

MELCHIZEDEK –THE “OTHER” EMBODIED

Melchizedek is part mystery, part amazing, and fully a significant figure in understanding God and his emphasis on the others. Mysteriously appearing in the Genesis narrative during an encounter with Abraham, Melchizedek would come to be connected to Christ and to represent God’s forever plan of including others in his kingdom.

Priest and King

We are first introduced to Melchizedek in Genesis 14. In this text we see kings who were once allies now waging war in the Siddim Valley. As a result Abram’s nephew Lot was taken prisoner. Discovering this Abram sets out to rescue Lot and recover his possessions. Abram gathered his 318 fighting men and in a demonstration of strength secured the victory and rescued Lot. It is afterward that we catch the first glimpse of Melchizedek (starting in verse 18).

He is introduced as both the “King of Salem” (think Jerusalem) and as “priest of God Most High.” He communes with Abraham and proceeds to pronounce a blessing over him—calling upon the true Jehovah God. Amazingly following this blessing Abraham offers tithes to Melchizedek—recognizing and honoring him as his superior (something that would be extremely important later). It was after this encounter God twice reinforces his covenant with Abram and changes his name to Abraham.

As both priest and king Melchizedek is unique in all of the Old Testament narrative. He makes his only appearance in this story, yet Abraham immediately recognizes his significance—giving him a tenth of everything he owned. With just this one brief historical mention Melchizedek naturally fits into the category of “others.” His story was not part of the main historical biblical record. Yet his importance—in several ways—is outsized compared to how much we know about him.

“A Priest Forever”

In seemingly random fashion Melchizedek’s name pops up in Psalm 110:4:

The Lord has sworn an oath and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

Contextually, this is a messianic psalm (which Jesus acknowledges in Matthew 22:44)—foreshadowing the day of the Christ and therefore connecting the priesthood of Melchizedek to that of Jesus. It is here first that we recognize that something bigger was going on with Melchizedek than just meeting and blessing Abram.

Thankfully we find further commentary and explanation in the pages of the New Testament—specifically the book of Hebrews. Here we gain the insight to not just Melchizedek’s outsized significance, but also an understanding of God’s desire for others to enjoy the blessings of his kingdom.

Jesus Like Melchizedek is the Other

The NT book of Hebrews presents a grand picture of how Christ is the better and truer fulfillment of Abraham's covenant and God's eternal will for all. Repeated comparing Old Testament heroes and practices to Christ and his covenant, the Hebrew writer clearly demonstrates that Christ's way is THE way God chooses to operate within now. And much to our surprise, Melchizedek plays a major part in explaining what all of this means.

Remembering that the focus of this book was directed toward Messianic Jews who were slowly abandoning Christ to return to Judaism is vital in understanding the part Melchizedek plays in the message of the book.

First referenced in 5:10—the author makes it clear that Melchizedek is important to his story, but he hesitates wondering if his audience is ready to digest it—the idea that Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek. He picks the theme back up in 6:20 and discusses in fully in the seventh chapter.

He identifies Melchizedek as both “king of righteousness” and “king of peace.” He reveals that there is no genealogy available for him—indicating that his priesthood is therefore, forever. And he recalls father Abraham paying tithes to him. In each example stand overarching messianic connections as well as great significance for God's relationship with others.

First the messianic connections: Christ is also identified in Scripture as both the embodiment of righteousness and peace (see 2 Corinthians 5:21 & Isaiah 9:6). The priesthood of Jesus is also a forever priesthood. Like Melchizedek whose priesthood predated both Torah and the Levitical priesthood it established—neither Melchizedek nor Christ were/are bound to that system. They operate outside of it—free from its restraints. This was especially key to demonstrating the better nature of Christ priesthood to the Hebrew recipients of the book. Why return to a system with an inferior, less expansive priesthood when Christ—serving as both priest and offering—brings so much more. Couple this with Abraham (and in essence Levi) paying tithes to Melchizedek. This served to demonstrate how the priesthood of Melchizedek then and Christ now (the priest after the order of Melchizedek) is clearly superior—offering complete forgiveness for all and for all-time.

The Others

Also very clearly embedded in all of this teaching is how Melchizedek was a representation of others-outside of the Abrahamic circle—who God called upon and used in incredible ways. Fast forward to Christ, whose covenant included those outside the Abrahamic covenant and the comparison is clear. Christ serving as a priest after the order of Melchizedek means all others are welcome in God's kingdom. His priesthood is not bound by ethnicity or any other restricting factors. The connection of both men vividly reveals God always had in mind the others in his plan of redemption. Melchizedek was an early embodiment of God's desire to include the others in his promises.