

The Levitical Priesthood and the order of Melchizedek

The advent of Jesus Christ and the successful completion of his mission on earth, inaugurated a new order in the relationship between God and His people. The fact of the Scriptures which no one can contradict is that the levitical priesthood was only a type or figure of the new order established by Jesus Christ.

The Bible shows that the early patriarchs such as Abel, Seth, Noah, Abraham, worshipped God without the benefit of formal institutions as priests, temples and the ceremonies that are laid down in the law of Moses. Rather, God emphasized faith, obedience and sincerity expressed in acts of reverence for Him, such as setting up of altars for the making of sacrifices to Him.. See - Genesis 4:1-8, 26; 8:20; 28:10-22; etc.

However, the Passover night when God Almighty slew the first born of the Egyptians, He told Moses thus, "Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine." (Exodus 13:2) He also stated, "all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD." (Numbers 3:13. See also Exodus 13:1-22) In course of time, it was the Levites who were consecrated and dedicated to the service of God in place of the firstborn, among the children of Israel. When the number of all the males among the Levites from a month old and upward was taken, they were found to be 22,000 whereas, the number of all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, was found to be 22, 273. For the 273 males by which the first born among the people of Israel exceeded the population of the Levites, God directed that they should be redeemed with money which should be paid to Aaron and his sons. - Numbers 3:12,13, 39-49.

The Levitical order was thus instituted. God told Moses His servant: "But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle." (Numbers 1:50) The Levitical order consisted of all the descendants of Levi's three sons, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Aaron, elder brother of Moses and Miriam, was son of Amram, the son of Kohath. He and his sons constituted the priestly order. (Numbers 1:50; Exodus 28:1) But generally, the Kohathites were in charge of the ark, the table, the candlestick, the altars, the vessels of the sanctuary and so on. (Numbers 3:31) The Gershonites had to carry the tent-hangings and curtains, (Numbers 4:22-28) while the sons of Merari were in charge of the boards, bars and pillars of the tabernacle. - Numbers 4:29-33.

The high priest was the head of all the priests and the head of all religious matters and judged the people. (Deuteronomy 17:8-12; 19:17; 21:5; 33:8,10; Ezekiel 44:24; 1 Chronicles 23:24-32) He entered the sanctuary once a year to make atonement for the sins of the whole people. (Leviticus 16:2, etc.) Thus, generally, to the priests and the rest of the Levites belonged the office of preserving, transcribing and interpreting the law. (Deuteronomy 17:9-12; 31:26) Concerning their duties it is written: "And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to

discern between the unclean and the clean. And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; and they shall judge it according to my judgments: and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall hallow my sabbaths.” - Ezekiel 44:23, 24; See also Leviticus 10:10.

It was the will of the Almighty God that the Levites should be fully devoted to their ministry, and so He made provision for their maintenance. Though they had no territorial possessions, they were to receive from the rest of their brethren, the tithes of the produce of the land and took charge of other offerings as a recognition of their higher consecration. - Numbers 18: 8-14, 21,24,26; Leviticus 27: 30; Deuteronomy 12: 19;14: 27; Nehemiah 10:37.

Thus, the Levites educated the people and trained them in morality and religion as those set apart by God for that purpose. Concerning the duty of expounding the laws of God to the people, the Bible says, “For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.” - Malachi 2:7.

It could be seen therefore that, following the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, and the subsequent establishment of the nation of Israel, God Almighty caused to be established a formal body of priests to minister to the spiritual needs of the people and to teach them His ways.

The Order of Melchizedek

The appearance of Melchizedek “the Priest of God Most High”, to Abraham, long before the nation of Israel was established, signified that God would in course of time establish a new order which would be superior and wider in scope than that of the Levites, as it is written, “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.” (Genesis 14: 18-20) Several years later, David the prophet was inspired by God to prophesy that there would in course of time be a priest of a system different from the Levitical priesthood, as it is written: “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” - Psalm 110:4.

Paul the apostle in his writing concerning Melchizedek, revealed that he was not an ordinary man but an angel who appeared to Abraham, who, having fulfilled his mission, dematerialized. (Hebrews 7: 1-3) The fact which no one can gainsay is that Melchizedek, who met Abraham was the chief of the angels of God, the Logos, who was later sent to the world by the Almighty Father and known as Jesus Christ. By his appearance to Abraham as a priest who was competent to receive tithes, God had established a pattern of priesthood as distinct from that of Aaron, which he the Logos would in due course assume fully for the benefit of humankind. (Hebrews 7: 4-7) Truly, when Jesus Christ came to this world he told the Jews, “**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.** (John 8: 54-59) It follows therefore that it was God Almighty, who knowing the end from the beginning, Who

caused Melchizedek to appear to Abraham as a priest in whose order, which is far superior to that of Aaron, His Son would be ordained a priest everlastingly for the salvation of mankind. - Hebrews 7: 11-17, 21-25.

Following the death and resurrection of Christ, by which he assumed office as High Priest of God Almighty, the Ministry was no longer restricted to the Levites but to all those it has pleased God to call from any part of the world. During his days on earth, the the Ministry was made up of himself and the 12 apostles. They had no other work than that of going about to preach the gospel. (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14,15, 38,39; Acts 10:38-40) The apostles, of whom the 12 are the foundation members, are thus, first in line in the Ministry of Christ and are the “able Ministers of the New Testament”. (Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 6:12,13; 2 Corinthians 3:6-18; Acts 1:14,15. See also Isaiah 61:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 20:6) That was why St. Paul wrote, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” - 1 Timothy 1:12,13.

Knowing the sacredness of his calling, St. Paul called it “an holy calling”. (1 Timothy 1:9) and spoke severally of the grace given to him to “be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.” (Romans 15:15, 16) He also stated “Let a man so account of us, (the apostles) as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God”. (1 Corinthians 4:1) There were also fully devoted men such as Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Epaphras who worked with Paul as ministers. - Philippians 2:19-24; Romans 16:21. Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 1:7. It is because there is a separate body of ministers, called the Ministry of Christ, that St. Paul spoke “of the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints”. He therefore charged them to “submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth”. (1 Corinthians 16:15, 16)

Not being anointed, these ministers did not have the high level of faith and understanding as the apostles and so needed to be exhorted from time to time. Thus St. Paul urged those who have fully devoted their lives to the work of God such as Timothy to strive to “make fool proof” of or “fulfil” their Ministry. - 2 Timothy 4:5; Colossians 4:17.

It could be seen that how erroneous is the view that the need for a body of ministers or pastors had become obsolete in the Christian era. The truth is that right from the time of Moses, there has never been a time when the people of God were without visible shepherds, men who were fully devoted to the work of God, and thus were free from the distractions which the search for economic pursuits entail. Hence St. Paul stated, “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of

men.” (1 Corinthians 7:20-23) That was why St. Paul said that for the sake of the gospel he had “suffered the loss of all things” -Philippians 3:8.

It is because there is a separate order of ministers in the order of Melchizedek that St. Paul wrote the qualifications list in his letters to Timothy and Titus. One who desires the office of a bishop, Apostle Paul said, must be vigilant, self-controlled, knowledgeable, given to hospitality and apt to teach. He should not be greedy, a drunkard or quarrelsome and so on. (1 Timothy 3:1-8) In his letter to Titus apostle Paul added that “...If any be blameless, not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate ...” such could be appointed as ministers. - Titus 1:5-9.

The ministers of Christ who are not of the class of the apostles have to undergo training to be taught by the apostles or other elders in the church to become full-fledged ministers. (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:13-16) It is for the purpose of providing such training that Salem City was built by St. Urhobo in 1948. In his booklet, THE “LION OF SALEM CITY, Mr. Smart Ebbi, a journalist stated that St. Urhobo had recently completed the Bethel Home – the official residence of the GKS in Salem City at Mile 2, Warri-Sapele Road, Warri, the headquarters of the GKS where kingdom servants and Ministers of the gospel are trained before they are sent out to Christianise the ungodly.” - WEST AFRICAN PILOT TUESDAY FEBRUARY 13, 1951

Support for the work

At the time of the early church the apostles themselves were supported by donations from people, as it is written: “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.” (Acts 4:34-37) It should be noted that the donations were given to the apostles, who were heading the ministry at that time, who then gave directives as to how they should be used. We should recall that the apostles gave directive on choosing of the seven men to ensure provisions were shared equally while St. Paul gave directive “concerning the collection for the saints” to the churches in those days. - 1 Corinthians 16:1-4.

To further buttress that fact that what happened in the Levitical priesthood under the law of Moses was only a type of what obtains in the Christian era, St. Paul drew an analogy between what obtained under the Aaaronic priesthood and the Christian era, stating: “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:13,14) St. Paul spent time in his letter to the Christians at Corinth to educate people who argue that the Ministry of Christ has no right to collect and use

tithes and offerings from the flock. He stated: "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope." (1 Corinthians 9:9,10) He asked, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ." -1 Corinthians 9:11,12.

Jesus Christ and tithing

When in Matthew 23:23, Jesus Christ rebuked the Pharisees for their undue emphasis on tithing, he did not by that mean that Christians should not pay tithes. He only pointed out that they should NOT stress tithe payments to the neglect of other more important requirements for salvation. The *King James Version* renders the text thus: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." (Matthew 23:23)

Again, Jesus Christ made us to understand that payment of tithes is not an end in itself but should be based on true penitence, humility and fear of God, not self-justification and self-righteousness as spelt out in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, - Luke 18:9-14.

The account of Malachi 3:7-12 shows clearly that the Lord's Ministry is the "storehouse" where all the tithes and offering should be paid by the faithful for their blessings and salvation in the end by the grace of God. Thus, right from the time of Christ, the disciples were making contributions to support the work. (Luke 8:3) In the time of the early Church people sold lands, and houses and gave the money to the apostles to enable them carry on with the work of the ministry. (Acts 4:33-37) It should be noted that St. Paul commended the disciples at Macedonia and Achaia for their contributions "for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem". - Romans 15:26 See also Romans 12:13; Hebrews 6:10.

Those who are not fully devoted as ministers are required to support the upkeep of the members of the ministry with their tithes and offerings. Our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles, who had left all and followed Christ, were supported by the gifts and goodwill of his disciples and other people of goodwill. – Mark 3:13-19; Luke 8:3; Matthew 26:6-12; John 12:1-6; Luke 18:28; Matthew 25:40.

From all that has been said, it is evident that a body of fully devoted ministers who make up the Ministry of Christ still obtains in the Christian era, the order of Melchizekek. These ministers are the ones to direct and teach the rest of the congregation. Much is expected of them. If they do the work faithfully they would receive blessing, if not they will get even greater punishment. If not they would be punished. "For though I preach

the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" declared St. Paul, adding, "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me." (1 Corinthians 9:16-17; See also Luke 12:47,48)

The work of those not fully devoted is to support the work of the ministers so that they would do the work "with joy, and not with grief". (Hebrews 13:17) That is the order. The Bible says, "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit." - 1 Thessalonians 4:8.