



G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

The Order of Melchizedek

Hebrews 7:1-10

June 7, 2009

¹For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ²and 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. ³He 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. ⁴See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! ⁵And 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. ⁶But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. ⁹One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

- ❖ When studying the Book of Hebrews, it is important that the contemporary reader grasp a particular biblical concept – that is the concept of a *type* or *shadow*.
- ❖ A biblical *type* is a person or object in the Old Testament that foreshadows and anticipates the fulfillment [of that type] in Christ.
- ❖ The Old Testament is filled with countless *types* which prefigure Jesus Christ. Again, biblical types include inanimate objects, such as the Tabernacle; as well as men, and even women, such as Esther.
- ❖ However, as John MacArthur writes, “The type, though it is historical, real, and of God, is nonetheless imperfect and temporary.”
- ❖ Therefore, when examining Old Testament types, it should never surprise us that **none of them correspond to Christ perfectly**. That is, there is always an imperfection in them, or a point where they fall short. This does not negate the

value of type, rather, it simply shows its imperfection – and, consequently, the perfection of Christ.

- ❖ For example, the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament were **types**, as they demonstrated that the shedding of blood, and the loss of life was required for the remission of sin. However, they were insufficient, as they were not human – and were not perfect.
- ❖ Also, David pointed to Christ as the Messianic King. Yet, David was sinful, and his rule was limited.
- ❖ Such an analysis would apply to every type in the Old Testament, including the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the Priesthood.
- ❖ And central to the Book of Hebrews is the contrast between the Old Testament *types* and the perfection to be found in Christ.
- ❖ One of the greatest examples of this is the figure of Melchizedek. Here, in Hebrews 7, Melchizedek is mentioned for the fourth time in this book. It is clear that in the mind of the author [of course, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit], that the mysterious figure of Melchizedek is important.

I. Melchizedek was a Historical Figure

Genesis 14:17-20: “¹⁷After his 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). ¹⁸And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹And he blessed him and said,
‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
²⁰and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.”

- ❑ One of the first question any reader of Genesis 14, as well as the Book of Hebrews will as is, “**Who was this Melchizedek?** What was his identity?”
 - Some scholars have suggested it was Shem, one of the sons of Noah [who would become the line out of which the Hebrews would emerge].
 - Others believe that Melchizedek was an angelic or celestial being.

- Still other see the episode of Melchizedek as being an example of an Old Testament *Christophany*, that is, an occasion where the pre-incarnate Christ reveals Himself to man for a particular purpose (consider Isaiah 6 as an example).
 - Yet, this would be difficult, if not impossible, as Hebrews 7:3 describes Melchizedek as “*resembling* the Son of God...”
 - If this were the pre-incarnate Christ, the author of Hebrews would have, no doubt, stated that Melchizedek *was* the Son of God, or possibly the “Son of Man.”
- Consequently, it seems rather clear, from the biblical testimony, that Melchizedek was an historical figure who pre-figured Jesus Christ.

- This was an interesting time in the Ancient Near East (the modern-day Middle East). This was several hundred years prior to the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and paganism was the “religion of the day.” It was much like our time today. That is, it was not that men rejected a belief in God, it was simply that they were worshipping the Creation rather than the Creator. The worship of the Sun and the Moon and the Stars was the clearest form of this.
- And it is in the pagan setting that Melchizedek mysteriously emerges.

“We must conclude, therefore, that we know very little about the person of Melchizedek, except that, apart from the line of Abraham, he kept pure religion as he had received it handed down from the time of the flood. He was a most extraordinary man, but a man nonetheless, and one of whom the Bible intentionally tells us only what it wants us to know.”
 Richard Phillips

- Also, John Calvin, in his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, writes, “Amid the corrupts of the world, he alone, in that land, was an upright and sincere cultivator and guardian of religion.”
- Therefore, it seems that we can learn a great deal from Melchizedek, in that, in the midst of a highly pagan culture, he maintained his faith in the one true God.
- Yet, this is basically, all we know of this man.

II. Melchizedek Foreshadowed Christ

1. Melchizedek combined the ancient near eastern offices of priest and king.

- Melchizedek appears to be the only figure who combined these two offices.
- Hebrews 7:1 states, “For this Melchizedek, **king** of Salem, **priest** of the Most High God...”
- Other Old Testament figures would combine other offices. For example, David combined the offices of King and Prophet. Samuel appeared to combine the offices of Prophet and Priest. However, Melchizedek seems unique in his combination of these two offices.
- Furthermore, he did so *prior* to their formal establishment in theocracy of Ancient Israel.

2. Melchizedek’s name reflects his character and function

- Next, the very name of Melchizedek, the king of Salem, and priest of the Most High God, reflects his character and function.
- That is, the name Melchizedek is formed by combining *Melek*, which means “king” with *tsedeq*, which means “righteous.” In other words, his name literally means “Righteous King” – a clear foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.
- Not only this, but Melchizedek, once again, appears to be *righteous* and upright in the midst of the pagan and idolatrous Canaanites.
- Also, he is described as **king of Salem**.
 - The city of Salem is typically understood as Jerusalem, which means, “the city of Salem.”
 - In Psalm 76:2 Zion and Salem appear to be synonymous.
 - Yet, ultimately, the significance of the phrase “king of Salem” seems to come from the word *Salem* which is a derivative of the Hebrew word *Shalom*, meaning “peace.” Consequently, Melchizedek is the “**King of Righteousness**” in the “**City of Peace**” – a beautiful picture of Christ Himself – the Prince of Peace and the King of Kings.
 - Further, Melchizedek’s rule represented **peace** in the midst of warring pagans.

- ❑ Finally, according to Genesis 14:18, Melchizedek was priest of *El Elyon*, or “God Most High.” Some have taken this particular name of God, in this context, to mean that the Melchizedekian priesthood represented the entire world – both Jew and Gentile. In other words, he was not a priest of *Yahweh* (the name of the God of Israel), in this context, but rather, he was the priest of the God of all Creation – the possessor of heaven and earth (although, *Yahweh* is all of these as well).

3. Melchizedek Pursued Abraham

- ❑ In Genesis 14:17, Moses writes that Melchizedek “*went out to meet* Abraham” in order to bless him.
- ❑ So it is which God, our Father, who pursues by the work of Christ, through the power of the Person of the Holy Spirit.
- ❑ And, by his grace, he does so simply to bless us.

4. Melchizedek Blessed Abraham

- ❑ Next, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, pointing to our blessing in Christ.
- ❑ What is significant, here, is that Melchizedek blessed Abraham publicly, in the presence of the Canaanites.
- ❑ In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Martin Luther commented, “Melchizedek presents Abraham to the entire world and declares that only with him, in his house and family, are the church, the kingdom of heaven, salvation, forgiveness of sins, and the divine blessing.”
- ❑ Not only this, but in the Genesis account, Moses records that Melchizedek blesses Abraham with **bread** and **wine**. Certainly, this was, in one respect, for Abraham’s physical nourishment. However, in another very real sense, it certainly pointed to Christ. [NOTE: Rome has often (wrongly) used the Genesis 14 passage as a proof-text for their view of the Eucharist and the Mass, as well as the Priesthood.]
- ❑ For, it is Christ who blesses us through his body and blood – the bread and the wine. What a beautiful picture, then, is Melchizedek’s blessing of Abraham, as it foreshadows the establishment of the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper as a visual reminder of our real blessing in Christ.
- ❑ Jonathan Edwards states, “The bread and the wine signified the same blessings of the covenant of grace that the bread and the wine do in the sacrament of the Lord’s supper...Melchizedek’s coming to meet him with such a seal of the covenant of grace, on the occasion of this victory, evinces, that it was a pledge of God’s fulfillment of the same covenant.”

5. Melchizedek was without genealogy

- In Hebrews 7:3, the author of Hebrews explicitly states that Melchizedek “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.”
- Because of this Verse, many have concluded that Melchizedek must have been either the pre-incarnate Christ or a heavenly celestial being.
- Yet, the point that the author of Hebrews is making is that no genealogy exists in the Torah for Melchizedek. It certainly does not mean that he *literally* had no father or mother, but that the Old Testament is conspicuously silent pertaining to his lineage.
- John MacArthur writes, “It is interesting that the single Greek word (*agenealogetos*) translated **without genealogy** is found nowhere else in Scripture – in fact nowhere else in Greek literature. The reason, no doubt, is that it would have had no use because it would have made no sense.”
- According to A.W. Pink, “The silence of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning his parentage has a designed significance. The entire omission was ordered by the Holy Spirit...in order to present a perfect type of the Lord Jesus.”
- Finally, F.F. Bruce states, “In the only record which Scripture provides of Melchizedek...he appears as a living man, king of Salem and priest of God Most High; and as such he disappears. In all this – in the silences as well as in the statements – he is a fitting type of Christ...Melchizedek remains a priest continually for the duration of his appearance in the biblical narrative.”

6. Melchizedek Preceded the Law [and the Levites] and received a Tithe from Abraham.

- Lastly, the scene in Genesis 14 takes place hundreds of years prior to the establishment of the Levitical priesthood and the commandment and provision for them in the form of the tithe. Yet, we see Abraham, prior to the requirement of the tithe, giving ten percent of his spoils to Melchizedek.
- Some have tried to apply this to the requirement of the tithe today (in that Abraham tithes *prior to the Law*, thus providing us with a timeless, binding practice/rule).
- However, this misses the point of the text. For, the meaning of Abraham’s giving of the tithe to Melchizedek (and Melchizedek’s blessing of Abraham) is explained in **Hebrews 7:4-10**:

⁴See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!
⁵And 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. ⁶But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. ⁹One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

- ❑ ...And the author's point? **Melchizedek represented a better priesthood than the one that would come through the genealogy of Abraham.**
- ❑ Not only this, but **Melchizedek's priesthood came before the one the Levites.**
- ❑ **How significant this must have been to the first century Jews who read this epistle, for it clearly states Melchizedek's superiority to Abraham, when it states, in Verse 7, "It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior."**
- ❑ **That is, the author is saying – DO NOT TURN BACK TO THE INFERIOR "RELIGION" BASED UPON AN INFERIOR, LEVITICAL, PRIESTHOOD. LOOK TO CHRIST – THE ONE WHO IS SUPERIOR TO THE LEVITICAL SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM.**

III. Jesus Christ is Superior to Melchizedek

- ❑ Once again, the author's primary purpose in this epistle is warn the Hebrew Christians in first century not to return to Old Testament Judaism, for Christ is far superior to Melchizedek – and Melchizedek is superior to Abraham.
- ❑ The Scriptures demonstrate this true in several ways:

1. Melchizedek pointed to the multiple offices of Christ

- ❑ Yet, whereas, Melchizedek combined the ancient offices of Priest and King, **only Christ perfectly fulfilled and executes the office of Prophet, Priest, and King.**
- ❑ No person in the Old Testament, or any time in history – other than Jesus Christ – fulfilled all three offices.

2. Jesus Christ is the True "King of Peace and Righteousness"

- ❑ As the only one who ever lived a righteous life and perfectly fulfilled the office of King – only Christ is rightfully the "King of Righteousness."

- ❑ Not only this, it is because of the **righteousness of Jesus Christ that we, as believers, have peace with God.**
- ❑ **In other words, it is the righteousness of the Christ that leads us into the City of God, the city of Peace – the New Jerusalem – where we will dwell with God forever in an eternal state of Peace.**
- ❑ Charles Spurgeon said, “Note well the order of these two, and the dependence of the one upon the other; for there could be no true peace that was not grounded upon righteousness; and out of righteousness peace is sure to spring up.”
- ❑ Spurgeon continued, “He knew that he could not be King of peace to us till, first of all, he had woven a perfect righteousness in the loom of his life, and dyed in it his own heart’s blood in his death.”
- ❑ This also points to our **justification through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.** For it is upon the foreign imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ that we are declared right with God, having found peace with Him because of the justice the Father exacted on the Son in the crucifixion.

3. Jesus Christ is our Eternal High Priest

- ❑ Next, the lack of genealogy of Melchizedek in the Book of Genesis points to the eternity of Jesus Christ, and His everlasting Priesthood.
- ❑ Not only this, but Jesus Christ existed prior to Abraham and Melchizedek. In John 8:58, Jesus tells the Pharisees (to their horror), “Before Abraham was, I AM.”

4. Jesus Christ will Bless us Publicly

- ❑ Finally, just as Melchizedek went out and blessed Abraham publicly, so Christ will bless us publicly at the Resurrection.

“When our battle is over, the risen Jesus Christ will bless us before the eyes of the world. Indeed, in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, he proclaims us blessed even now from the throne of heaven.”
Richard Phillips

- ❑ Consider Galatians 3:13-14: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

- And, so, as we prepare to come to the table this morning, and partake of the Lord's Supper, may we meditate upon the words we have heard this morning, in Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7. May we also consider the most famous of all the Psalms – Psalm 23, as David states, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”