**Melchizedek – A King and a Priest**

“**17** After his (Abram’s) return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). **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.” (Ge 14:17-20 ESV)

Here in Genesis chapter 14 we are introduced to this shadowy figure named Melchizedek. His name means ***“king of righteousness”*** although it is likely that it is not actually his name, but his title. It is the combination of **מלך** (melek) the Hebrew word for **king** and**צדק** (tsedeq) the Hebrew word for **righteousness**. He is the king of righteousness (likely his title). We are also specifically told that he is also the king of**שׁלם** (Shalem) the **king of Salem**. Most believe he was the king of Jerusalem. It is important to note that this is the same root word as the Hebrew word for peace **שׁלום** (shalowm).

Further, we are told that this king of righteousness, who is also the king of peace is a priest of the “Most High God.” For those familiar with the Old Testament and the nation of Israel, this is quite a surprise. In the Old Testament we find three principal offices, that are normally always occupied by three different people:

Prophet – From various nations

Priest – From the tribe of Levi

King – From the tribe of Judah

Here prior to the formation of the nation of Israel, we are introduced to this one, who serves as both priest and king to the Most High God.

His sudden appearance here in Genesis 14 is as mysterious as the character himself. He bursts on the scene as Abram is returning from defeating Chedorlaomer and the three Mesopotamian kings who were allied with him. After the four-king federation invaded the land and attacked a number of cities (Gen 14:1-10), the Mesopotamian alliance defeated the southern kingdom alliance and then they looted Sodom and Gomorrah, taking possessions, provisions, wealth, and people into captivity (Gen 14:11-12).

As Abram is returning to Canaan, having retrieved the possessions, provisions, wealth, and people that Chedorlaomer captured, we see that Melchizedek, along with the king of Sodom meet Abram in the Valley of Shaveh, where Melchizedek brings both bread and wine to celebrate Abram’s victory. Further, Melchizedek blesses Abram: “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!"...” (Ge 14:19-20a ESV)

The lesser is blessed by the greater, and Melchizedek blesses Abram. He declares that the God the Most High is the one who delivered Chedorlaomer and his forces into the hand of Abram. The victory belongs to Yahweh, although he delivered it by the hands of Abram.

Then we read: “... And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.” (Ge 14:20b ESV). Here Abram offers a tithe (1/10) of all that he had collected. In doing this he is indicating that he recognized Melchizedek as a Priest of the Most High God, who was fit to collect tithes. Keep in mind this is prior to the nation of Israel coming into existence. As you consider this point, the writer of Hebrews tells us about this act: “**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?” (Heb 7:7-11 ESV)

So the priesthood of Melchizedek stands above the Levitical priesthood, for in a way, Levi paid a tithe (through Abraham) to Melchizedek. Then in verse 11, the writer tells us that if perfection had been attainable or achievable through the Levitical priesthood, there would not have been a need for one to arise as priest after the order or Melchizedek. It is this thought that thrusts us back to the second (and only other) mention of Melchizedek in the Old Testament. This thought, a priest coming after the order of Melchizedek is found in Psalm 110:1-4, there we read:

“1 ¶ « A Psalm of David. » 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."” (Ps 110:1-4 ESV)

Psalm 110, like many of the Psalms, is Messianic. It was penned by the human author King David. Here we see that Yahweh (the LORD) is speaking to Adonay (Lord) and he says: **"Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."**

This is a messianic promise of the coming Messiah King who will rule at the Father’s behest, even in the midst of his enemies, and the Father will exalt him, this is the Father’s ultimate plan.

Then we are told this coming Messiah King will be a priest forever after the order (the manner) of Melchizedek. It is here that we get the first indication that Melchizedek is possibly an Old Testament “type” of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is as far as the Old Testament takes us on the matter of Melchizedek.

The connection between Melchizedek and Christ is picked up in the book of Hebrews with many additional points being made. These points could be summed up the way the writer of Hebrew sums them up:

“**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.” (Heb 7:11-24 ESV)

As you consider Melchizedek. There are some who believe that Melchizedek was a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ, what Theologians call a ***Christophany***. While others believe the Melchizedek was a real king, who only serves as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. The verse that really deals with this head-on is Hebrews 7:5 where the author (likely Paul) writes of Melchizedek: “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.” (Heb 7:3 ESV)

If Paul means that actually, literally, Melchizedek was without mother and father or any genealogy, then indeed He must be a Christophany. Case closed! If on the other hand the author means, figuratively he has no named (in the scriptures) mother, father, or genealogy, then Paul’s point is that Melchizedek serves as a type of Jesus Christ. You will notice that the writer, towards the end of verse three, tells us that Melchizedek was someone “resembling the Son of God...” His point seems to be, as the ESV captures, Melchizedek resembles, Melchizedek is like, Melchizedek is similar to Jesus the Son of God.

In Hebrews chapter 5, the author writes:

“**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.” (Heb 5:1-10 ESV)

The high priests in the old economy came out from among men, thus they understood human frailty and weaknesses. They were appointed by God to act on behalf of their fellow men and offers gifts and sacrifices to God, not only for the sins of the people, but equally for their own sins.

Christ, did not take upon himself the honor of being high priest, but rather was appointed to be high priest by God the Father. Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, Jesus in fulfillment of Psalm 110 would be a priest who would come after the order, after the arrangement, of this ancient priestly king, Melchizedek. This was purposed by the Father and fulfilled in Christ, a new high priest that does not suffer from human frailty and will not be replaced by another human high priest. A high priest who is truly without earthly descent.

But the writer of Hebrews has more to say. In passing he mentions once again that Jesus has become our high priest forever and that is according to the order of Melchizedek: “where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Heb 6:20 ESV)

In Hebrews chapter 7 we find the largest treatment of Melchizedek and the author develops a number of important points about Melchizedek and Jesus:

“**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.” (Heb 7:1-28 ESV)

Was Melchizedek a Christophany or a type of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it possible that Abram was met, upon his return from defeating Chedorlaomer, by the God of Glory Himself? Good men disagree. But at a minimum, Melchizedek is an Old Testament type of the coming King (the Lord Jesus Christ) and the connection of Melchizedek to Jesus is both surprising and incredible and reminds us of our Great High Priest who is totally different than any high priest in the old economy. Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant, a covenant that is built on better promises. He is the High Priest forever and continues in that office perpetually. He had no need to offer sacrifices for his own sins, he is holy, harmless, and undefiled. Instead, he offered up himself, once and for all. He serves as the high priest forever and He is able to completely save those who come to Him by faith.