

Introducing: Melchizedek

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[0 : 00] So as we turn to Hebrews 7, as I mentioned earlier, we're looking at this character named Melchizedek. So in biblical study, the study of types and antitypes is known as typology.

And a type refers to an Old Testament person or practice that has a counterpart or an antitype in the New Testament. Types are kind of like analogies in that they correspond to a person or thing to which they're compared only in certain ways.

For example, in John chapter 3, Jesus talks about the bronze serpent that God commanded Moses to set on a standard that took place in Numbers 21.

And Jesus says that's a type of him being lifted up on the cross. So that would be found in John 3, 14, I think it is, and following. So the bronze serpent typified Christ in that it was lifted up for all the people to see.

And in that looking upon it brought them deliverance from death. And if you're kind of like, what in the world does this have to do with it? Go back to Numbers 21 and read it for yourself and you'll have an understanding of the context and what was going on.

[1 : 17] But that is a type. So the type is the bronze serpent lifted up. The antitype is Jesus being lifted up on the cross. Another one would be the sacrificial lamb.

It was a type of lamb of God in that it was sacrificed on behalf of the sins of another. And Jesus, of course, is the lamb of God. It was sacrificed for the sins of the world.

So you see this. There are really a lot of them in the Old Testament. And you might get tempted to get carried away and kind of put a type where there isn't one. But ultimately, they're there, right?

They're allusions to something greater and something better coming. And that's what Melchizedek is. And then we come to Hebrews 7. Melchizedek, not much information is given to us about this mysterious character.

He's mentioned in Genesis 14, Psalm 110, and Hebrews chapters 5 through 7. And that is it. And it's like, okay, what do we know about this guy?

[2 : 18] Who is he? And while we don't know much about him, we do know that he was a priest and that the priesthood is central to Jewish life.

And remember, Hebrews is written to Jews. Hebrews is written to Hebrews to tell the Hebrews to stop being Hebrews. Pretty much.

So it makes sense that he would focus on the priesthood because it's so important to Jewish life. And the priests, you know, they offered prayers and incense on behalf of the people.

They offered sacrifices to atone for sin of the people and as the nation as a whole. And given how important the priesthood was in Judaism, they came to hold a prominent role in society and were to some degree exalted by the people.

That's why when you're reading the gospel accounts and you've got Jesus interacting with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, he's talking to the, you know, the priesthood. And there's so much tension there because the priests were not really functioning the way that they ought to have been functioning.

[3 : 25] They took on more power and prominence than they should have had. So as we come to Hebrews 7, the author of Hebrews continues their intention of exalting Christ above all things that Judaism holds dear by addressing the priesthood of Christ.

And he begins with the introduction to Melchizedek. And that's what we're going to look at today in verses 1 through 10. So I'd like to read this section of scripture and just make a few observations at the end.

Hebrews 7 verse 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.

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.

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. Verse 4.

[4 : 41] See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils? And those descendants of Levi who received 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. But this man, who does not have his descent from them, received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. 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. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham.

For he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. Father, please grant us understanding. Amen. Right.

[5 : 46] So what do we know about Melchizedek? What do we learn about Melchizedek in this chapter? And why is it important? Well, see, in verse 2, we see that he's a king of righteousness and peace.

He's a king of righteousness and peace. He held a distinction that was not necessarily uncommon in the ancient Near East. He was both a king and a priest.

And while nations around Israel made this a common practice, the Israelites were unique in that they intentionally separated the king and the priest roles.

So they were unique in that way. God instructed them to do so. That's how God led them to do it. And that's what they did. And we know that the king of Israel would be descended from the tribe of Judah and the priest from the tribe of Levi.

But Melchizedek, you know, he's kind of unique. He's both a king and a priest. But we know that wasn't too uncommon in those days. The name Melchizedek, as defined for us here by the author here of Hebrews, means king of righteousness.

[7 : 01] Jews attached great meaning to names. Names mean something in their culture, at least back then it did.

And so Melchizedek was the king of righteousness. They would have caught on to that meaning. They would have understood its etymology and what it meant and alluded to.

And we see here, you know, in Genesis 14, you got Melchizedek. Okay, king of righteousness. Great, awesome. He is a king and he is a priest. And then here in Hebrews, they're really pouring this on.

He's the king of righteousness. And then he says that he's the king of Salem. Now, Salem's a name used for Jerusalem in Psalm 76, verse 2. And it's related to the Hebrew word shalom, which means peace.

Jerusalem means city of peace. So Melchizedek was the king of Salem. He was the king of the city of peace. He's the king of peace. So I found that interesting as I was studying and reading along.

[8 : 04] Like, Melchizedek is the king of righteousness and the king of peace. And I think, you know, in our churches, when you think of the king of righteousness, you think of the king of peace. You think of Jesus, who grants righteousness and gives peace like none other.

So as an Old Testament type of Christ, Jesus is designated by Paul as our peace in Ephesians 2.14. For he himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

So remember that, the uniting Jewish believers and Gentile believers into one body. He is our peace. Jesus is the peace who brings peace between Jews and Gentiles.

We're also shown that Jesus as priest justifies those who trust in his atoning sacrifice. In Romans 3.26. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier, the one who has faith in Jesus.

So Jesus is our righteousness and he is our peace. 1 Corinthians 1.30, I want to share that with you as well. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

[9 : 25] So verse 2, Melchizedek is the king of righteousness and peace. And we can see how that is a type of Christ who is the ultimate giver of righteousness and peace.

Hebrews 7.3 tells us that he is without beginning or end. Ready for this, Dean? I was already asked about that. Like, what's that mean? He has no mother, no father.

How do we understand that? Because upon initial reading of this verse, you would seem to conclude that the author of Hebrews was hinting at the eternity of Melchizedek, the person. And I've had this thought too, like, well, if he's without father and mother, without end of days and beginning of life, he must be eternal.

Right? He must be God. So we know nothing of his father and mother. He does not appear to have a beginning or end. Could this be a theophany? Could Melchizedek actually be the pre-incarnate Christ?

Now, theophanies is another area of theology you can study and look at and speculate about. that Jesus, before he was born, the second member of the Trinity there, had made appearances.

[10 : 41] And typically under the title when it says, the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament. Not always, but you can look out for those. And it would seem that Melchizedek may be a theophany.

Seems to fit the bill, doesn't it? Well, it's a reasonable conclusion if it wasn't for one very important fact in this passage in Hebrews 7. The author is not dealing with the person of Melchizedek.

Rather, the focus is on the priesthood of Melchizedek. And so the point that the author is making here in Hebrews is that Melchizedek was not a priest because his father was a priest.

Nor was he a priest who had successors. So by providing this family background, the author is trying to communicate the unprecedented nature of Melchizedek's priesthood.

He's a priest of God Most High by divine ordination. It's not something that, oh, his father was a priest, now he's a priest because he's of a certain tribe and has certain qualifications.

[11 : 49] No. The author of Hebrews is saying, look, he's a priest of God Most High. He doesn't, it's not because of the lineage that he had. He enters into the Genesis story as if he has no father, no mother, and no sons.

He's just there. He shows up, does something great, priest of God Most High, and leaves. And this kind of priesthood stands in stark contrast with the priesthood of Israel, the priesthood that the Hebrews would have, which was entirely based on the Levitical family descent.

When we're reading through scripture, we have to keep in mind the intent of the author. The intention of the author wasn't to tell us who Melchizedek's mom or dad was, but it was to show that his priesthood wasn't just, it wasn't inherited, as it would be for the Hebrews, the Jews.

So in keeping with the intent behind types and antitypes, Melchizedek is not seen as the model to be looked at, but it says here in verse 3, resembling the Son of God, he continues a priest forever.

He resembles the Son of God. So that right there tells us Melchizedek is not a theophany, because he resembles something greater.

[13 : 18] He resembles the Son of God. He remains a priest without interruption. He remains a priest forever. So Melchizedek is a shadow of the object, and Jesus is that object.

And Jesus, because of his eternal nature, fits the bill of being a priest forever. Did that help you out, Dean? I think he's thinking on it.

All right, verses 4 through 6. We see that he received tithes from Abraham. Now, like I said, this passage can be a little tricky in understanding and its significance, but you have to understand that tithing was important in the Jewish culture.

So in verse 4, Abram's response to Melchizedek's blessing is impressive, really. He says, See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils.

Abraham just got done defeating four kings in battle, and he brought back all the possessions. It's quite a haul. Think about it, because they had just got done looting Sodom and other cities on their way out, and they took a lot with them, and that's what got Abram involved, and that was, it didn't end well for those four kings.

[14 : 34] But then as a matter of obligation to God Most High, Abraham gives this priest a tenth of everything he had obtained. Now, I'm not going to turn this into a sermon about giving.

It's not the intention here. But it's interesting to note that Abraham, who is, you know, who is the one blessed by God and given the promises, is giving a tithe, giving a tenth to this priest who comes out and blesses him.

Abraham, here in this passage, is addressed as a patriarch. Now, patriarch is a word of unique importance in the history of Israel as it denotes the highest level of honor in Jewish life.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the big three. They're the big three patriarchs whom God acted in salvation history in order to set the stage for what he accomplished in Christ.

God made promise to Abraham. That promise extended to Isaac, went through Jacob, and so on and so forth. But those are the big three, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Jewish history.

[15 : 40] Thus, to the Jews, Abraham is the father of their nation. He's the father of Israel. As important as Moses is, it could be argued Abraham is even more so important to them.

And to Christians, Abraham, according to Romans 4.11, is the father of all who believe. So by attaching this title of respect to Abraham, the author demonstrates the superiority of Melchizedek, even when compared to the great patriarch, Abraham.

Abraham. If Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, his priesthood must be greater than a priesthood that traces its descent from Abraham. You see what's going on here?

They're setting it up. Melchizedek is superior that even Father Abraham paid tithes and submitted to him. And just as important, though we have a hard time understanding it, is the fact that of Melchizedek receiving tithes from Abraham, right?

The law in Numbers 18 provided that the people should pay tithes to the Levites for their work as priests. In their mind, that's how tithing works. He paid tithes to the Levites.

[16:55] Goes to the temple. No, it doesn't go to anybody else. The priests that take care of the tithes and the money and the money in the temple? Levites.

And the priests receiving the tithes were not superior to the payees. They were relatives. Their ability to collect tithes did not come from any inherent superiority, but from the commandment in the law.

Melchizedek was different in that he did not receive tithes from any special commandment, but from his inherent superiority. Abraham's spontaneous action implied Melchizedek's superiority over him.

He recognized that. Father Abraham recognized the superiority of Melchizedek. By extension, Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

You've got to be sitting there and asking, man, who cares about all this stuff? Well, I do, but we'll get there. So verses 6 through 10.

[18:02] So we see, so we saw that he received tithes from Abraham. In verses 6b through 10 and here in Hebrews 7, we see he blessed Abraham. He blessed Abraham.

Again, this is another very Jewish practice that we do not fully grasp. I would even say ancient Near East practice that we don't fully grasp because of our culture. No, but we can glean it from scripture. It's this idea of the blessing and the firstborn that's given to us that we read about in the Old Testament and we see.

I had a friend, I think I shared this with you, I have a friend who is from India. His name is Lalpi. And he and I, we went to the same church when I was in, when we were in West Virginia.

And I was teaching, we were teaching through, I think Galatians. I can't remember what passage we were through. And I had handled the passage that dealt with the firstborn and the inheritance and, you know, what it means, you know, being an heir of Christ.

And I fumbled through it. I was a college student, still learning, and was in an area of scripture that I was like, I don't fully get this. I'm a, I'm a Western, you know, American guy.

[19:13] We don't do this. I don't understand this. And he had talked to me after, afterwards. He said, Ken, I want to talk to you sometime about the, the importance of the firstborn, the importance of the heir in a, in a household.

And he did, we, we had a, we had a meal together and we were able to talk about it. And he just said, in, in his culture and in the cultures in the Middle East, it is such a, it's a position of honor and prestige and, but importance in the family.

And so, and, and he gave me a whole lot more to it as somebody from that culture could do. You know, it enlightened me to understand like, oh wow, this is a big deal when we're called, you know, heirs and joint, you know, we're joint heirs with Christ and what that means.

And the same is here with the blessing. In Genesis 24, Laban in Bethuel blessed Rebecca as she went to be Isaac's wife.

In Genesis 27, Isaac blessed Jacob and to a lesser degree Esau. In Genesis 48 and 49, Jacob blesses his sons and grandsons. In Joshua 14, Joshua blesses Caleb and gave him Hebron as an inheritance and so on and so forth.

[20 : 28] You see this, the blessings taking place throughout the Old Testament and it's not like, you know, going to the Catholic, to the Catholic church down the street and getting blessed by the priest.

It's not the same thing. It was, it was a prayer, it was, well, let me read my notes. I don't want to deviate and go on a rabbit trail and put you to sleep.

A patriarch's final blessing was important in the ancient Near East as a practical matter of inheritance rights but it also could include prophetic statements that reveal God's supernatural power at work through the men of his choosing.

So as great as Abraham's privileges were by virtue of the promises he had received from God he recognized the superiority of Melchizedek by accepting a blessing at his hands because it's beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.

Melchizedek in his blessing of Abraham, if you want to turn to Genesis 14 real quick. So verse 17, after his return from the defeat of Keter and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Sheba, that is the king's valley, and Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine.

[22 : 01] He was priest of God most high 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 hands.

So this is the blessing that Abram received. But he says, blessed be Abram by God most high, possessor of heaven and earth. And it was in, it's like in continuity with God and had already blessed Abram, made a promise and a covenant with him and Melchizedek's kind of a reassurer of these things.

You are going to be blessed by God most high. And then you followed in chapters 15 and following with the actual cutting of the covenant and the reaffirmation of that between God and Abram.

So Melchizedek blessed Abraham and in that it's the superior blessing the inferior. Back to Hebrews 7 verse 8.

I want to read that to you in the Amplified. It says, furthermore here in the Levitical priesthood tithes are received by men who are subject to death while there in the case of Melchizedek they are received by one of whom it is testified that he lives perpetually.

[23 : 14] So this is another token of Melchizedek's superiority to the Levitical priesthood is that nowhere is it related that Melchizedek lost his priestly office by death.

He doesn't have an end of days. He continues forever. Yet generation after generation of Levitical priests have died and had to hand on their dignity and their duty to their heirs.

Beyond that the writer makes the point that Abraham was a representative of his descendants. These are verses 9 and 10. Abraham's a representative of his descendants through this tithe paying process. It's kind of like a federal headship idea.

All the descendants of Abraham are like with him in him in this process and what's taking place. And so Levi himself who receives tithes paid him through Abraham to Melchizedek.

So that shows the Levitical priesthood in subordination to the Melchizedekian priesthood. All right. Why well why does the Hebrew author of Hebrews emphasize this point about the priesthood with such care?

[24 : 26] Why does he bring about Melchizedek? Why does he talk about him? Why does it even matter? And do we even need to spend time on it today? Well yes we need to spend time on it today because we're in the book of Hebrews and we're going through it and it's what we came to.

but ultimately the author wants the Jewish people he wants the Hebrews to see that the Old Testament itself showed that the Levitical priesthood was always meant to give way to something greater.

Thus the author under the inspiration and authority of the Holy Spirit made a biblical and theological argument to convince his audience of this fact on the basis of scripture. He wanted his readers to be convinced that the priesthood that is in Christ or the priest, the high priest Christ is higher and superior to their priesthood.

And I say that, you know, it's important today and it matters because as I said on Thursday I was sitting in the smack dab in the middle of a Catholic church in a Catholic funeral led by a priest.

So we have a priesthood even in Western culture. This idea of priesthood and that, you know, we have to go and give to a man and he's our representative to God and he represents God to us and all that is still in existence today and many, many people fall into that.

[26 : 02] So I would say Hebrews 7 as though it was written to the Jews and put the Levitical priesthood in its proper perspective, I would dare say Hebrews 7 also would put into its proper perspective what we see as priesthood operating around us today.

That's just my own thought and opinion on it. So what? What can we take from this passage from Hebrews? What can I give you to take from here and meditate on?

It's this. Jesus Christ is a priest of whom Melchizedek is but a picture. Jesus Christ is the only priest who is alive forevermore. He's a greater priest because he's a living priest, not a dying one.

Christ is the priest of a better priesthood than Aaron's. And we're going to see here in the coming chapters he's a priest of a better covenant than the old covenant.

And he's the only priest of the only priesthood that can bring God to men and men to God. Hebrews 4 verses 14 through 16.

[27 : 16] Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

God has given us a priest to whom we can go to anytime and who identifies with our weaknesses. We have no need to depend on a priesthood concocted and carried out by mankind because we have a priest in Jesus Christ who is above every human priestly institution.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you for your word. Lord, I thank you for this text of scripture. I thank you for the difficult passages we come to, ones that we may feel don't make any sense or don't matter.

Lord, we just thank you that all scripture is inspired. We thank you that all scripture is profitable. Lord, I just pray that we would take from here the superiority of Jesus as our high priest serving in your presence and interceding on our behalf and one in whom we can go to.

[28 : 50] Lord, we don't need to go to a confession booth. We don't need to go and say many words of prayers. We don't need to go repeat our fathers and hail Marys and to be forgiven.

But Lord, we can come directly to you. Thank you for that, Lord. Thank you for this truth. Thank you for this scripture that we can go through and come to know you more and better and draw closer to you as our God and Savior.

In Jesus' name, Amen.