This monograph is a revised version of a doctoral dissertation directed by James VanderKam and accepted by the University of Notre Dame in 2005. It is divided into five chapters. The first outlines the presentation of Jesus as High Priest in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The second discusses previous theories of the background of the motif. The third reviews traditions about a messianic High Priest in Second Temple Judaism. The fourth discusses traditions about Melchizedek, and the fifth discusses the priestly Christology of Hebrews in light of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

While the Epistle to the Hebrews supplies the frame for this study, the core (pp. 64–190) is a review of material from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The second chapter considers various theories of the background of priestly Christology (original to Hebrews, early Christian exegesis, Gnosticism, Philo) and finds them lacking. Certainly, none of them now commands a consensus. The relevance of the Scrolls had been noted already in the 1950s, notably by Yigael Yadin, but had also been disputed. The publication of 11QMelchizedek revived the discussion. Mason gives a fair summary of all the major contributions to the debate. Most scholars have regarded Melchizedek in the Scrolls as a heavenly being. Most have also understood Melchizedek in Hebrews as heavenly, but the latter position has been challenged by F. L. Horton.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide an extensive overview of messianism in the Scrolls. The presentation is not especially original, but it is very balanced and restrained. Mason is skeptical about theories of chronological development. He accepts the usual view of two messiahs, but takes due note of the objections. He refrains from pushing the evidence of fragmentary texts such as 4Q491 11 I, 8–19 (which speaks of a figure enthroned in heaven) and 4Q541 (4QapocrLevi-b? ar). He dwells at some length on the antecedents of priestly messianism in the Aramaic Levi Document and Jubilees. The discussion of Melchizedek traditions is likewise moderate in approach. He accepts that at least one passage, possibly more, in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice appear to identify Melchizedek as an angelic priest in the heavenly temple. He also accepts, with all due caution, the restoration of Melchizedek in 4QAmram. Again, arguing with caution, he concludes that it seems clear that the author of 11QMelchizedek is identifying Melchizedek with elohim, while his priestly character is implied by the reference to the Day of Atonement.

In the brief concluding chapter Mason argues that ‘the theme of a priestly service—even described as heavenly—at the decisive point in history binds these traditions’ (p. 198). While he recognises that some differences are evident, he argues (p. 199):

the author’s conception of Jesus as a heavenly priest was prompted at least in part by an intellectual context in which a priest called mashiach was expected and the priestly endowment of Levi in the Hebrew Scriptures was understood in heavenly terms. Jesus is not the ‘messiah of Aaron’ of Qumran or the Levi of Jubilees and the Aramaic Levi Document, but those conceptions—along with the broader heavenly temple cult supposed in Jewish apocalyptic texts—provided a precedent for the author of Hebrews to conceive of Jesus similarly as a priest making atonement and eternal intercession in the heavenly sanctuary.

With regard to the comparison between the depictions of Melchizedek in the Scrolls and in Hebrews, Mason concedes that certain differences exist. In the Scrolls, Melchizedek is both a heavenly priest and an eschatological warrior. The function of warrior/judge is absent in Hebrews, both for Melchizedek and for Jesus, but they share
the depiction of Melchizedek as an eternal, presumably angelic, figure (cf. Heb. 7:3). While many scholars see the argument of Hebrews 1, that Jesus was superior to the angels, as an impediment to any dependence on the Scrolls, Mason argues that it can be read as a point in favour of a relationship: ‘The eternal, divine Son was the model, and the angelic Melchizedek was the copy who encountered Abraham and established a non-Levitical priestly precedent in ancient Israel. This in turn prepared the way for the incarnate Son—both the model for Melchizedek yet now also resembling him—to be comprehended as a priest’ (p. 202). He concludes that Hebrews’ presentation of Jesus as a priest finds its closest parallels at Qumran.

Mason writes clearly and is cautious and judicious in his scholarly judgments. His book is a nice summary of the evidence for priestly messianism, and makes a persuasive case for the relevance of this material for the interpretation of Hebrews.

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Five of the eight chapters in this collection of articles have appeared before in books and journals. They have established Ruzer’s reputation as a perceptive and subtle reader of the New Testament; their collection here with some other studies confirms that reputation. Ruzer’s voice is fresh and distinctive because he explicitly seeks to challenge those who view the early Christian exegesis evident in the New Testament as a first and major step towards the differentiation of Christians from Jews. Whilst fully acknowledging how the interpretation of authoritative scripture can be undertaken to establish positions of power and modes of self-identity, Ruzer senses, correctly in my view, that what is evident in much of the scriptural exegesis in the New Testament is part and parcel of what belongs to a Jewish milieu and is representative of an inner-Jewish phase of nascent Christian self-understanding. This is not to assert, of course, that all the New Testament authors were members of Jewish schools of interpretation, but to affirm that when they base their arguments on scriptural antecedents what they write is more often than not part of an ongoing set of Jewish discourses, amongst which Pharisaic views have pride of place.

Even if the messianic claims about Jesus in the New Testament that are based on scripture are consistently different from those of other exegetical traditions, the texts and methods used often correspond more or less precisely with those used by other Jewish groups. But the commonalities with other examples of Jewish exegesis are perhaps most apparent in the non-messianic pericopae in the New Testament. It is perhaps no surprise that the majority of what Ruzer presents concerns halakhic and theological matters, topics of behaviour and belief, in which Christology plays a less explicit role. Thus, for example, he has an enlightening rehearsal of the midrashic techniques in the antitheses of Matthew 5; he gives a profound reading of the ‘idiosyncratic’ shift from ‘love your neighbour’ to ‘love your enemy’ that links it with developments in a similar direction in other Jewish sources (but without any mention of Gordon Zerbe’s 1993 monograph on non-retaliation); he reads the double love precept (Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18) comparatively; he offers an insightful exposition of ‘proper’ attitudes to marriage and divorce in which Paul in particular is used to illuminate the meaning of the Damascus Document; he investigates neatly the moral proclivities of body parts, arguing that in some ways Paul’s overall positive view of their potential anticipated that of later rabbis; and he discusses the collective significance of rereading the new