

Lesson 6 – Where Did Melchizedek Come From?

Background (Gen 14:18-20; Ps 110:4; Heb 5:6; 6:19-20; 7:1-28)

Genesis 14:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Why is this unsolved?

Melchizedek appears and disappears suddenly, with nothing said about his birth or death, ancestry or descent, in a manner which declares his superiority to Abram and, by implication, to the Aaronic priesthood descended from Abram.

Items of Note

1. His Name (Gen 14:18; Heb 7:1-3)

- King of Righteousness (מֶלֶכִּי־צְדָקָה)
- Literally “My king is right”
- Rom 3:21-26

2. His Offices (Gen 14:18; Heb 7:1-28)

- King of Salem / Salem (שָׁלֵם) = Peace
- *Isa 32:17; Rom 5:1
- Priest of God

3. His Location (Gen 14:18; Heb 7:2)

- Salem = Jerusalem / Throne of David
- *2Sa 7:12-13; Psa 89:3-4; Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Jer 23:5-6; Luke 1:26-33

4. His Ministering (Gen 14:18-20)

- Bread and Wine
- *Mt 26:26–28; 1Co 11:23-26
- Benedictions
- *Blessings to Abram & God

5. His Receiving (Gen 14:20)

- Received a “tithe” or tenth of everything from Abram (Heb 7:1-10)
- What does this imply about his relationship to Abram?

6. His Predecessor (Heb 7:1-3)

- Melchizedek = By way of Record: “without father or mother”
- Jesus = Virgin Birth
- *Isa 7:14; Mat 1:18-25
- Neither received priesthood due to their ancestry. It was from God.*

7. His Successor (Heb 7:1-3)

- Melchizedek = By way of Record: “[without] genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life”
- Jesus = Priest “Forever” (Ps 110:4)

Theories

The Second Book of Enoch (pseudepigrapha) - Approximately 1st century AD. The last section of the work, the Exaltation of Melchizedek, tells how Melchizedek was born of a virgin, Sofonim, the wife of Nir, a brother of Noah. The child came out from his mother after she had died and sat on the bed beside her corpse, already physically developed, clothed, speaking and blessing the Lord, and marked with the badge of priesthood. Forty days later, Melchizedek was taken by the archangel Gabriel (Michael in some manuscripts) to the Garden of Eden and was thus preserved from the Deluge without having to be in Noah's Ark.

Dead Sea Scrolls - A fragment of a text about Melchizedek was found in Cave 11 at Qumran. In this eschatological text, Melchizedek is seen as a divine being and Hebrew titles such as Elohim are applied to him. According to this text Melchizedek will proclaim the "Day of Atonement" and he will atone for the people who are predestined to him. He also will judge the peoples.

The Qumran Scrolls, also indicate that Melchizedek was used as a name of the Archangel Michael, interpreted as a heavenly priest; Michael as Melchi-zedek contrast with Belial, who is given the name of Melchi-resha "king of wickedness"

Rabbinic Literature - Chazalic literature unanimously identify Melchizedek as Shem son of Noah (Targum Yonathan to Genesis chap. 14, Genesis Rabbah 46:7, Babylonian Talmud to Tractate Nedarim 32b). Some chronological works have identified that Shem would have been 465 years old at the time and Abram was 75 years of age.

Messiah – Some believe that Melchizedek and the Christ are one and the same, and that in Genesis 14 the Messiah appeared to Abram after the battle. This comes from a literal reading of Hebrews 7:3 – “He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.”

What Really Matters

Psalm 110:4 (ESV)

⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

Hebrews 4:14–16 (ESV)

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Background

Psalm 110 (ESV)

A Psalm of David.

¹ The Lord says to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

² The Lord sends forth from Zion
your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

³ Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of your power,
in holy garments;
from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours.

⁴ The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of **Melchizedek.**”

⁵ The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶ He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter chiefs
over the wide earth.

⁷ He will drink from the brook by the way;
therefore he will lift up his head.

Hebrews 4:14–5:10 (ESV)

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

¹ For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;
⁶ as he says also in another place,
“You are a priest forever,
after the order of **Melchizedek**.”

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of **Melchizedek**.

Hebrews 6:13–7:28 (ESV)

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” ¹⁵ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. ¹⁶ For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. ¹⁷ So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of **Melchizedek**.

¹ For this **Melchizedek**, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. ³ He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

⁴ See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵ And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶ But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. ⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when **Melchizedek** met him.

¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise

after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of **Melchizedek**, ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, ²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

“The Lord has sworn
and will not change his mind,
‘You are a priest forever.’ ”

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

MELCHIZEDEK (Heb. *malkîšedeq*, ‘Sedeq is (my) king’ or, as in Heb. 7:2, ‘king of righteousness’). He was the king of Salem (probably Jerusalem) and priest of ‘God Most High’ *’ēl ’elyôn*) who greeted Abram on his return from the rout of *Chedorlaomer and his allies, presented him with bread and wine, blessed him in the name of God Most High and received from him a tenth part of the booty which had been taken from the enemy (Gn. 14:18ff.). Abram thereupon declined the king of Sodom’s offer to let him keep all the booty apart from the recovered prisoners,

swearing by God Most High that he would allow no man to have the honour of making him rich (v. 22, where *MT*, but not Samaritan, *Ixx*, or *Pesh.*, adds *Yahweh* before *'ēl 'elyôn*, thus emphasizing that the two names denote one and the same God). The incident is probably to be dated in the Middle Bronze Age (*Abraham). Melchizedek's name may be compared with that of a later king of Jerusalem, Adoni-zedek (Jos. 10:1ff.).

In Ps. 110:4 a Davidic king is acclaimed by divine oath as 'a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'. The background of this acclamation is provided by David's conquest of Jerusalem c. 1000 bc, by virtue of which David and his house became heirs to Melchizedek's dynasty of priest-kings. The king so acclaimed was identified by Jesus and his contemporaries as the Davidic Messiah (Mk. 12:35ff.). If Jesus is the Davidic Messiah, he must be the 'priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'. This inevitable conclusion is drawn by the writer to the Hebrews, who develops his theme of our Lord's heavenly priesthood on the basis of Ps. 110:4, expounded in the light of Gn. 14:18ff., where Melchizedek appears and disappears suddenly, with nothing said about his birth or death, ancestry or descent, in a manner which declares his superiority to Abram and, by implication, to the Aaronic priesthood descended from Abram. The superiority of Christ and his new order to the levitical order of OT times is thus established (Heb. 5:6–11; 6:20–7:28).

A fragmentary text from Cave 11 at Qumran (11QMelch.) envisages Melchizedek as divinely appointed judge in the heavenly court, expounding Pss. 7:7ff.; 82:1ff. in this sense (*cf.* A. S. van der Woude, 'Melchisedech als himmlische Erlösergestalt', *OTS* 14, 1965, pp. 354ff.).

Bibliography. Commentaries on Genesis, Psalms, Hebrews; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, *NIC*, 1964, pp. 94ff., 133ff.; H. H. Rowley, 'Melchizedek and Zadok', *Festschrift für A. Bertholet* (ed. W. Baumgartner *et al.*), 1950, pp. 461ff.; A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, 1955; O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 1959, pp. 83ff.; J. A. Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the NT*, 1971, pp. 221–269; F. L. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 1976; B. A. Demarest, *A History of Interpretation of Hebrews 7:1–10 from the Reformation to the Present*, 1976.¹

Melchizedek—king of righteousness, the king of Salem (q.v.). All we know of him is recorded in Gen. 14:18–20. He is subsequently mentioned only once in the Old Testament, in Ps. 110:4. The typical significance of his history is set forth in detail in the Epistle to the Hebrews, ch. 7. The apostle there points out the superiority of his priesthood to that of Aaron in these several respects, (1) Even Abraham paid him tithes; (2) he blessed Abraham; (3) he is the type of a Priest who lives for ever; (4) Levi, yet unborn, paid him tithes in the person of Abraham; (5) the permanence of his priesthood in Christ implied the abrogation of the Levitical system; (6) he was made priest not without an oath; and (7) his priesthood can neither be transmitted nor interrupted by death: "this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood."

¹ Bruce, F. F. (1996). Melchizedek. In (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman, Eds.) *New Bible dictionary*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The question as to who this mysterious personage was has given rise to a great deal of modern speculation. It is an old tradition among the Jews that he was Shem, the son of Noah, who may have survived to this time. Melchizedek was a Canaanitish prince, a worshipper of the true God, and in his peculiar history and character an instructive type of our Lord, the great High Priest (Heb. 5:6, 7; 6:20). One of the Amarna tablets is from Ebed-Tob, king of Jerusalem, the successor of Melchizedek, in which he claims the very attributes and dignity given to Melchizedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews.²

Melchizedek (מֶלְכִי־צְדֵק, *malki-tsedek*). The king of Salem and priest of God Most High. Blesses Abram in Gen 14, referenced in Psa 110 in God's promise to bless the Davidic king, and invoked in the letter to the Hebrews to affirm the priestly status of Christ.

Introduction

Genesis 14:18–20, Psa 110:4, and Heb 5–7 mention Melchizedek, whose name means “righteous king” or “my king is righteousness.” Scripture does not include details about Melchizedek's background and identity; as a result, he is one of the Bible's most mysterious characters.

Melchizedek in Judaism

Jewish tradition surrounding Melchizedek originates with two Old Testament passages and is developed further by a number of extrabiblical sources. He is introduced in Gen 14 as the priest-king of Salem who offers bread and wine to Abram, along with a blessing. Psalm 110 references him again in a divine promise to bring victory to Israel's king. Both appearances are brief, leading to a wide range of speculation in Jewish writings from the Second Temple and early Christian eras.

Old Testament

Genesis 14. Melchizedek first appears after Abram's victory over Chedorlaomer (Gen 14:1–12). The king of Sodom and Melchizedek, “king of Salem” and “priest of God Most High” (Gen 14:18 ESV), approaches the victorious patriarch. Melchizedek shows hospitality to Abram and pronounces a poetic blessing upon him. Abram responds by giving him a 10th of his spoils (Gen 14:18–20). Genesis provides no additional details about the identity of Melchizedek and doesn't explain how a Canaanite city-king came to be a priest of God Most High. Further, Melchizedek does not appear in any genealogy.

The historical data contained in the first half of Gen 14 is obscure, making it difficult to date Melchizedek's story and raising doubts about its historicity (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 134–35). Abram's discourse with Melchizedek also gives a composite feel to the chapter, as it interrupts Abram's interaction with the king of Sodom (Gen 14:17, 21–24). This may indicate that the Melchizedek episode is a later addition to the text.

² Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton's Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

It is unclear, however, why the text was added. Von Rad argues that a later editor added the exchange to lend support to the Davidic Dynasty by connecting Abraham with a king in Salem (i.e., Jerusalem; *Genesis: A Commentary*, 180–81). Westermann focuses on the religious language of the passage—none of which fits within the patriarchal period—arguing that an editor included the episode to affirm the paying of tithes and syncretize the Canaanite deity *El Elyon* (“God Most High”) with the God of Israel (*Genesis 12–36*, 203–05). While Brueggemann also believes that the Melchizedek episode is a later addition, he cautions that “our knowledge of association between Israelite tradition and Canaanite religion is as thin as our knowledge of the political history reflected in verses 1–11” (*Genesis*, 135).

McKeown focuses on the function of Melchizedek within the narrative, drawing on the contrasting parallels between the kings of Salem and Sodom. Both kings approach Abram after the battle, but only Melchizedek comes bearing gifts. The first words of the priest-king form a poetic blessing, while the king of Sodom issues a command: “Give me the persons” (Gen 14:21 ESV). Within the broader context of Genesis, Melchizedek reminds the reader that Abram has been blessed by God. The character turns Abram’s victory into “a sign of God’s ability to deliver on the promises that he has made” (McKeown, *Genesis*, 88).

Psalm 110. Melchizedek’s only other Old Testament appearance is in Psa 110, a psalm addressed to the king of God’s people. In it, the LORD promises to bring victory in battle and to establish the king as “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psa 110:4 ESV). The psalmist then declares that God will stand at the right hand of the king, using him to bring judgment upon the nations (Psa 110:5–6).

It is debated whether Psa 110 actually references Melchizedek. Ganerød draws a distinction on the basis of genre. The episode in Genesis is a narrative, and the context clarifies that “Melchizedek” is a personal name. However, the poetry of Psa 110 lacks similar context; because of this, “Melchizedek” could be a formal title meaning “righteous king” (*Abraham and Melchizedek*, 168). Some modern Jewish translations, such as the JPS Tanakh, render Psa 110:4, “You are a priest forever, a rightful king by my decree.”

The parallel between Abram’s divinely sanctioned victory and God’s promise to bless the king of Israel is clear. Haney asserts that the connection to Melchizedek would have been apparent, especially given the political advantage of linking the authority of the Davidic monarch to the Abrahamic traditions of Israel (*Text and Concept Analysis in Royal Psalms*, 117). The evolution of Psa 110, as it was interpreted throughout Jewish history, sheds light on Melchizedek’s own growth from a marginal Canaanite priest-king into an important figure in the eschatological imagination of Israel. Allen estimates that the psalm emerged at some point during the early monarchy—most likely as part of a royal coronation ceremony in Jerusalem (*Psalms 101–150*, 111–12). During the Babylonian exile, the psalm was an expression of faith in God’s promise to redeem Israel and restore the monarchy. By the time it was included within the Psalter, Psa 110 was read as a vision of the kingdom of God, expressing the people’s hope for a Messiah (Waltner, *Psalms*, 539).

This eschatological reading of Psa 110 piqued the curiosity of Jews and later Christians, especially in regard to Melchizedek. Hughes illustrates: “Psalm 110 declared that God was going to do something *new* by bringing into history a priest-king like Melchizedek. His priesthood would last ‘(‘)forever.’ He would be appointed directly by God. A divine oath guaranteed it: ‘(‘)The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind.’ What an intriguing prophecy. God was going to establish a totally new priesthood” (*Genesis*, 215).

Extrabiblical Sources. Although Melchizedek appears in only two texts from the Old Testament, extrabiblical Jewish literature contains many references to the character. Some of these documents aim to fill in gaps left by the biblical narrative, while others present Melchizedek as a semidivine Messianic figure. Pearson observes, “the interpretive imagination devoted to Melchizedek in extrabiblical sources stands in inverse proportion to the sparsity of data found in the Bible about him” (Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 176).

The *Genesis Apocryphon*, a paraphrase of Genesis composed in the second century BC, clarifies Salem as Jerusalem, and attempts to iron out the composite nature of the story by having the two kings meet before journeying together to congratulate Abram (Mason, *You Are a Priest Forever*, 148). Josephus also identifies Salem as Jerusalem and explains that Melchizedek’s name means “righteous king” (Ant. 1.180). He describes Melchizedek as the first priest, founder of Jerusalem, and builder of the first temple (J.W. 6.438).

Philo’s treatment of Melchizedek in his *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis* includes the same etymology used by Josephus, as well as “king of peace” in place of Salem (3.79). He identifies Melchizedek as the divine Logos (3.82) and uses Abram’s payment as justification for tithing (Prelim. Studies, 99). Pseudo-Eupolemus, a Samaritan text which equates Salem with Mount Gerizim, took similar liberties (Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 183).

Melchizedek’s status reaches new heights in Jewish apocalyptic texts. A Qumran document authored in the second century BC, 11QMelch, transforms the priest-king into a semidivine being, referring to him at one point as “God” (2.24–25). The text presents Melchizedek as an eschatological figure, “reserved in heaven till he should appear at the last to establish the true Day of Atonement and usher in the final cosmic Jubilee” (Dunhill, *Covenant and Sacrifice*, 165). *Second Enoch* provides Melchizedek with a miraculous birth narrative. Born posthumously to the barren wife of Noah’s brother, the child is taken into heaven by the archangel Michael for protection from the flood (72:9). The text then predicts that Melchizedek will become “the head of a new kind of priesthood that did not suffer destruction” (Thompson, *Hebrews*, 146). Such imaginative takes on the origin and eschatological significance of Melchizedek are countered by later rabbinical literature. The targums, midrashim, and Talmud typically identify Melchizedek as Shem, clarifying that he is not the royal Messiah (Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 185–86). Dunhill interprets this as an attempt to undercut early Christian speculation about Melchizedek (*Covenant and Sacrifice*, 164–65). Hayward disagrees, arguing that the rabbinical sources draw upon an established tradition which viewed Shem as a priestly figure and ultimately inspired the Christocentric reading of Hebrews (“Shem, Melchizedek,” 74–77). The

difficulty of dating the material makes it impossible to know with certainty who was responding to whom.

Melchizedek in Christianity

Christian tradition embraces Melchizedek and relates him to Jesus. Hebrews and the musings of the church fathers indicate that Christian developments emerged as an outgrowth of the biblical and extrabiblical sources. Understood as a precursor to Christ, the character became an example used to assist God's people in relating to their Savior.

The New Testament. The first reference to Melchizedek in the New Testament is a quotation of Psa 110:4 found in Heb 5:6. The writer quotes the passage to affirm that Christ was appointed as heavenly high priest: "And being made perfect, [Christ] became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:9–10 ESV). Hebrews 7, a commentary on the Old Testament appearances of Melchizedek, elaborates on this teaching.

Reflecting on Gen 14, the author gives the same etymologies for Melchizedek and Salem found in Philo, while pointing to the eternal scope of his priesthood (Heb 7:1–3). The author argues that Melchizedek was superior to Abraham because the patriarch tithed to the priest-king; this supports the belief that "the inferior is blessed by the superior" (Heb 7:7 ESV). The author then argues that the order of Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood, which counts Abraham as its ancestor (Heb 7:9–10).

The author of Hebrews then turns to Psa 110, citing God's promise to appoint a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" as indication of the Levitical priesthood's imperfection (Heb 7:11 ESV). Christ fulfills the eschatological hope of the psalm not by meeting the legal requirement of descent, but by the eternal quality of His life (Heb 7:13–17). He is a superior high priest, bringing a new covenant which grants salvation to all who believe (7:18–25).

The argument put forth in Hebrews was especially appropriate in its day. Christianity was born during a period of heightened fascination with Melchizedek, and the letter offers "a decisive claim against religious silliness often associated with such a shadowy figure" (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 140). While indebted to the extrabiblical speculation surrounding the character, the author's goals are not limited by a need to provide fodder for curious readers.

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who likely faced criticism from fellow Jews. The author invokes Melchizedek in order to provide Christ with a priestly status rivaling that of the religious establishment. The author's main interest with Melchizedek lies as "an agent of dissonance to unsettle the fixed structures of conceptions of priesthood" (Dunhill, *Covenant*, 167). While not messianic in his own right, Melchizedek serves as a prototype for Christ by establishing the eternal priesthood that the Son of God now possesses.

The letter was also pastoral, written to reaffirm the faith of Christians who have been ostracized because of their beliefs. The author uses the heavenly reality of Christ's priesthood to bring security to a struggling community. Thompson observes: "The exaltation of Christ offers the community the opportunity to ' ()grasp the hope that is made available' (6:18). As the author indicates in 7:19, the community now has a " ' ()better hope' than that provided by the Levitical priesthood ... giv[ing] the wavering community a reason to persevere, knowing of the future that awaits them" (*Hebrews*, 159).

Melchizedek provides Christians with a template for understanding the heavenly priesthood of Christ. This challenges our attempts to substitute human mediators for the divine, revealing a high priest whose saving work cannot be confined to any one culture or bloodline (Thompson, *Hebrews*, 164).

The Early Church. Most of the church fathers evaluate Melchizedek from either the book of Hebrews or the Jewish tradition. Chrysostom points out the similarities between Christ and Melchizedek (*Homilies on Genesis*, 35.16), while Origen affirms that Jesus fulfills Psa 110 (Pearson, "Melchizedek," 187). Ephrem the Syrian accepts the theory that Melchizedek was Shem (*Commentary on Genesis*, 11.2), while Theophilus of Antioch's commentary is similar to Josephus' (*Ad Autolyicum*, 2.31).

Like the Jews, early Christians likewise found creative ways to interpret the character of Melchizedek. Believing it was he who circumcised Abraham, Hippolytus compares the Canaanite king to John the Baptist at the baptism of Christ (Pearson, "Melchizedek," 187). Clement of Alexandria first invoked eucharistic readings of the bread and wine Melchizedek offered, further connecting the priest-king to Jesus (*Strom.* 4.25).

Some of the early church fathers present an anti-Jewish polemic in their presentation of Melchizedek. For example, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr uses Melchizedek to argue against the need for Christians to be circumcised (19). Tertullian presents a similar case, claiming that Melchizedek also refused to observe the Sabbath (*Adv. Jud.* 2).

Other Christian sources were written in opposition to heretical teachings about Melchizedek. Hippolytus (*Haer.* 7.35–36), Pseudo-Tertullian (*Against All Heresies*, 28) and Epiphanius of Salamis (*Pan.* 55.8) refute a sect known as the Melchizedekians, who believed that Melchizedek was a heavenly power greater than Christ and that Christ was made in his image. Looking to Melchizedek for salvation, they taught others to make offerings in his name to be saved. While Epiphanius can be credited with supplying the name of the group, very little additional information is provided regarding the scope of the Melchizedekians and their broader teachings. Pearson suggests that the writers may have invented the group to quell smaller, unrelated movements which viewed Melchizedek as a divine figure ("Melchizedek," 189). Horton disagrees, and argues instead that the lack of information demonstrates that the sect's impact was small and lacked longevity. He identifies that the evidence points to a movement which lasted no more than 20 years (*The Melchizedek Tradition*, 100–01).

The Melchizedekians were not the last heretical group to be connected with the priest-king. Epiphanius mentions Hierakas, a heretical leader who taught that Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit (*Pan.* 67.1). Similar heresies would plague the church for generations. In the fifth century, Mark the Hermit disputed Christians who believed Melchizedek to be the Logos, Jesus, or even God (Pearson, “Melchizedek,” 191).

Conclusion

Melchizedek was the first person in the Bible to share the office of priest and king. He served as a reminder of God’s promise to bless and vindicate His people, and an archetype intended to point our attention toward Jesus.

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King of Righteousness

מַלְכִי־צְדָק **Malki-tsedeq** (575d); from 4428 and 6664; “my king is right,” an early king of Salem:—Melchizedek(2).⁴

³ Brockway, D. (2012). Melchizedek. In (J. D. Barry & L. Wentz, Eds.) *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴ Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

4900 מֶלְכִי־צְדָק (*mäl·kî·šĕ·dĕq*): n.pr.; ≡ Str 4442; TWOT 1199i—LN 93-pers. (male) **Melchizedek**: king of Salem and priest of the Most High God (Ge 14:18; Ps 110:4+)⁵

Romans 3:21–26 (ESV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

King of Peace

שָׁלֵם **Shalem** (1024a); from 7999a; “peaceful,” an early name of Jer.:—Salem(2).⁶

Isaiah 32:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

Romans 5:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jerusalem - Throne of David

II Samuel 7:12-13

¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Psalm 89:3-4

³You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant:

⁴"I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.""

⁵ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁶ Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 11:1-10

¹There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ²And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. ⁹They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples--of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Jeremiah 23:5-6

⁵"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Luke 1:26-33

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Bread and Wine

Matthew 26:26–28 (ESV)

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 14:22–24 (ESV)

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

Luke 22:19–20 (ESV)

¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (ESV)

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

God Receiving from Us

1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)

² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

2 Corinthians 8:3 (ESV)

³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,

Virgin Birth

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Matthew 1:18–25 (ESV)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.