

The Order of Melchizedek

Some time after Abraham left his family home and moved to the land of Canaan, a famine arose. Since there was no food for him or his family he left Canaan and went to Egypt. When the famine ended and he returned to Canaan, he and Lot had so many cattle that the land couldn't support both of them. Because of this the two men were forced to part company. Abraham gave Lot first choice, and he looked around and decided to live in Sodom:

Genesis 13:10-13: “And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.”

Life in Sodom wasn't as easy as Lot expected. There came a day when a coalition of kings invaded Sodom and conquered it, carrying off (among other things) Lot and all of his possessions:

Genesis 14:1-12: “And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of

Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar. All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea. Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emins in Shaveh Kiriathaim, And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan, which is by the wilderness. And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezontamar. And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim; With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five. And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.”

When Abraham heard about this he armed his servants for war and fought the kings that had taken his nephew:

Genesis 14:14-16: “And when Abram heard

that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.”

This is when we meet a mysterious man named Melchizedek. When the king of Sodom came out to meet the victorious Abraham, Melchizedek came as well:

Genesis 14:17-20: “And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.”

This is the first and only time in the Bible that Melchizedek appears. He is a very unusual and unexpected character! First of all, Melchizedek was the king of Salem. The city of Salem (which literally means “Peace”) is very famous; the rest of the Bible refers to it as *Jerusalem*. This means Melchizedek was king over Jerusalem in the time of Abraham.

Melchizedek was not just a king, though. He was also a priest! Verse 18 tells us that he was “the priest of the most high

God". This makes him both a king *and* a priest, which is an unusual combination.

Right from the start we can see the parallels between Melchizedek and Jesus. Jesus is also a king (Revelation 19:16); during the Millennial Kingdom He will reign over the entire world. Jesus is also our high priest, who gave His own life for us and who intercedes on our behalf (Hebrews 3:1). Like Melchizedek, Jesus will one day reign as king *from Jerusalem*.

It's interesting that Melchizedek wasn't just a priest but was a priest "of the most high God". Melchizedek isn't a descendant of Abraham. He wasn't a Jew or a Levite. To find someone in this era who wasn't related to Abraham but still worshiped the most high God is amazing. To find someone who not only worshiped God but was both a king and a priest is even more amazing! Melchizedek comes out of nowhere and then disappears. The Bible doesn't tell us anything about his ancestry or how he came to be both priest and king. His past is shrouded in mystery.

One thing we do know is that as great as Abraham was, Melchizedek was even greater. We know this because Abraham gave a tithe of the loot to Melchizedek:

Hebrews 7:4-7: "Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better."

Melchizedek was an interesting person. He was both a

king and a priest, he reigned over Jerusalem, and he was greater than even Abraham. All of that is good to know but his importance runs much deeper. The book of Psalms tells us that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek:

Psalm 110:4: “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

What does that mean? Well, in order to understand this we need to understand the Levitical priesthood. The Lord established the Levitical priesthood when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai. The first priests were Aaron and his sons:

Exodus 28:41: “And thou shalt put them upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office.”

Moses and Aaron were both from the tribe of Levi:

Exodus 2:1-3: “And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.”

All priests are from the tribe of Levi, which is why it's called the Levitical priesthood. However, not everyone in the

tribe of Levi was a priest. The only people who could be priests were the direct descendants of Aaron. The rest of the tribe of Levi was charged with ministering to the priests and maintaining the tabernacle:

Leviticus 18:1-3: “And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die.”

Only the descendants of Aaron were allowed to minister as priests and perform sacrifices. The priesthood was of the tribe of Levi and the line of Aaron. If you weren't of the tribe of Levi and a descendant of Aaron then *you couldn't be a priest.*

The reason this matters is because Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi:

Revelation 5:5: “And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”

How could Jesus Christ possibly be our high priest if He wasn't from the tribe of Levi? It's because God made Him a priest after the order of *Melchizedek*, not the order of Levi:

Psalm 110:4: “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek wasn't from the line of Levi and yet he was still a priest. Jesus is our high priest, but as the apostle Paul explained He's not a *levitical* priest:

Hebrews 7:14-17: “For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Why was this necessary? The reason Jesus needed to be a priest of a different order is because the Levitical priesthood couldn't save anyone. The Levitical sacrifices were unable to forgive sins:

Hebrews 10:4: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

Not only were those sacrifices unable to take away sins, but no one could be saved by keeping the Mosaic Law:

Galatians 3:11: “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”

The Levitical sacrifices could *not* take away sin, and

keeping the Levitical law could *not* justify anyone in the sight of God. (This is by design! The law was intended to point us to Christ and wasn't an end in itself.) In order for salvation to be possible there had to be a change in the order of things. In order to change the law the priesthood had to change as well:

Hebrews 7:11-12: “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.”

In the days of Moses the Israelites were under the Mosaic Law and the Levitical priesthood – but neither of those could save them. Today we're not under the law but are under grace. The reason that's possible is because the Levitical priesthood has been replaced with something else. Jesus, our high priest, has done away with the old order and created a new one – and the reason *that's* possible is because He's *not* from the tribe of Levi. The old system has been annulled:

Hebrews 7:18: “For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.”

As Christians we're not under the law but are under grace (Romans 6:14). The Mosaic Law has no power over us. We're not bound to keep it, as Israel was. (It's true that we must keep the commandments which God has given to the church in the New Testament, but that's not where our salvation comes from.) This is *why* we're not under the law. Since there has been a change in the priesthood, the law of the old priesthood has been annulled and replaced with a different law – the law of grace:

Romans 8:2: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

This is why these things are so important. In order for us to be saved there had to be a change in the law and a change in the priesthood. The old law and the old priesthood couldn't save us. Christ didn't come as a Levitical priest. Instead He was a priest after the order of Melchizedek and that made all the difference. Now salvation is indeed possible:

Hebrews 7:22-28: “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.”

Under the Levitical system the priests had to offer sacrifices day after day after day. However, Jesus doesn't need to do that! He offered one supreme sacrifice – Himself – and then sat down at the right hand of God. That one ultimate sacrifice was

enough to pay for all of our sins and make us right with God. Jesus literally “paid it all” with His own blood.

The Lord Jesus Christ is still our high priest and still executes that office. One point that's easy to overlook is verse 25: the reason Jesus can save us *because He ever lives to make intercession for us*. Our eternal life depends on the eternal life of Jesus! We will continue to be saved as long as Jesus continues to live and intercede for us. Our salvation is dependent upon Jesus for the rest of eternity.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is the Eternal One. He's always existed and He will always exist. We also know that He will never stop making intercession for us. Our eternal salvation and everlasting life is absolutely assured beyond any possibility of doubt. What I want to point out is that we will *always* be dependent upon Jesus as our high priest.

When the Bible says that Jesus is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek it's not a useless bit of trivia. Instead it's a vital fact which makes our salvation possible.