly birth. In the course of life's pilgrimage he may, as Abraham did, pitch his tent here or there for a longer or shorter time, but the home of his heart is where Christ is. Let Lot settle in Sodom, live there a righteous life, seek to better its moral state: at the last the Sodomites will despise and assault him; and when the city is destroyed he will escape with the skin of his teeth, to end his days discreditably. Abraham, on the mountain tops, moves among the godless as a pilgrim; buys a bit of land when he needs it, though by grant from God it is already his; he bows politely to the sons of Heth, confesses himself but a stranger and sojourner among them who makes no claims; and is honoured with the reply: "Hear us, my lord: thou art a *prince of God* among us" (Gen. 23: 6). Not in vain had he walked among them as a servant of God Most High, rejecting their false gods and condemning by his ways their wicked lives. *It is of such* it is written that "God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11: 16). This applies to all such men of pre-Christian times as the passage cited shows.

15. Such are the heirs of God's own kingdom and glory. In Romans 4 and Galatians 3 believers are regarded as heirs with Abraham of righteousness by faith and the gift of the Spirit; which, however, may be their blessing as godly men of the earth,

as will be the lot of the saved of Israel and the nations in the new earth. But in Ephesians and Colossians they are regarded, as God sees them in Christ, as raised to the heavenly world and seated with Christ where He now is. In Hebrews they are viewed as "holy brethren, *partakers* of a *heavenly* calling" (Heb. 3: 1), and are earnestly warned lest they slip back and lose their highest dignities. To this end they must pass beyond Abraham and be joined to Melchizedek: they must go beyond the chief man of God on earth, and God's covenant with him for earthly status and privilege, and must devote themselves to Melchizedek the Priest-King of heaven. By giving to Him the tithe they thus own His right to all, and in return secure His blessing in His own heavenly world.

16. Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine to refresh Abram. The last night before His sacrifice of Himself, Jesus gave bread and wine to the faithful band that had stuck to Him through thick and thin, and connected this with their place in His kingdom and glory, saying that He would not again drink of that wine "until that day I drink it new with you in *My Father's kingdom*" (Matt. 26: 29). Melchizedek and Christ both looked forward, beyond any earthly kingdom of God, to the kingdom of the Father in the Father's world on high. It was as about to resume the glory which He had renounced that Jesus spoke, and invited His followers to share now His reproach and sufferings that they might at last share His glory as Melchizedek.

And when the roar of battle shall have passed,
 And every foe is trampled down at last,
 Then, as we near the heavenly Salem's height,
 With many a captive freed by desperate fight,

The King of righteousness shall swift appear
 With mightiest blessings war-worn hearts to cheer:
 He meets us on the way—O happy lot!
 Now toil and strife and pain are all forgot.

Sumptuous the banquet spread by love divine;
 Melchizedek brings heavenly bread and wine;
 The Prince of peace with stately grace attends
 To serve His faithful servants as His friends.

Why as we feast upon the food of God
 Will thought unbid retrace the way we trod?
 This Bread that feeds us through eternal years
 We ate on earth, oft moistened with our tears.

Why as we drink the wine that cheers the heart
 Do visions of the thirsty desert start?
 This blood-red wine of heaven, so rich, so rare,
 Is strangely like the living water there.

Not always as we trod that desert way,
 Regaled with angel's food from day to day,
 Did we appreciate the Father's grace
 Who sent our Portion from before His face.

But here we fully know as we are known,
 And here our oft-dimmed eyes are clearly shown
 Christ was our sustenance the journey through—
 The Bread of God is old, yet ever new.

Yes, He Who satisfies the Father's love,
 He is the joy of all the hosts above ;
 Christ is our strength through all the vale of tears,
 And Christ our life through heaven's unclouded years.

Memorable are the words of Viscountess Powerscourt that a Christian is "not one who looks up from earth to heaven, but one who looks down from heaven on earth". The secret of the heavenly life is loving heart-occupation with Christ *where He now is*. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even JESUS ; Who was faithful to Him that appointed Him. . . Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 3: 1, 2 ; 12: 2).

Wimborne, Dorset.