

## "JESUS THROUGH MELCHIZEDEKIAN LENSES"

### I. Introduction

- A. In the world of sports, people often draw comparisons between athletes of different eras.
1. ESPN analysts measure the merits of Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers against those of his predecessor Brett Favre.
  2. Basketball fans debate whether Michael Jordan, or Magic Johnson, or Larry Bird, or Wilt Chamberlain is the greatest player of all time.
  3. And Boston Red Sox fans compare the late-season heroics of David Ortiz with those of Carlton Fisk and Carl Yastrzemski.
- B. In the verses we have just read, the writer of Hebrews begins to draw a comparison between two figures from different eras in redemptive history: Melchizedek and Jesus.
1. The point of this comparison is not to determine which of the two is greater.
  2. Jesus is infinitely greater than Melchizedek because Jesus is the eternal Son of God.
  3. The writer is using the mysterious figure of Melchizedek to help us better understand Jesus' identity as our great high priest.
  4. It is important for us to understand why passages like this have been given to us.
  5. They are given because of what the writer said back in chapters 5 and 6.

6. They are given because we need to move beyond elementary teachings and move towards the mature faith that serves as a safeguard against falling away.
7. You cannot have a mature faith in Christ without being a student of both the Old and the New Testaments.
8. As Augustine of Hippo famously said, in the Old the New is concealed, and in the New the Old is revealed.
9. This passage shows us how Jesus was prefigured by the Old Testament figure of Melchizedek.
10. The object of interest here is not Melchizedek but Jesus.
11. In these verses, the writer helps us to consider Jesus through Melchizedekian lenses.

## II. An Unending Priesthood

- A. Our text begins by referring to an encounter that is recorded in Genesis 14.
  1. That encounter took place after Abraham had rescued his nephew Lot from the four kings who invaded the area of the Transjordan from the east.
  2. After routing the invaders, Abraham was returning home when he was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High.
  3. The only thing that we know about this mysterious figure is what we can infer from his titles and his name.
  4. The fact that he was both a priest and a king is itself significant.
  5. He united in his person two offices that were for the most part kept separate in the rest of the Old Testament.

6. This was a foreshadowing of Christ, the supreme prophet, priest, and king.
- B. Melchizedek was king of Salem, an ancient name for the city of Jerusalem, the city where David would eventually have his throne.
1. Melchizedek was priest of God Most High, which is clearly a name for Yahweh in light of how Abraham uses it when he meets up with Melchizedek. (see v. 22)
  2. The name 'Melchizedek' is Semitic, which indicates that he was a descendent of Noah's son Shem.
  3. That is, he belonged to the line of promise, even though there is no explicit mention of his lineage anywhere in the Bible.
  4. When we put all of these details together, we are driven to the conclusion that whoever this Melchizedek was, he had preserved the worship of the one true God.
- C. After mentioning the meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham, the writer of Hebrews gives an interpretation of Melchizedek's name and title.
1. In Hebrew, the name 'Melchizedek' means 'king of righteousness' and the title 'king of Salem' means 'king of peace.'
  2. While the writer does not develop this any further, we should take note of how these names point to Christ.
  3. Jesus is the true king of righteousness and the true king of peace.
  4. It is through his perfect righteousness that we obtain peace with God.
- D. In verse 3, the writer makes his first main point about Melchizedek, telling us that he is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.

1. If we were to take those statements literally, we would have to conclude that Melchizedek is a divine figure.
  2. That is not the point that the writer is making here.
  3. He is simply making an argument from silence, pointing out that we are not given any information about Melchizedek's parents or genealogy anywhere in the Bible.
  4. This sets Melchizedek in sharp contrast to the Levitical priests, whose genealogies were always carefully recorded.
  5. If a potential priest couldn't demonstrate his lineage back to Levi, he couldn't be a priest.
  6. The absence of genealogical information about Melchizedek stands out even more when we note that the book of Genesis contains ten genealogies.
  7. It was a striking omission to leave Melchizedek's out.
  8. In doing so, God was making the point that Melchizedek's priesthood was not established on the basis of his genealogy.
  9. His priesthood was of a different order than that of the descendants of Levi.
- E. The writer then tells us that Melchizedek resembles the Son of God.
1. Think about that statement.
  2. It would have been more natural to say that Jesus resembles Melchizedek, since Jesus came after Melchizedek.
  3. The fact that the writer doesn't put it that way points to Jesus' preexistence.

4. Jesus is the pattern to which Melchizedek was made to conform.
  5. Jesus is the substance and Melchizedek is the shadow.
  6. This is an example of what biblical scholars call typology.
  7. The king of Salem was a type, or a foreshadowing, of Christ.
  8. This text makes it clear that types are not a matter of our own interpretive fancy but of God's design.
  9. This is what differentiates typology from allegory.
  10. While allegorical interpretations of Scripture set aside the context and move off in all sorts of fanciful directions, typological interpretation requires that we pay careful attention to context.
  11. The way to discern biblical types is by taking note of clear theological correspondences between one person or thing in Scripture and another.
- F. Melchizedek was an obscure figure who stood well outside the mainstream of Old Testament history.
1. Yet God called him to his office and ordained his meeting with Abraham in order to provide a prophetic foreshadowing of how the Levitical priesthood was never intended to remain forever.
  2. We need to remember that God is the same today as he was in the days of Melchizedek.
  3. He is still every bit as much in control of history as he was back then.
  4. He is ensuring that even the smallest details that unfold in this world are ultimately serving to advance his plan to redeem his people.

- G. At the end of verse 3, the writer says that Melchizedek continues as a priest forever.
1. Once again, this is not intended to be taken literally.
  2. The point is simply that, unlike the Levitical priests, Melchizedek's priestly office was never transferred to a successor.
  3. From the perspective of the reader of Genesis, Melchizedek had neither beginning of days nor end of life.
  4. He just drops into the biblical narrative and then he disappears.
  5. The Old Testament tells us nothing about his death.
  6. He never gives up his priestly office.
  7. He is never replaced by somebody else.
  8. It is in this sense that his priesthood lives on forever.
  9. This is why the writer calls Jesus a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.
  10. Jesus continues to exercise his priestly ministry on our behalf for all eternity.

### III. A Superior Priesthood

- A. Verses 4-10 emphasize how Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to that of the Levites.
1. The writer makes this point by first demonstrating that Melchizedek is superior to Abraham.
  2. That is quite an assertion given Abraham's place as the father of the Jews.

3. This is even pointed out in verse 4, where Abraham is called “the patriarch.”
  4. There were other patriarchs in Genesis.
  5. There was Isaac, and Jacob, and Jacob’s twelve sons.
  6. But all of those men came from Abraham.
  7. Abraham was THE patriarch.
  8. Yet Melchizedek was greater than Abraham.
- B. The writer supports this astounding claim by directing our attention to two details from the meeting of these two men in Genesis 14.
1. Melchizedek blessed Abraham and he received tithes from Abraham.
  2. Bestowing blessings and receiving tithes was priestly ministry.
  3. As one commentator explains, “Melchizedek was therefore acting as a mediator of God’s blessing to Abraham and of [Abraham’s] gratitude to God.” [Jones, *Let’s Study Hebrews*, 72]
- C. As we think about Melchizedek’s blessing of Abraham, we should note that the term ‘bless’ is very significant in the book of Genesis.
1. It occurs 88 times in the 50 chapters of Genesis.
  2. God blesses the line of promise, and then that blessing is passed on from one generation to the next.
  3. And this blessing is not a matter of wishing someone well but is something that bears prophetic weight.

4. This is why the characters in Genesis take the patriarchal blessing so seriously.
  5. It was the means by which God's promise was transmitted.
- D. As far as the nation of Israel was concerned, Abraham was the original recipient of that promise.
1. God even backed up his promise by swearing an oath to Abraham, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."
  2. This is why it was so significant that Melchizedek blessed Abraham.
  3. God mediated his promise through Melchizedek.
  4. And as the writer of Hebrews points out, the greater always blesses the lesser.
  5. This means Melchizedek is greater than Abraham.
  6. And if Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, then he is also greater than Levi, the head of Israel's priestly tribe, because Levi was descended from Abraham.
- E. Abraham also gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils from his victory over the marauding kings.
1. This further underscores Melchizedek's priestly credentials, because receiving tithes was something that Israel's priests did.
  2. The Levites received their inheritance not in the form of land but through the tithes that the other tribes paid to them.
  3. In a similar manner, Christians today support the ministry of the church by giving a tithe of their income.



4. The fact that Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek shows that he recognized the legitimacy of Melchizedek's priesthood.
5. There is even a sense in which Levi paid a tithe to Melchizedek while he was still in the loins of his great-grandfather Abraham.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. We might be tempted to wonder why the Bible contains passages like this.
  1. It takes considerable mental effort to understand what is being communicated in these verses.
  2. But this only shows us that we need to use our minds if we are going to grow up in the faith.
  3. God does not make everything easy for us to comprehend.
  4. He wants us diligently to study what he has revealed to us.
  5. We need to remember that every single word of Scripture is profitable for us.
  6. Even the most obscure and difficult passages should be more precious to us than silver and gold.
  7. It is well worth our time to ponder their meaning.
- B. As for the benefit of considering Jesus through Melchizedekian lenses, this really should be quite clear.
  1. These verses should cause us to have greater reverence for Jesus and greater confidence in Jesus.
  2. We have a high priest who can mediate God's blessings to us for all eternity.

3. We have a Savior who is great enough to deal with whatever problems we face and whatever sins plague us.
4. This is why we must not turn our back on Jesus and look elsewhere for comfort and help.
5. If we did that, we would be turning our back on the only true source of comfort and help.
6. We must not neglect such a great salvation.
7. For it is only by faith and patience that we will inherit the promises.
8. And the way to persevere in patient faith is to keep growing up in our faith.