

WHO WAS MELCHIZEDEK IN THE BIBLE

Melchizedek was a real human being like Abraham, not a Theophany (i.e. a visible manifestation of God). He was both a king and priest of an ancient city called Salem, which later became *Jerusalem*. In Genesis 14:19, he blessed Abraham after Abraham returned from defeating four kings and recovering all possessions. Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything he had captured in the battle, of the defeated and conquered kings.

Melchizedek's name means king of righteousness. His genealogy was not recorded, therefore no one knows anything about his parents, ancestry, when he was born, or when he died. So until the day he died, he continually remained a priest, resembling the Son of God. Melchizedek was so great that Abraham paid tithes to him.

The Law of Moses commanded the Levitical priests to receive tithes from the people who also were descendants of Abraham. Even though Melchizedek was not a descendant of Levi, he received a tenth of everything Abraham had and then blessed him even though Abraham already had God's promises. In reality, the one who has the power to give a blessing is greater than the one who is blessed. The Levitical priests received tithes from the people but they died. In contrast, Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham but lived on!

The writer of Hebrews tells us that the Levites who receive tithes also paid tithes through Abraham because Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchizedek met him. The Levitical priesthood was based on the Law of Moses. It was not perfect, nor could it achieve perfection. It therefore was necessary for God to establish a different priesthood, not after that of Aaron, but after Melchizedek.

A change in priesthood also required a change in Law seeing that the priesthood was based on the Law. The priest the writer of Hebrews has in mind was from the tribe of Judah, a tribe in which no one has ever served at the altar. For example, Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, a tribe the Law of Moses never mentioned anything about priesthood. Such a change in the priesthood became very clear after a different priest arose after the likeness of Melchizedek.

Jesus therefore became a priest not based on human requirements of the tribe of Levi, but according to the power of a life that can never be destroyed. In quoting Psalm 110:4, God, through the Psalmist, foretold that Jesus would be a priest forever after the order (or in the way) that Melchizedek was a priest. And according to the author of Hebrews, the former commandment for the priesthood was to be annulled because of its weaknesses. The Law of Moses was not good enough to accomplish everything God required. Now, however, we have better hope through Jesus Christ to approach God and draw nearer to Him in confidence.

No oath was required to qualify for the Levitical priesthood; the qualifications were purely physical for those descended from the lineage of Aaron. In regards to the priesthood of Christ, however, God swore it with an oath; in quoting Psalm 110:4, the LORD swore and will not change His mind that, "Christ is a priest forever in the way Melchizedek was a priest." As a result Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.

There were many Priests throughout Israel's history, but they were prevented from continuing in the office because they died. But Jesus on the other hand lives forever, and His priesthood therefore continues permanently. Jesus is able to save any human from the farthest reaches that would come to God by Him, and he forever lives to intercede to God on their behalf. It was necessary for Jesus to be such a priest for us; he is kind, patient, gentle, innocent, holy, blameless, and unstained by sin, and has the highest place of honor in heaven itself.

Besides, we definitely need a priest like Jesus who does not need to offer sacrifices everyday like the high priest did under the Old Covenant, who first offered up sacrifices for himself and then for the errors of the people. But Jesus made one complete sacrifice for sins by offering up Himself on the cross. The Law of Moses designated the Levites as high priests even though they themselves had weaknesses. But the Word of oath came much later after the Law to appoint Christ as the perfect high priest forever and thereby accomplished everything God required.

The writer's purpose of bringing up Melchizedek was only a byproduct of his intention. He brought Melchizedek into focus in order to bring to focus the greatness of Christ. He is greater than all the Levitical priests; so therefore it is ridiculous idea for

Christians suffering persecution to leave Christ's New Covenant, and revert back to an inferior one (e.g. the Old Covenant). In Judaism, the office of the priest and king were separated. The priests were from the Levites and the kings were out of Judah. If Jesus was on earth He would not qualify to be a priest after the Law of Moses because He was not a descendant of Aaron.

As a descendant of David, from the tribe of Judah, He was heralded as, "The King of the Jews." His priesthood therefore is a heavenly priesthood, where He ever lives to make intercession for those who come to Him, and are in Him. Wouldn't you like to have a priest like this? He is the One Mediator between God and people. He is a Great High Priest who has ascended high into the heavens. He is a priest after the way of Melchizedek, because Melchizedek was both a king and priest simultaneously (all at the same time). The Lord Jesus Christ, presently, fills both offices simultaneously; in which it was impossible under the Old Testament Levitical system.

REFERENCES

Excerpt from the new book entitled, “The Story of Redemption: In the Power of the Gospel of Christ.” Powell, John M. (Covenant Books, Murrells Inlet, S.C.), 2019.

Hebrews 7:1-28

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