

## **Melchizedek: Victory and Intercession**

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The need for a priest originates in the first book of the Bible. The fall of mankind caused a serious change in man's relationship with his Maker. Instead of enjoying fellowship with God during walks in "the cool of the day," Adam and Eve suddenly hid in shame from their Creator. This distressing state of affairs was remedied by the divine provision of a covering for the guilty pair; thus permitting pardon and ongoing relations with the Holy One. Thereafter in Genesis heads of families, such as Noah and Abraham, built altars, worshipped the Lord, as well as making supplications, intercession, and prayers (e.g. Gen. 8:20; 12:7-8). In chapter fourteen, Melchizedek, an independent priest, is introduced – One who is closely linked in the Scriptures with the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Of Battlefields and Benedictions**

The mysterious "King of Salem" appears on the scene at a strange time. Where has this man been? At first glance, he seems to have little to do with the other events of the passage. Lot's life steadily intertwined itself with the politics and affairs of Sodom. Consequently, when one of that wicked city-state's battles went awry, he is taken hostage in the aftermath of the military rout by King Chedorlaomer and his allies. Thankfully, Abraham "the Hebrew" engineers a daring rescue of his captive nephew, simultaneously recovering the other prisoners and material spoils.<sup>1</sup> Afterwards, the king of Sodom approaches Abraham with a tempting offer. Thankfully, he is first met by Melchizedek, who exercises what turns out to be an important ministry.

Before encountering the subtle wiles of the potentate of Sodom, Abraham is fortified by this spiritual king-priest. The text identifies Melchizedek as a "priest of the Most High God" (El Elyon in Hebrew, Gen. 14:18). This name of God occurs for the first time in Scripture in this passage. He goes on to bless Abraham in this mighty name. In this fitting benediction Melchizedek reminds the patriarch that the Lord is "the possessor of heaven and earth," thereby emphasizing the sovereignty of the Almighty. He also gives full credit to God for the impressive military victory. Lastly, he thoughtfully brings bread and wine to strengthen and cheer Abraham physically. How good it is that our God remembers our weak frames (Ps. 103:14). When our bodies are feeble, the Lord cares for us. Just as He provided a meal for the depressed Elijah under the broom tree, so He ministers to the physical and spiritual needs of His downcast saints (1 Kings 19:1-8). Bread and wine cannot help but remind us of the wonderful symbols of provision and fellowship that God has given us in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11: 20-34).

Armed with this knowledge of the character of God Abraham is prepared to meet the king of wicked Sodom. The king's offer was alluring, but the Hebrew chieftain rejected it without a second thought. The proffered spoils are spurned with these words of conviction: "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars believe that "Hebrew" stems from the phrase "One from beyond the river"; thus making this a reference to his "pilgrim and stranger" status, and not just a comment on his ethnicity.

not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich” (Gen. 14:22-23). Since God Most High had blessed Abraham and given him the victory, there was nothing of lasting value that an earthly king could offer him. What is more, Abraham wanted God to get all of the glory for enriching him.

### **Christ’s Preventative Ministry**

Like Melchizedek, the Lord Jesus exercises a strengthening ministry on behalf of His children. For example, before His betrayal He forewarns His disciples of their impending desertion. He especially cautions Peter of the dreadful testing that was about to overtake him. He said: “...Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31-32). Not only did Christ predict the denial, He also assured Peter of his eventual restoration and subsequent helpful ministry.

After his key role in preparing Abraham to meet the temptation of the king of Sodom, Melchizedek disappears from the record for a millennium. He resurfaces in another seemingly strange context. Psalm 110 looks prophetically at the future triumph of God’s Messiah. In the midst of detailing His martial victory, David interjects this statement: “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4). Just as Abraham’s battlefield triumph was accompanied by a king-priest from the Most High God, so Christ’s future exaltation will see Him acting as prophet, priest, and king.

### **The New Testament Comparison of the two king-priests**

Another thousand years elapses before Melchizedek reappears in Hebrews 5-7. In many ways first century Judaism appeared to have the advantage over Christianity. The Jews had a visible system of worship, which included the Temple, the Mosaic covenant, and the Aaronic priesthood. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit points out that Christians have a heavenly Temple, a New Covenant with better promises, and an infinitely superior high priest – the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Christ’s priesthood is not according to the Levitical system. He was a Judahite rather than a Levite. Hebrews assures us, however, that His priesthood has an even more ancient precedence in Scripture. The Lord Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4); thus connecting Him with a form of mediation that supercedes the old priesthood. The Genesis 14 passage holds the key to this superiority. Firstly, even the great patriarch Abraham gave tithes to this king-priest. By extension, Levi – who was in the loins of Abraham – participated in this payment (Heb. 7:4-5). Secondly, superiors bless inferiors, and Melchizedek blessed the patriarch, thereby blessing Levi and all of his other descendents. Thirdly, his names indicate the type of fruit that his ministry produces, for he is called “king of righteousness” and “king of peace” (Heb. 7:2). The Lord Jesus’ priestly ministry brings peace with God in a righteous manner (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:1).

In addition to being exalted by Abraham's behavior, the Melchizedekian priesthood is demonstrated to be superior by God's attitude toward it. He is the one who proclaims with an oath the Lord Jesus to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:21). By contrast, the Levitical priesthood could point to no oath establishing themselves as priests. Finally, Christ's priesthood is like Melchizedek's in that it is not limited by age or death. Many priests had come and gone since Aaron; this always presented a weakness in the old system. Under the new covenant, however, the high priest serves "after the power of an endless life" (Heb. 7:16) and therefore "ever lives to make intercession" (Heb. 7:25) for His people. Having entrusted one's representation before God to the Lord Jesus, they never need fear that their case will be neglected or fall through the cracks. Whereas the old covenant perfected nothing, the new covenant presents the believer in a living relationship with the Creator through the glorious redemptive and intercessory work of Christ.

The presence of Melchizedek in the Bible reaffirms the truth that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (2 Tim. 3:16). What at first glance seems like a strange intrusion in the text, turns out to be the legal and spiritual basis for the great high priestly work of the Son of God Himself. How thankful the Christian should be for having such a high priest "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). Having undertaken this work Christ will faithfully perform it forever, praise be to His name.