

KING MELCHIZEDEK

After he defeated Chedorlaomer, King of Elam, who — in alliance with three kings of Mesopotamia — had earlier captured his nephew, Lot, Abraham was welcomed and blessed:

Genesis 14:18–20 King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. ¹⁹He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; ²⁰and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything. [NRSV]

This is all we are told that Melchizedek did: as priest of God Most High, he gave thanks to God, offered bread and wine to Abraham and blessed him. Yet, his role, his example and his importance are outstanding, as David recognized, when he forecast the priesthood of the Messiah:

Psalms 110:4 The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. [KJV]

On the basis of so little from the scripture, the search for Melchizedek's identity has nourished endless hermeneutical and exegetical speculations for the centuries and engendered confusion.

However,

1 Corinthians 14:33a God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, [KJV]

Hence, we can be confident that, if the Lord wants us to know more about Melchizedek, He — the Living God — would tell us more and be confident also that there is no point in going, by means of our imaginings and speculations, beyond what He tells us. The Lord tells us as much as we need in order that we may know, love and serve Him.

Next, it is wise for me — not adding conjectures to the Word of God — to simply ask what I may learn from what is taught by the scriptures I do have.

There is much to learn and there is no confusion.

First, Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God — the One Who made "heaven and earth": Abraham and Melchizedek trusted and worshipped the same God, the God, Who gave Abraham victory over his enemies. We know that God selected Abraham, revealed Himself to him and established a covenant with him and his descendants for the purpose of building a great nation that would worship Him and would be a blessing to all people,

Genesis 12:1–3 The Lord said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who

treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you. [HCSB]

However, Abraham and his family were not the only ones to whom God had revealed Himself. Although Canaan was a heathen land and the Canaanites a heathen population, the true God, the Lord, was known by some of them and not only known to Abraham: Melchizedek, for example, was such an one, called to serve the true God (Most High), as Abraham also was.

The Lord is the God not only of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants, but of all, who worship Him, wherever they may be. He transcends the children of Israel. A confirmation of this is from the teaching of the Apostle Paul to the Greeks at the Aeropagus in Athens:

Acts 17:23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. [NKJV]

Second, after the covenant — which lasted about a millennium and a half — was continuously faulted by the descendants of Abraham, the Lord prepared a new way, as foretold by the prophet:

Jeremiah 31:31–32 "Look, the days are coming" — this is the Lord's declaration — "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³²This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant they broke even though I had married them" — the Lord's declaration. [HCSB]

The Mosaic Law did accomplish an important purpose: it demonstrated the sinful nature of mankind.

Romans 7:7b In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "You must not covet." [NLT]

However, a better New Covenant, a superior ministry and a new High Priest — Jesus Christ — were required:

Hebrews 8:6–7 But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree He is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been legally enacted on better promises. ⁷For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second one. [HCSB]

Third, the High Priest of the better covenant, the New Covenant, which is continuing to our days is "after the order of Melchizedek" and not from the tribe of Levi — as according to the Mosaic Cove-

nant — but from the outside (as was Melchizedek): Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and

Hebrews 6:19–20 *We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. [NRSV]*

Furthermore, the reference to the order of Melchizedek confirms and helps me understand the extraordinary nature of the New Covenant, whose High Priest has no beginning and no end; no birth, no death, no antecedents.

Hebrews 7:2–3 *Then Abraham took a tenth of all he had captured in battle and gave it to Melchizedek. The name Melchizedek means "king of justice," and king of Salem means "king of peace."³There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God. [NLT]*

Of course, the incarnate Jesus, Son of God, had a virgin birth, died on the Cross and was resurrected on the third day, as we learn clearly from the Gospels, but the spiritual Jesus, was and is always one with His Heavenly Father:

John 10:30 *"I and my Father are one." [KJV]*

And both Father and Son are spirit:

John 4:24 *"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." [ESV]*

The spiritual Jesus had no ancestors and was at the foundation of the world:

Revelation 13:8b *..... the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. [KJV]*

Fourth, the High Priest of the New Covenant was appointed by an oath of God and not with a religious ceremony, as the Levites were (*viz.* **Exodus 29**).

Hebrews 7:20–24 *This new system was established with a solemn oath. Aaron's descendants became priests without such an oath, ²¹but there was an oath regarding Jesus. For God said to him, "The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow: 'You are a priest forever.'" ²²Because of this oath, Jesus is the one who guarantees this better covenant with God. ²³There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office. ²⁴But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. [NLT]*

The reference to Melchizedek thus manifests and teaches me the complete break with tradition and the radical innovation of God's New Covenant: not a follow up on the Old, nor an update or upgrade of the Old, but an altogether revolutionary New Kingdom, with a High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek."

A complete break with tradition: as it was announced by the prophet Jeremiah, in the New Covenant there is no hierarchical structure (as there was in the Levitical Priesthood):

Jeremiah 31:34 *No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least to the greatest of them"—this is the Lord's declaration. "For I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sin." [HCSB]*

And as Jesus taught us again:

Matthew 23:8 *"But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren." [NKJV]*

The seal of the break with tradition is the new creation in the Kingdom of Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. [KJV]*

Notwithstanding the revolution of the New Covenant, God does not change and He did not change the fundamental role that obedience always has for Him, as the prophet Samuel taught King Saul:

1 Samuel 15:22 *But Samuel replied, "What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. [NLT]*

The priority God places on obedience is so high and so strong that even Jesus had to learn it in order to qualify as High Priest:

Hebrews 5:8–9 *Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. ⁹In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. [NLT]*

May we all also — as we are blessed by the gift of the New Covenant and by the ministry of its High Priest, Jesus Christ — heed this teaching and learn obedience, quickly and promptly.