

Melchizedek: A Foreshadowing of Jesus

INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 7:1-10

On June 27, 1976, armed operatives for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine surprised the twelve crew members of an Air France jetliner and its ninety-one passengers, hijacking it to a destination unknown. The plane was tracked heading for Central Africa, where indeed it did land under the congenial auspices of Ugandan President Idi Amin. And there it remained apparently secure at Entebbe Airport where the hijackers spent the next seven days preparing for their next move. The hijackers were, by all estimations, in the driver's seat.

However, 2,500 miles away in Tel Aviv, three Israeli C-130 Hercules transports secretly boarded a deadly force of Israeli commandos, who within hours attacked Entebbe Airport under cover of darkness. In less than sixty minutes the commandos rushed the old terminal, gunned down the hijackers, and rescued 110 of the 113 hostages. The next day, July 4, Israel's Premier Yitzhak Rabin triumphantly declared the mission "will become a legend," which it surely has! Israel's resolve and stealth in liberating her people is admired by her friends and begrudgingly by her enemies.

Actually Israel's resolve is nothing new, because the same quality can be traced all the way back to the very beginning of the Hebrew nation in the prowess of their father Abraham. The kidnappers in his day were a coalition of four Canaanite kings headed by King Chedorlaomer who attacked the Transjordan, defeating the city-states of Sodom and her neighbors and carrying off a large number of hostages, including Abraham's nephew Lot (cf. Genesis 14:5–12).

Undaunted, Abraham recruited 318 trained men (Genesis 14:14)—proto-commandos!—from his own household and took off in hot pursuit until he closed in on the kidnappers somewhere close to Damascus. And there, under the cover of night, he deployed his small forces in a surprise attack. His troops, riding bawling camels and slavering horses, bore down on the hijackers and their hostages. Deadly arrows flew in the night, and bloody swords were raised gleaming in the dusty moonlight—and the four kings were put to flight.

The Genesis account gives this Entebbe-like summary of Abraham's success: "Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people" (Genesis 14:16). Abraham could be formidable. It was not wise to mess with father Abraham!

So when Abraham returned to his home after the slaughter of the kings he was a hero, at the pinnacle of martial success. Can you see him proudly astride his lumbering camel, smeared with the dirt and blood of battle, leading his 318 proud men plus Lot and all the captives and all the plunder through Jerusalem? If so, you have the feel necessary to begin to appreciate Abraham's strange, mystic encounter with a shadowy figure of immense grandeur—Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem. Genesis says:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said,

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" (Genesis 14:18–20)

So mysterious! And think of this—this is the only historical mention of Melchizedek in the Old Testament. What we have just read is all we know of him! Yet Abraham allowed Melchizedek to bless him and then gave him a tenth of everything.

That was around 2000 BC, and for a millennium there is no mention at all of Melchizedek, not even in retrospect. But in the tenth century BC, when the psalmist David was King of Israel, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write this prophetic word: “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek’” (Psalm 110:4). There God declared that he was going to do something new. His intention was to bring into history one who would be a priest like Melchizedek. In the likeness of Melchizedek he would be both priest and king (cf. Psalm 110:1). Also, his priesthood would last forever. And, like Melchizedek, he would be appointed directly by God. It was all divinely guaranteed: “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind.” What an intriguing prophecy! God was going to establish a totally new priesthood.

Imagine for a moment that you are the writer of Hebrews writing to encourage the soon-to-be persecuted Jewish church. Also imagine yourself reflecting both on Melchizedek’s history and this prophecy—and then you make the connection! Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecy! He is a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Further, you are the first person in history to make the connection. You begin to muse and pray—and everything falls into place. Now in Hebrews 7 you present what you have learned as a means of encouragement to the storm-tossed church. There is no teaching like it anywhere. This is, as we sometimes say today, heavy!¹

Watch It Bible Principles

Watch Bible Principles #12; Heb. 7:1-28 www.villagebible.church/bibleprinciples

Open it

1. Who is the most honor-worthy person you’ve been around in your life? What did it look like for you to show them honor?

Read it

Hebrews 7:1-10

¹ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: an Anchor for the Soul*. Crossway, 2015.

Explore it

2. How do verses 1-3 describe Melchizedek?
 3. How much of his recently acquired wealth did Abraham give to Melchizedek?
 4. Is Melchizedek described as greater or lesser than Abraham?

Apply it

Why Melchizedek Matters

The title Melchizedek, our author explains, means “king of righteousness,” and the title “king of Salem” (i.e., Jerusalem; cf. Psalm 72) means “king of peace.” Significantly here we should note that both the qualities of righteousness and peace were prophesied of the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6, 7, where his fourth title is “Prince of Peace,” and he goes on to rule with “righteousness.” The New Testament identifies Jesus specifically as “Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1) and our “righteousness” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Jesus is the King of righteousness! Likewise, the New Testament says of Jesus, “For he himself is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus is the King of peace!²

- #### **5. What qualities of Melchizedek from our passage foreshadow the character of Jesus?**

2 Ibid.

6. The unique person of Melchizedek points to truth about Jesus that would have profound effects on the followers of Christ for the rest of eternity. What's one reason you are thankful Jesus has authority to establish peace?

7. Why does it matter to you that Jesus is perfectly righteous in all respects?

Why We Need High Priests

We will only appreciate our need for a high priest to the degree that we realize how holy and unapproachable God is and how sinful and defiled we are. When Isaiah saw the Lord, sitting on His throne, lofty and exalted, surrounded by the seraphim who called out, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts," the prophet was undone (Isa. 6:1-5). It devastated him because immediately he became aware of how utterly sinful he was, in contrast to God in His awesome holiness.

Israel in the wilderness had seen Moses go up on the mountain into the cloud, with lightning and thunder and a loud trumpet sound, and they were terrified. If the people got too close to the mountain, God warned that He would break forth upon them with a deadly plague (Exod. 19:10-25). The Jews knew that they could not saunter into the Holy of Holies to chat with God! Only the high priest could enter there, and only once a year, with blood. The Jewish people knew how desperately they needed a high priest if they were to approach God.³

8. It's not fun to think about, but what's something in your life that reminds you of how sinful you are?

³ Cole, Steven. <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-20-why-you-need-know-about-melchizedek-hebrews-71-10>

9. What would life be like without someone to bridge the divide between you and God?

10. When we pray to the Father in Jesus' name, it's because Jesus is serving as our High Priest. How can we remind ourselves of the priceless gift it is to talk with our Holy God?

Why the Tithes to Melchizedek Matter

Abraham's giving of a tithe acquires even greater significance if it is interpreted in terms of the OT law, which laid down that the Israelites were to give the Levites a tithe (a tenth) of everything they acquired (7:5). This tithe was the salary for the Levites as they served God on behalf of their fellow descendants of Abraham (Num. 18:21). Abraham gave Melchizedek this tithe, even though he was not a Levite (7:6). In fact, given that Levi, the father of the Levites, was one of Abraham's descendants, it could even be argued that in Abraham the Levites were paying a tithe to Melchizedek, showing that his priesthood outranked theirs (7:9-10).⁴

11. Did you grow up in a home where generosity was modeled? What were your earliest experiences observing cheerful generosity?

⁴ Adeyemo, Tokunboh. Africa Bible Commentary: a One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars. Zondervan, 2010.

12. How do those experiences shape your own generosity today?

In the ancient world, paying tithes to another was recognition of the other's superiority and a sign of subjection to that person. In the case of Abraham's rendering his title, we must remember that when Abraham returned from the slaughter of the kings, he was on a personal mountaintop. He had proven himself a man of great courage and of considerable capability. Moreover, in the eyes of succeeding generations of Jews he would be considered to be the greatest of men. He was called the "friend" of God (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). He was the father of the nation of Israel—the patriarch. But when he met Melchizedek, he recognized that personage's superior greatness and paid him "a tenth of the spoils" (7:4; literally, "the top of the heap"), the choicest spoils of war. This was a calculated recognition by Abraham that he was in the presence of one greater than himself. Our writer expresses proper astonishment: "See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!"⁵

13. What are some practical ways we can prioritize giving back to God from "the top of the heap?"

⁵ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: an Anchor for the Soul*. Crossway, 2015.

- 14. What would be possible if each Christian decided to give a tenth of their income to God's Work? (Feel free to dream a little bit!)**

Why Melchizedek Was Superior

So we must conclude that Melchizedek's priesthood, though it has only brief mention in Scripture, is superior in every Biblical and logical way to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. Yet, realizing that, we note that it was only a type of the ultimate superior priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is "a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." And as the antitype to the type, Christ supersedes it, just as living reality supersedes a photograph!

Though Melchizedek was "king of righteousness" and "king of peace," he could never make men righteous or give them peace. He was only a type. But Jesus, the grand, true, eternal Melchizedekian priest/king, gives righteousness and peace!⁶

- 15. Take time to pray and to praise God for giving us peace and righteousness through the finished work of our High Priest: Jesus Christ, the Greatest of All Time!**

⁶ Ibid.

This study was compiled and questions were written by David Wood (Aurora Campus)—www.villagebible.church/smallgroup