

Melchizedek

“King of righteousness . . . King of peace”

Peter Cresswell

Melchizedek, the king/priest of Genesis 14, is referred to twice more in Scripture as the founder of a new and superior order of priesthood to which Christ belongs, and which faithful saints will join to carry out their role as kings and priests in the coming Kingdom.

GENESIS 14 describes a battle which took place—four kings against five. These kings are not mentioned by name elsewhere in Scripture. The initial battle seems of little interest to us for the purposes of this article (although aspects of it are picked up elsewhere in Scripture) except that Lot was taken captive from Sodom. This precipitated the involvement of Abraham, who came and fought for the king of Sodom (who did not go with him), pursuing the armies of the four kings all the way to Dan (v. 14), where he defeated them: “And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus” (v. 15).

He then returned and the king of Sodom met him: “And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at

the valley of Shaveh, which is the king’s dale” (v. 17). It was then that Melchizedek came on the scene for the first time: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God” (v. 18).

Later, Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac: “And [God] said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (22:2). Mount Moriah was just north of the border of Melchizedek’s kingdom of Salem and, it seems, is almost certainly the mountain now known as the Temple Mount, where the temple was to stand in Jerusalem in later years. So Abraham may well have wondered whether Melchizedek, “priest of the most high God”, was to be involved in this strange sacrifice God had commanded.

The order of Melchizedek

We are told of Christ that he was a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6). There is thus another order of priesthood, not Levitical, to which Christ and Melchizedek (at least) belonged. It is this order of priesthood that we must now examine, starting in Genesis 14. Let us list the attributes of Melchizedek that we find here:

View from the Mount of Olives over Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock in the centre is situated on the site of Solomon’s and Herod’s temples, and is believed to have been the place where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac and met with Melchizedek.



- He lived in a area later to be known as Zion, or the City of David.
- He had no pedigree of priesthood: “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life” (Heb. 7:3).
- He brought bread and wine.
- He was a king (of Salem) and a priest (of the most high God).
- Abraham recognised him as a priest. Did he wear priestly garments, white linen?
- He blessed Abraham.

Using the above criteria we can discover another person who was a priest after this order. In 1 Chronicles 15:1 we read: “And David made him houses in the city of David, and prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched for it a tent”. (According to 16:39 the Levitical priesthood was based in Gibeon.) It was not David’s job to pitch the tent for the ark at all unless he was fulfilling the office of a priest. He was not of the line of Levi, so he also had no priestly pedigree.

According to 16:3 he gave out bread and wine to the people: “And he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine”. Though he was a king, he wore a linen ephod: “And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen . . . David also had upon him an ephod of linen” (15:27); and he blessed the people: “And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD” (16:2).

So we see that David satisfies all the criteria we have specified as being necessary to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus also fits the pattern perfectly, as we would expect, but for completeness let us include the points which make Jesus a priest after this order:

- He is king as well as priest.
- He has no pedigree of priesthood on the human side, not being of the line of Levi but of the line of Judah. It was an honour conferred by God, because he is His Son (Heb. 5:5,6), and it was confirmed by an oath (7:21).
- He gave out bread and wine at the feast of remembrance.
- At his death he was wrapped in the white linen of the priestly garments. It was his death and resurrection that perfected his priesthood.
- He blessed many people, especially his disciples just before his ascension, as recorded for us in Luke 24:50.

Psalm 110

Regarding Christ’s priesthood being confirmed by an oath, Psalm 110 is the passage to which the writer to the Hebrews appeals when making his argument about Christ’s priesthood: “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (v. 4). In verse 2 we read, “The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies”.

Notice the mention of Zion, and of ruling (that is, kingship); also the reference to enemies. We have here two ideas picked up in 1 Corinthians 15:25, showing that the message is in the context of resurrection and redemption: “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet”.

In Psalm 110:3 we read, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning; thou hast the dew of thy youth”. The phrase “beauties of holiness” suggests the priestly garments, and “womb of the morning” gives the idea of Jesus as the only begotten Son.

Lessons for Abraham

Let us now return to Genesis 14. After defeating the four kings and rescuing Lot, Abraham is met by two people, the king of Salem (Melchizedek), who offers him bread and wine, and the king of Sodom, who offers him riches. He refuses the riches of this world and so is blessed by Melchizedek.

Melchizedek, of whom it is said, “first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace” (Heb. 7:2), gave Abraham a glimpse of a future age when Jesus, clearly portrayed by the person of Melchizedek here, would also be King of Righteousness and King of Peace. Righteousness is a quality of God, and peace is required because of the rift that exists between God and man. That is what Melchizedek stood for, and what Abraham, like us, had to learn to appreciate.

Abraham’s life was full of decisions, and we find that he did not always make the right ones. Here are four steps in his life that brought him to this incident we are now considering:

- 1 Abraham faced the decision to leave Mesopotamia: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8). It was a step of faith, and was, as

it were, his baptism, the start of his new life. There was, it seems, no hesitation.

- 2 He settled between Bethel (the House of God) and Ai (Ruin) (Gen. 12:8). The significance of this is clear, for is this not where each one of us dwells?
- 3 Now he makes an uncharacteristic move, going to Egypt, where he practises deception to save his skin (vv. 10-13).
- 4 He emerges from Egypt wealthy and respected, but this causes a division. Lot, taken in by the splendour of Egypt and the well-watered banks of the Nile, chooses the plain of Jordan (13:10).

Abraham is evidently trying to build a household to the Lord at this time, with some success apparently. But he spent much of his life learning that "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Ps. 127:1). This is the very principle that his meeting with Melchizedek was to reinforce, for it required him to make an important decision. This is what we read: "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" (Gen. 14:18,19). Abraham would see from this that God's sovereignty was over all the earth, that His power was ultimate and that he must rely on Him. Thus Abraham learned from this meeting that God would fulfil the promise in His own way and in His own good time. His faith was strengthened as he made the right choice: to reject the riches offered by the king of Sodom and pay tithes to the king/priest Melchizedek.

In the next chapter it is recorded that Abraham questioned God about his seed, and God's promise was spelt out again (15:2-5). Abraham's response is recorded in verse 6: "And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness". So Abraham sets the example for us, as, like Moses, he "esteem[ed] the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt [or Sodom]" (Heb. 11:26).

Hebrews 7

Hebrews 7:3 has always been a difficult verse, but I suggest that it all falls into place in the light of the above background: "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually". The word translated "descent" here means 'pedigree' (see margin), and this fits in exactly with what we

have already said. Melchizedek had no natural 'right' to priesthood through the usual channels. "Having neither beginning of days, nor end of life", is surely saying that he was one in an everlasting order of priests (which the Levitical priesthood was not), an order established by God, Who is from eternity to eternity, and perfected in Jesus through his resurrection.

Hebrews 7:11-22 makes a number of points, summarised as follows:

- There was no perfection under the Levitical priesthood (v. 11).
- A new law was needed for the change of priesthood (v. 12).
- This priesthood is also a kingly order (of Judah) (v. 14).
- The basis of this new order of priests is different from the old (vv. 15,16).
- Christ is a priest *for ever* (v. 17).
- We can draw nigh to God this way (v. 19).
- Christ's priesthood was made by an oath (vv. 20,21).
- It is everlasting (v. 23).

It is fascinating that God in His wisdom started this 'new' order in the person of Melchizedek even before the old order was established under the Law of Moses. No wonder Jesus could say, "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jno. 8:58)!

The main message for us is to be found in Hebrews 7:25-28:

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore".

Through Jesus we have the hope of life eternal, something that only the "better testament" (v. 22) could offer. The intercession made for our sins is an everlasting one (v. 25), sealed by the word of the oath (v. 28).

Where does this take us?

Israel, if they had obeyed, would have been kings and priests (Ex. 19:5,6). There are beautiful pictures of how it should have been under the old priesthood which are not lost, as they can be

Summary chart			
Melchizedek	David	Christ	Us
King of Salem (Zion) (Gen. 14:18)	Pitched a tent for the ark at Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15:1)	Ate the Last Supper at Jerusalem with his disciples	Spiritual birth in Zion (Ps. 87:5,6)
No pedigree given	Not of the tribe of Levi	Not a Levite; priesthood confirmed by an oath as God's Son (Heb. 5:5,6; 7:21)	Gentiles with no right to the promises except through Christ
Brought forth bread and wine (Gen. 14:18)	Gave out bread and wine to the people (1 Chron. 16:3)	Gave out bread and wine at the Last Supper (Mt. 26:26,27)	Partake of bread and wine weekly in remembrance of Christ's suffering
King (Gen. 14:18)	King	The promised Messiah	Kingship promised (Rev. 5:10)
Wore priestly attire?	Wore the linen ephod of the priest (1 Chron. 15:27)	Wrapped in white linen in the tomb (Mt. 27:59). His resurrection perfected his priesthood	Given white robes (Rev. 6:11)
Blessed Abraham (Gen. 14:19)	Blessed the people (1 Chron. 16:2)	Blessed the disciples just before his ascension (Lk. 24:50)	As kings and priests in the Kingdom will bless others (Rev. 5:10)

fulfilled instead under the new and better testament, sworn with an oath. Take, for example, Isaiah 61:6: "But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves". Psalm 132 is an exposition of the promises in 1 Chronicles 17, the next event after the bringing of the ark to Zion (see above), promises made to a man who was a priest after the order of Melchizedek:

"For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed" (vv. 13-17).

We belong to those who are to be part of this order of king/priests, through the one who was priest after the order of Melchizedek:

"But ye are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9,10);

"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God *kings and priests*: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9,10).

Australia Editor

The Testimony Committee has decided to appoint an Australia Editor. We are very pleased that Brother Geoff Henstock of the Adelaide ecclesia has agreed to take on this role. He has been a contributor to the *Testimony* and other Christadelphian magazines for a number of years and we look forward to his greater involvement in the *Testimony*. Australian readers who wish to submit articles for publication are asked to send them to him; see front inside cover for details.