

The Priesthood of Melchizedek

A Priest Forever

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

Hebrews 7:1-8

Typology

ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING ideas in the Bible is something called **typology**. **Typology** is “the study of Old Testament types as anticipating New Testament persons or occurrences.”¹ A type is like the image of Abraham Lincoln stamped with massive pressure onto a copper planchet, only in reverse because in a biblical type, the image comes before the real thing (the “antitype”)! Types are imprints of the future literally pressed upon the fabric of time and space in human history. Since they anticipate a real, historical future, types presuppose an all knowing, all sovereign God who is able to bring about the antitype. Only God could do such a thing.

The word “**type**” comes from a Greek word *tupos*, which is found in several places in the Bible (cf. **Rom 5:14**; **1 Cor 10:6**; cf. **Ex 25:40 LXX**). Types can consist of persons, actions, events, or things. It is found in Hebrews in the chapter after the one we are studying today where it refers to a **building** made by Moses (see **Heb 8:5**). In Romans 5, **Adam** is said to be a type of Christ. Both were put under a test. Both were the representative man. Both brought

¹ *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 1996: 290.

something to humanity, though what they brought is the opposite of one another. Adam brought death; Christ brought life. In 1 Corinthians 10, the **actions of people** of Israel are called types. They are “**examples**” of how we are not to behave. In 1 Peter 3, **Noah’s flood** is said to be a type of Christian baptism. It is a forerunner and something that was very much like the waters we go down into and rise up from in the sacrament.

Types are related to antitypes by similarities: “like to like” or “same to same.” But sometimes, **people make mistakes** in seeing types where probably none should be seen. For example, there is a similarity between the redness of Rahab’s scarlet thread and the red blood of Jesus and early fathers often saw the former as a type of the latter. This is probably not true, because types are related organically on a deeper level than something like the superficial color of a thing (these are what philosophers would call “accidents” or things that are not essential to making a thing what it is). If anything is a type in that story, it is probably on the more basic level of one person saving others in the midst of a wicked place.

At any rate, the first type in Hebrews actually occurs in our chapter, at least as most people understand what is being

said. This is the relationship between **Jesus** and a man named **Melchizedek**. Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14 in a chapter that is in its own right one of the strangest in that book. Fittingly, someone has said, “**There is probably a no more enigmatic figure in all of scripture than Melchizedek, and there is no more difficult problem in biblical studies than tracing the Melchizedek tradition in Jewish and Christian literature.**”² He is also in Psalm 110. If you are anything like me after reading Hebrew’s take on this person, you will be scratching your head at some of the remarkable things that are said here. So who is this Melchizedek, why does he show up here in Hebrews, and what does this have to do with Jesus and helping us move on to maturity? We will take two weeks to answer these questions. Whatever else we say this morning, up front I will answer this way. It has to do at the very least with **typology**.

Melchizedek, Genesis 14, and Hebrews 7:1-2

Hebrews 7:1 begins, “**For this Melchizedek...**” He has just raised the question of this person in the previous verse

² Richard N. Longenecker, “The Melchizedek Argument of Hebrews: A Study in the Development and Circumstantial Expression of New Testament Thought,” in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd* (ed. Robert Guelich, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 161.

which said, “...where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (6:20). We will look at more at this verse next time when we conclude our thoughts about this mystery man. Until then, this verse (and the one before it) mark the return of the discussion that was brought up way back in the beginning of chapter 5. Just prior to the long digression about growing up into maturity he said, “And being made perfect, he [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek” (5:9-10). There is some kind of a strange connection between “eternal” and Melchizedek and we will see this several times today. But before Hebrews gets to it, it warns us that what he is about to talk about here is “hard to explain” (11). Indeed, as we will see, it surely is. Melchizedek puts on our plate a huge piece of “meat” from Hebrews.

Again, we know about Melchizedek from two places in the Old Testament. The first is the actual story about him. It is found in Genesis 14. The beginning of the chapter recounts the “Giant Wars” as I call them. It tells us about a war of five kings against four. The four kings, with a man named Chedorlaomer as their leader, were so fierce and

deadly, that they fought a series of wars against the Rephaim giants (see Deut 2) and won them all. The giants, you see, were in literally in the way of a confederation of five rebellious kings lead by the **kings of Sodom and Gomorrah**. During this war, **Lot**—Abram’s nephew—was taken away along with all of his possessions. When Abram was told about it, he led a force of over 300 men and went in pursuit as far as Dan and Damascus. God was with Abram, and he returned victorious with his Nephew and all of his family.

After defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings from the east, the king of Sodom went out to meet Abram in the Valley of Shaveh (the King’s Valley), probably south of what would later be called **Jerusalem**. This is where we meet Melchizedek. “**And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High [Elyon].) And he blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’ And Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (Gen 14:18-20)**. And that is all we know about Melchizedek from Genesis.

Hebrews recounts much of this for us in **Heb 7:1-2**. It tells us about his **kingship (7:1)**. This will become important

in the only other passage we learn about Melchizedek. He is a king of a certain important [place](#). This place is “[Salem](#)” (7:1). This is the early name of Jerusalem (see [Ps 76:2](#)). Next, it tells us that he is a [priest](#) (7:1). Believe it or not, this makes Melchizedek the only explicit [priest-king](#) in the Bible, though many have this dual role implicitly. Melchizedek serves a very specific God. He serves “The Most High.” Elyon is the name here, and it is most often used when non-Jewish peoples are in view, for it was a term used by other nations when they talked about the Most High (and they rarely meant Yahweh). Genesis’ point is that he is the priest-king of the Lord in the city that would later become Jerusalem, but before Abram was given his promised son Isaac.

Hebrews skips the part of the bread and wine and goes right to the blessing. [Melchizedek the king blesses Abram](#) (7:1). But it is not the blessing of Abraham that is on his mind. Instead, it is the fact that for receiving such a blessing, Abraham gave [a tithe of all his spoils to Melchizedek](#) (7:2). This is what is truly important for Hebrews. Why? The second half of the verse explains it in a rather interesting way. “[He is first](#)” (*protos*). Just here, he becomes a type of Christ.

Melchizedek: First in Name

What it means by “first” is the first of many strange things said about Melchizedek. **First in what?** The answer to this question is hinted at in the next part. “**He is first, by translation of his name...**” (7:2). So it is something about **his name** that makes him “first.” Names are extremely important things in the Bible, much more than they are in our culture. At the very beginning of Hebrews, Jesus inherits a “name” that is more excellent than the names of angels (1:4), and to prove it he is named the “firstborn” (*prototokos*), and thus all the angels worship him. “**Name,**” “**first,**” and even the “**angel**” idea as we will see makes Jesus the antitype of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is a combination of two elements separated by a hyphen in the Hebrew (*malkî-şedeq*) which lends itself as much to a title as to a name. *Malki* comes from *melek* (king) and has the first person singular ending (my): “My King.” *Sedeq* means “righteousness.” Hence, “My King is Righteousness” or simply, “**King of Righteousness,**” as Hebrews puts it. Like Elyon, which was a word used for “god” throughout the ancient near east, *Sedeq* (*Sedek*) was

also the name of a god.³ The Bible wants us to know that the Righteous God and the Most High are the same God—the God of Salem. Counterfeit pretenders and usurpers to the throne of Yahweh don't get to steal his titles! However, the way Hebrews puts it, it is probable that King Melchizedek has taken the title of Righteousness—which is a divine attribute sometimes personified and said to be in God's heavenly court⁴--upon *himself*. So while he serves the Most High, *he* is the Righteous King and thus *his* "name" makes him "first." I can't exaggerate how important this point is to things we are soon to see.

This is the first way his name is put. The second has to do with the place where he is the priest-king. The place is "Salem." "And then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace." We say "Salem," but it is actually *Shalem*, from

³ "Philo, who claimed to get his information from the Phoenician writer Sanchuniaton, noted that the Phoenicians numbered among their gods "Misor and Sydyk, that is, 'Easy to loosen' and Righteous (*Misōr kai Sydyk, toutestin eulyton kai dikaion*); they invented the use of salt" (quoted by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* i.10.13; instead of *Sydyk*, some manuscripts have *Sydek* or *Sedek*)." (B. F. Batto, "Zedeq," ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* [Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999], 930). Thus, some will give an alternate translation like, "My King is Sedek." See Eric F. Mason, "Hebrews 7:3, Melchizedek, and the Nature of Jesus' Priesthood," [SBL 2007 Presentation], p. 4, <https://hebrews.unibas.ch/documents/2007Mason.pdf>, last accessed 2-17, 2016,

⁴ *Ibid.* See also J. Reiling, "Melchizedek," ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 560. Adoni-Sedek (My Lord is Righteousness) was a wicked king of Jerusalem in the days of Joshua (Josh 10:1). He seems to be telling others to call him, "My Righteous Lord."

shalom, which means “peace.” One dictionary says, “Whatever the original semantics of the city name may have been, the element *šālēm* could be construed as meaning ‘peaceful,’ alluding to the messianic ‘prince of peace’ in **Isa 9:6**.”⁵ “... a son will be given to us ... and His name will be called ... Prince of Peace.” Solomon writes, “Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal [“kings” - *melek*] son!” (**Ps 72:1**). Therefore, both the name and the place have Messianic overtones. This is but a taste of what it means that Melchizedek is a type of Christ.

Melchizedek the Eternal?

After introducing us to what we know about Melchizedek from Genesis, we come to **one of the most mysterious verses in the Bible: Hebrews 7:3**. It is the real beginning of the reason why Melchizedek is such a Mystery Man to biblical scholars and lay people alike. “**He 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.**” Now, this is not information that we get from anything that is said in the Bible. So where

⁵ **Michael C. Astour**, “Salem (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 905.

does it come from?⁶

Many suggest that what Hebrews is doing is giving an **argument from silence**. The idea would be that as long as the Bible doesn't talk about it, he is free to argue like this. The thinking is that of course he has a mother and a father and a genealogy, beginning of days and end of life, but since none of this is mentioned, why not use the absence to liken him to Jesus? If this is what Hebrews is doing, it isn't exactly a strong argument, because many people in the Bible lack such information. Thus, Jesus would be like anyone in the Bible of whom nothing like this was said.

Someone who agrees that this is what is going on, but who believes that Melchizedek is unique in more ways than just these absences has put it, **“The lack of genealogy about Melchizedek does not seem to support Heb 7:3 because the genealogies of many people were not mentioned in the Scriptures. It would be nonsense to treat all those people equally with Melchizedek.”**⁷ Part of his solution is points

⁶ Of course, it comes from God. That goes without saying. But that isn't the answer I'm after, because it begs the question of *how* the biblical author decided upon what he was going to write. Only if one had a Dictaphone view of inspiration like Muslims have of the Koran would the following answer not be acceptable. But for much of the Bible (places where it is not directly quoting Yahweh or Jesus, and even that isn't a "Dictaphone"), this is not a biblical view of inspiration. Rather, men were lead along by the Spirit as they inquired about things, thought about them, prepared, and finally wrote with the Spirit guiding them.

⁷ **Sung Jin Park**, "Melchizedek as a Covenantal Figure: The Biblical Theology of The Eschatological Royal Priesthood," *Bible.org* [Apr 4, 2011],

out that we have an inscription of one Abdu-Heba, another king of Jerusalem (14th BC) that it is said of him, “Neither my father nor my mother but the mighty arm of the king [of Egypt] gave [the kingship] to me.”⁸ God giving the kingship instead of being born is kind of, but also kind of not what Hebrews is saying.

Another possibility exists and, quite frankly, needs to be taken much more seriously than it is by most people, since it reflects [the only certain interpretation](#) that we have prior to the writing of Hebrews.⁹ To put that another way, there was lots of speculation about Melchizedek in the century or two prior to the writing of Hebrews, and all scholars now recognize that our author was at the very least familiar with these ideas. The only question is whether he agrees with them or not.

So what ideas am I talking about? This is where things start to get pretty strange pretty quickly. Among [the Dead Sea Scrolls](#) (which predate the NT) we have discovered a few of them that talk about Melchizedek. The thing is, all of

https://bible.org/article/melchizedek-covenantal-figure-biblical-theology-eschatological-royal-priesthood#P36_10383, last accessed 2, 16, 2016.

⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 68. Amarna Tablet No. 288, lines 14f. quoted in [M. J. Paul](#). “The Order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:3),” *WTJ* 49 (1987): 207 [204-209], and [F. F. Bruce](#), *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 136-37.

⁹ See Mason, 9.

them speak about Melchizedek as if he were a heavenly being of some sort.¹⁰

Sometimes he is presented as **one of the chief angels** around Yahweh's throne in the divine council (**4Q401 11 3**). It is interesting in this light that Hebrews has talked about how Jesus is greater than angels and this might put the Melchizedek typology in a similar light. In the so called "Sons of the Sabbath Sacrifice," he has a "kingdom" and is presented as a heavenly high priest, something that at the very least is coincidental, but it probably much more than that for Hebrews. In one of the texts (**4Q Visions of Amram^b**), he is said to have three names which are: **Michael**, **Prince of Light**, and **Melchizedek**. In another (**11QMelch II, 10**), he becomes the "Elohim" of **Psalms 82**, which Jesus

¹⁰ For the following discussion, see (above): **Mason**, 1-23; **Kim**; also **Anders Aschim**, "Melchizedek and Jesus: 11QMelchizedek and the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus*, ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, & Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden, Brill, 1999), 129-47.

https://books.google.com/books?id=9ST5wISvTaQC&pg=PR9&dq=carey++newman&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjo6OHGuP_KAhWMKCYKHRxsDToQ6AEIPjAG#v=onepage&q=carey%20%20newman&f=false; **James C. VanderKam**, "Sabbatical Chronologies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Their Historical Context*, ed. Timothy H. Lim (London: T & T Clark, 2000), 159-78. https://books.google.com/books?id=4UaaULzuUQkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+Dead+Sea+Scrolls+in+Their+Historical+Context&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjwryu9uf_KAhXM1CYKHRdfBpoQ6AEIHDA#v=onepage&q=The%20Dead%20Sea%20Scrolls%20in%20Their%20Historical%20Context&f=false; **Charles A. Gieschen**, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents & Early Evidence* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 171-75 and 307-11. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/76371514/Angelomorphic-Christology>.

applies to himself (**John 10:34**). In still another, “Instead of reading ‘the year of the LORD’s favor,’ which is the way **Isa 61:2** actually reads, the text ... reads ‘the year of Melchizedek’s favor.’” (**11Q13 Col. ii:9**).¹¹ Like Jesus, who wins a great victory over Satan in **Heb 2:14-15**, Melchizedek is seen as a heavenly warrior to fights and defeats Belial at the end of the age.

All of this speculation is rather strange to our ears, and perhaps unknown to most of us. And if it were only in Jewish writings, we could dismiss it. The problem is, **Hebrews itself** is cryptic on this very point. The question that plagues scholars—both today and even in the early church—is whether or not Hebrews shares in this thinking. Does it think that Melchizedek is of supernatural origin?

Because this person (and very few other people—if any—in the Bible attain this status even in Jewish speculation) has so many strange things said about him, it is quite possible to **take Hebrews 7:3 literally**. He really did not have a father or mother or genealogy. He really did not have beginning of days nor end of life. Hebrews almost

¹¹ **Craig A. Evans**, *NT306 The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014). I don’t remember if he discusses this directly or not here, but you can listen to Dr. Evans talking about Melchizedek on “Hebrews: A Superior Covenant,” *White Horse Inn* [Feb 8, 2015], <https://www.whitehorseinn.org/component/tags/tag/2-hebrews>.

certainly knows about this tradition and to use language like this for Melchizedek certainly would have been begging the original audience—probably many converted Jewish priests themselves—to enter into that thinking. This is all the more true when you know that there is one passage (in **2 Enoch A 71:27-29**) where Melchizedek is said to have no biological father, though his mother is Sothonim, the wife of Nir, Noah’s mythical brother. He is a miraculously born baby! To say that he is without father or mother may have caused this passage to come to mind, if it was written prior to Hebrews, which it could have been.

One of the great challenges of Hebrews in regard to its view of Melchizedek is that it compares Jesus’ to Melchizedek precisely on the point that he has no beginning or, especially, no end of life. “**Resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever**” (**Heb 7:3**). And it doesn’t just say it once. It says it no less than three times in three different ways (also **Heb 7:8** and **16** and if we add **5:6**, **6:20**; and **7:24** which all talk about “forever”, three more). That is, *Melchizedek* continues a priest forever, not just Jesus! Again, if this were nearly any other person and it said this, it probably wouldn’t be as big of a deal, as the Bible does teach that all believers have eternal life. And even the OT has this

view of the afterlife. But this is Melchizedek with so much strangeness attached to him. Let's look at what it says.

Heb 7:4-10 starts off by asking us to consider “**how great this man**” Melchizedek is. (It does not actually use the word for “man,” but literally reads, “he” or “this one”). Why is he great? Because of all the people, mighty Abraham “**gave a tenth of the spoils**” (7:4). This actually refers to the legal concept of **a tithe**, which is found in the Law of Moses, but which predates Moses and existed in other cultures outside of Israel. Hebrews isn't raising this to have a discussion on tithing, however. It is to contrast the priesthood of Aaron with the priesthood of Melchizedek (**which we will look at in greater detail next time**).

“**And 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**” (7:5). He is making two points here. **First**, the priests of Israel actually had a command where they could *take* the tithe. But we find no command in Genesis 14 and we don't know if Abraham had to do this by custom or if he did it much like a freewill offering, because he simply wanted to in acknowledgement of this king's greatness. **Second**, the priests received their tithe from

among equals: “brothers.” But Melchizedek and Abraham are not brothers. “But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises” (Heb 7:6).

If they are not brothers, then what was their relationship? This question gets at the heart of Hebrews raising this issue. Abraham is considered perhaps the greatest OT person. No one is greater than Abraham. The Pharisees once asked Jesus, “Are you greater than our father Abraham?” (John 8:53). Curiously in reference to Hebrews 7, the context was about death and life. “... Abraham who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” Given this, it would have been rather amazing to use this same argument about Christ being eternal because he is like Abraham, even though, of course, he has eternal life. Hebrews doesn’t do that.

It is at just this point that Hebrews swoops in with its point about Abraham paying a tithe to Melchizedek. But look at how it puts it. “It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior” (Heb 7:7). We now see clearly that Hebrews not only does Hebrews not see them as brothers, it does not see Abraham and Melchizedek as equals. The really interesting thing is said next. “In the one

case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives” (8).

Just as we found hints in vs. 3 that Hebrews may see something more in Melchizedek than most of us would ever want to, so also we see the same thing now. Did you catch it? “One who lives” is contrasted with “mortal men.” Whether the mortal men refers to the case of Levites (vs. 5) or more probably to Abraham (vs. 6), the conclusion is the same either way. Melchizedek is not mortal. He is immortal. He is contrasted with mortal men. Jesus is not the one being contrasted yet. That honor belongs to Melchizedek. This is astonishing and rather shocking to say the least. Melchizedek is greater than Abraham because Melchizedek lives? Where might all of this speculation come from? Psalm 110.

Melchizedek and Psalm 110

Psalm 110 is the only other place in the Bible where we hear about Melchizedek. It is a Psalm of David. It contains perhaps the most quoted verse in the NT: Psalm 110:1. “The Lord (Yahweh) said to my Lord (Adonai), ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’”

Hebrews has already quoted it (**Heb 1:13**) and alluded to it (**1:3**) in his discussion about angels which may be important. He will quote or allude to it several more times (**8:1; 10:12-13; 12:3**). The Psalm continues as a War Psalm (**vs. 2**), and we have seen how Melchizedek and Jesus are both associated with war. We will skip vs. 3 for a moment.

Then we come to **vs. 4**. “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind. ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’” Hebrews cites this verse from the LXX no less than five times (**5:6, 10; 7:3; 17; 21**). Several scholars have noted ambiguities that may have led the speculations at Qumran and other places about Melchizedek being something more than human. One says:

Ancient readers of the story of Abraham and Melchizedek in Genesis looked to this psalm to help clarify its significance. But that meant first of all deciding to whom these words were addressed and what they meant. Here, the potentially ambiguous writing system of biblical Hebrew played a crucial role: the Hebrew words that correspond to [You are a priest forever, after the line of Melchizedek] could in fact be read and understood in two radically different fashions ... One way of understanding [the words] was: ‘You are a priest forever by my order [or

‘on my account’], O Melchizedek.” If this is [how they translated it], then it is Melchizedek who is being addressed *throughout the psalm* [emphasis added], and everything else in the psalm that refers to ‘you’ must therefore be talking about Melchizedek.¹²

This would include Adonai. “Hence he sits at God’s right hand and God has given him his kingly scepter.”¹³

Another ambiguity is found in **Psalm 110:3** which says, “From the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours” (**Ps 110:3**). The word “youth” is the ambiguous term. Thus, and amazingly, the LXX translates it as “begotten” (“I have begotten you from the womb before the morning”). In other words, it is perfectly legitimate Hebrew to read the Psalm as speaking to Melchizedek being a/the begotten son of God before time. The point is, this is not wild speculation. There are biblical reasons that come from Psalm 110 itself that caused so many people to wonder who this person was.

In the history of the church, many have taken Melchizedek simply as an important, but **quite ordinary**

¹² James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 154. A more technical discussion is in Aschim, 136-37.

¹³ See Vanderkam, 173-74.

human.¹⁴ But some have not.¹⁵ The Pelagians said he lived a sinless and perfect life. Some (including Gnostics and a sect called the Melchizedekians) identified him with the Holy Spirit taking the form of an angel. Origin and Didymus the Blind believed he was an angel. Ambrose seems to have called him both God (like those at Qumran) and the son of God, even though he in another place said he was absolutely just a man.¹⁶ Epiphanius catalogued views that said he was the pre-incarnate Son,¹⁷ a manifestation of the Holy Spirit,¹⁸ or even the Father.¹⁹ Clearly, the Church would not have followed the Jews in such speculations if Hebrews was clear on who this person was.

¹⁴ In the early church, Jerome received a letter claiming that Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit, and assured the man who gave it to him that most in the church agreed he was a man. This included: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Eusebius of Emesa, Apollinaris, and Eustathius.

¹⁵ On the history that follows see Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 242-44.

¹⁶ The citations in Hughes are *Hexaemeron* i.3. *De Abrahamo* i.3. and *De Fide ad Gratianum* iii.11. I tracked down the *On Abraham* quote (found in the Genesis Ancient Christian Commentary) and it does not appear to me that he is saying that Melchizedek was the Son of God, but that Jesus was. I could not find the other quote.

¹⁷ Cf. Epiphanius *Pan.* 55.7.3; Ambrose *De Abr.* 1.3.4.

¹⁸ Cf. *Pan.* 55.5.2. The possibility is also entertained by Cyril of Alexandria; *Glaph.* on Gen 2:7* (PG 69.97).¹⁸

¹⁹ Cf. *Pan.* 55.9.11–15; and Mark the Hermit (PG 65.1117–40), on whom see Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, 101–11. See also John F. X. Sheehan, “Melchisedek in Christian Consciousness,” *Sciences Ecclésiastiques* 18 (1966) 127–38. These references are found in Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 195, notes 111, 113, 114, 115.

So Who Was Melchizedek?

As for me, my worldview could very easily assimilate the idea that Melchizedek is the Angel of the LORD, God the Son who took the land of Canaan. I think that this would solve most of the problems. But there are problems with the this.²⁰ The biggest hurdle is that Hebrews continually says that Melchizedek “resembles” or is “like” Jesus. That is a comparison, not equality. “*Resembling (aphomoioo) the Son of God he continues a priest forever*” (Heb 7:3). Or, “... another priest arises according to the likeness (*homoiotēs*) of Melchizedek” (15). Now, the first word can mean in the passive tense (which this is) “to become” (Baruch 6:5 [LetJer 1:4]).²¹ But the word “likeness” never has this meaning as far as I can tell. It is related to the word that became popular at Nicaea where Jesus in his Person was said to be “like” the Father, but in substance was absolutely not “like” the Father, but of the same substance as the Father.

²⁰ Difficulties also arise from the lesser accepted views that he is the Holy Spirit.

²¹ “Beware therefore that ye in no wise be **like** to strangers, neither be ye and **of** them, when ye see the multitude before them and behind them, worshipping them.” “Like” and “of” are the same word in different forms in the verse. See “**ὀμοιοῦω**,” in Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint : Revised Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2003).

To me, this spells near defeat for the idea that Melchizedek is the Pre-incarnate Lord Jesus. **It is hard to see how he could be.** And yet, I also don't see how Hebrews could say that this person is less than immortal, which would seemingly makes him just like all of us—including like Abraham. In fact, the entire argument hangs on this point that **it is because he is eternal** that this is what makes him “like” the Lord Jesus. He is like him because “**he continues a priest forever**” (7:3). He is like Jesus because he is not a mortal man but “**he lives**” (8). He is like Jesus because he has an “**indestructible life**” (16). And finally, Jesus holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues “**forever**” (24). **Four times** it repeats this important point linking Jesus and Melchizedek. Someone has said, “Probably, there is an exegetical background for the notion of Melchizedek's immortality: The words [you are a priest forever] ... were interpreted quite literally.”²² And yet, all this seems to say that Melchizedek is only like Jesus. He is not in fact Jesus.

So what does this mean Hebrews teaches Melchizedek is? I have no idea. Some today still try to make the argument that he is the Son of God, and I suppose we could say that even the Angel of the LORD who is one in substance with

²² Aschim, 139.

the Son of God is still not Jesus incarnate, and so it only “like” him. But is that really what Hebrews is saying? I suppose it is possible that Melchizedek was/is an angel (perhaps the angel Michael who was in charge over Israel, and I’m assuming here that Michael would be a created angel and not the Angel of the LORD as most think, but which I’m inclined not to agree with), or Jesus or the Holy Spirit or even just a man.

Here may be a more important point and it harkens back to last week. What is interesting is that while it clearly engages in the language of the speculations that arise from the ambiguities in Psalm 100, [Hebrews clearly doesn't answer this question](#). It just doesn't seem *to care* about answering it. So why get all wrapped up in what we just can't know? What we must say is that this Melchizedek was so very great that even Abraham bowed his knee to him in submission to his kingship. Abraham gave him a tithe. Abraham was blessed by this man. It was not the reverse. And because Melchizedek was this great, he serves at the very least as a type of the coming Lord Jesus whose priesthood he would inherit at the command and oath of God.

He is a type in his name. King of Righteousness. He is a

type in his residence. King of peace. He is a type in his lack of genealogy. He is a type in his living forever. He is a type in his greatness. He is a type in his person. He is a type in his priesthood. He points you to the Lord Jesus Christ, as all Scripture ultimately does in one way or another. And that is the point.

We will explore the implications that Hebrews has for us regarding the priesthood especially next time as we consider why all of this matters, which Hebrews itself addresses. For now, let us simply stop and praise God who has seen fit to write into history something so fantastic that mortal men couldn't think to write it in their own stories. For here we see 2,000 years before the Lord Jesus came to earth that there was a pattern set up. This pattern would imprint upon the Patriarchs, upon the Kings of Israel, upon the writers of the NT, and upon all who read the story that here in Melchizedek is a person who shows us the glory of Son of God.