

The Book of Hebrews

מְאֹנְשׁ מִנְמָה דָא מִנְהָת אַקְלָא
צְמַאַלְלָא נְתַחְצְרָה דְרַחְסָנָה סָקָה
אַחֲרַ פְּקָלָא תְּסִנְ סְרְבָּאַלְלָה
רַרְתָּא סָקָה תְּאַקְסָנָה דְמַמְצָה
תְּאַתְּפָלָשָׁה נְתַרְדְּנָה הַרְפָּרָה נְרַלְדָה
תְּאַגְּשָׁה רַלְדָה מְלַלְצָה סָסָה תְּלָשָׁה



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Outline of Hebrews

“Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus’ Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)**

Outline of Hebrews

IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

- A. Jesus Is a Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14-16)
- B. Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)
- C. Jesus Is Better – Don't Apostatize (5:11-6:20)
- D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
- E. The New Covenant Mediated By Jesus Is Better than the Old Covenant (8:1-13)
- F. Jesus' Sacrifice Is Better Than the Temple Sacrifices (9:1-10:18)

Outline of Hebrews

D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)

1. The Melchizedekian Priesthood Is Superior to the Levitical Priesthood (7:1-10)
2. The Obsolescence of the Levitical Priesthood and Mosaic Law (7:11-16)
3. The Stunning Announcement of Psalm 110 and Its Implications (7:17-28)

Melchizedek Is Superior to Levi (7:1-10)

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.*

Melchizedek Is Superior to Levi (7:1-10)

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. ⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Melchizedek Is Superior to Levi (7:1-10)

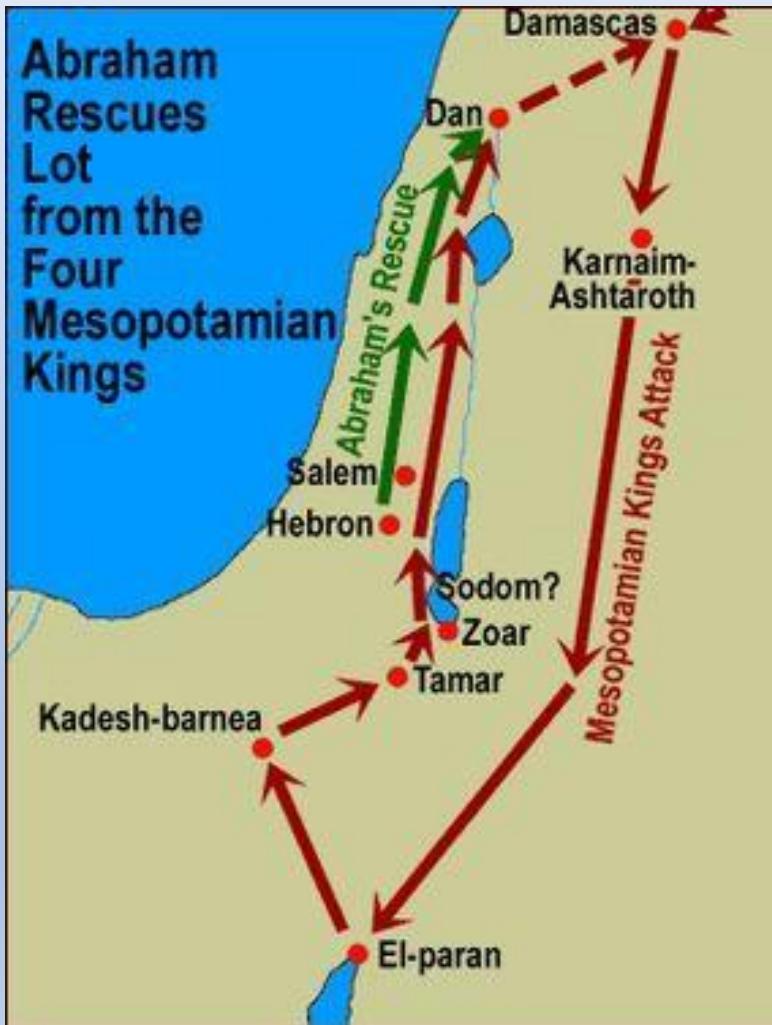
- Earlier in Heb 5:11 the author indicated to his readers that he had a great deal to tell them about Melchizedek – and now he's about to do just that!
- In order to show the superiority of Christ's Melchizedekian priesthood the author draws from the **only two** Old Testament passages that **mention** Melchizedek:
 - Genesis 14:18-20
 - Psalm 110
- The author **begins** with the account of Abraham and Melchizedek in Genesis 14.
- But **before** we look at the **author's comments** on Genesis 14:18-20, I **first** want to **read** that passage along with some of the surrounding context.

Genesis 14:14-24

¹⁴ When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶ Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people. ¹⁷ After 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).

Abraham Rescues Lot

Genesis 14



Genesis 14:14-24

¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. ²¹ And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, ²³ that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' ²⁴ I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."

Some Observations on Genesis 14:18-20

- If you're just reading through the book of Genesis and you're not aware of how this little section on Melchizedek (verses 18–20) is later referenced in Psalm 110 or the book of Hebrews, you might be tempted to ask, “What on earth does this little detail of the story contribute to anything?”
- How greatly impoverished would the storyline of Genesis be if you left out the little section of the text that talks about Melchizedek?
- Probably not much.
- If you left in the part about Abram defeating the kings and then refusing to accept any goods from the hand of the king of Sodom, wouldn't that say enough about Abram and his character and his commitment to righteousness and all of that?

Some Observations on Genesis 14:18-20

- What on earth does this little snippet about Melchizedek have to do with *anything*?
- And if Melchizedek is *so important*, why, in a book like this where *everybody who is important* is connected by genealogy to other important people, does Melchizedek just pop out of nowhere and then disappear?
- It's a very odd account.
- So with those questions hanging in our minds, let's take a look at what the author of Hebrews does with this text...

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

- All the author has done so far is say what the text says: “*Melchizedek*” was “*king of Salem*” and “*priest of the Most High God*” (*El Elyon* in the Hebrew).
- It’s interesting to notice that when **Abraham** speaks of God, uses the **covenantal** word for God: *Yahweh* (translated in our English test as “*LORD*”)
- Whereas **Melchizedek** uses the more **generic** word for the God, *El Elyon*, “*the Most High God*”.
- The author continues summarizing: “*Melchizedek... 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.**

- In verse 2, the author continues summarizing: *“and to him [i.e., Melchizedek] Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything.”*
- *“He [Melchizedek] is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness...”*
- In Hebrew, **“Melchizedek”** means precisely that:
 - **“Melch”** is from the Hebrew root *melek*, which means “king”
 - **“zedek”** is from the Hebrew *tsedeq* word group which means “righteousness or justice”.

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**.

- By **title**, Melchizedek is called “*king of Salem*.”
- Now in Hebrew, they originally didn’t have the vowels in, so the *S-L-M* is exactly the same root as *shalom*, the Hebrew word for “peace”.
- So “*king of Salem*” means he’s “*king of peace*”, not just peace in a psychological sense, but a fundamental well-being in the universe before God.
- It’s also a word that is used in Hebrew for **greeting**, but it has this deeper connotation to it.
- Historically this city of “*Salem*” **may** well be the city of Jeru-*salem*, but that’s not quite provable; though it’s highly likely.

*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.***

- This verse has convinced many thoughtful Christian readers that the Old Testament Melchizedek is, in fact, a preincarnate appearance of Jesus.
- While I respect those who take that view, in all fairness I think they're deeply mistaken.
- For starters, the text does **not** say that he **was** the Son of God; it says he was "*resembling*" the Son of God.
- What the author is doing is directing your attention to the historical details of the text.
- You read about Abraham and you know who his parents are. You know how died.
- Later, when you read about Isaac; you know the same kinds of things. That's the way the whole account of the family runs.

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.*

- But, for **this** man (Melchizedek), he's "*without father or mother*." That is to say, there's no **mention** of his father or mother in the text.
- He's not saying he **literally** has no father or mother; he's just saying that **so far as the record goes**, there is no father or mother mentioned in a text where you would **normally** expect to see them mentioned. There is no genealogy.
- In fact, **like** the Son of God, he seems to just continue forever – there is no mention of his death, unlike, for example, Genesis chapter 5.

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.*

- What do you read in Genesis chapter 5?
 - So and so lived so many years, he begat so and so, he lived so many more years, and then he died.
 - So and so lived so many years, he begat so and so, he lived so many more years, and then he died.
 - ...then he died ... and he died ... and he died.
- But Melchizedek? There is ***no account*** of his death. In a book like Genesis, that raises a flag.
- So what's going on? If he's ***not*** the preincarnate Jesus in some sense, how are we to understand this?

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.

- It's not reasonable to think that Abraham was the **only** person since the flood who had any memory of the one Sovereign God, God Most High.
- We shouldn't assume that.
- I think that what happens, rather, is that Abraham is called by God into this land.
- He meets all kinds of people, but there's one man with whom he has a kind of kinship – this monotheist, this king of Salem.
- This king, who really does believe in *El Elyon*, is functioning, **not only** as a **king** over this town, but he seems to have a kind of **priestly** function as well.

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.*

- So he's **both** a *priest* and a *king*, and Abraham seems to have a kind of kinship with him.
- So when Melchizedek comes and meets Abraham afterwards, Abraham gives Melchizedek honor, and the Melchizedek blesses Abraham.
- I suspect this hints at all kinds of deep relationships that have been going on for some time.
- But that's not the point.
- The point is, **not** the psychology of friendship in the life of Abraham.
- The point is, **why** does the Genesis account **mention** this brief encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek?

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.

- So to recap what we've seen so far, the author of Hebrews points out that, in the Genesis account, there is no father, there is no mother, there is no genealogy, there is no mention of beginning of days, there is no mention of end of life.
- And therefore the author concludes that, *like* the Son of God, he remains a priest ***forever***.
- Of course, he didn't literally remain forever or he'd still be around. He wasn't there in Moses' time as far as we know, and as far as we know, he wasn't there in Joshua's time.
- So he doesn't *literally* remain forever. It's just *so far as the account goes*, there is no record of his origin or his ending.
- But the author sees there is *something significant* going on regarding Melchizedek within the Genesis account itself.

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.

- “*The law*” here refers to the law given to Moses in about 1400 BC.
- Abraham is about 2000 BC.
- So more than half a millennium *after* the events described in Genesis 14, “*the law*” is given through Moses and stipulates what’s to be done.
- A *tithe* is to be given to God by the people through the *Levites* who collect it.
- That’s what the law says. The descendants of Levi became priests and collected a tithe from the people.

⁶ *But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.*

- Melchizedek was not descended from Levi, therefore he would not be authorized **by the law** to collect a tithe.
- Furthermore, this incident where Abram pays a tithe to Melchizedek takes place **before** Levi is **even born**.
- You're dealing here with Abraham, the **great-grandfather** of Levi.
- And at this point, the **whole law** given to the Levitical heirs (six centuries later) hasn't even happened yet.
- So obviously Melchizedek is **not** collecting this money because he's a Levite operating according to the law of Moses.

⁶ *But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.*

- Yet Melchizedek “*received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.*”
- The “*promises*” here refer to those promises God had *already given* to Abraham back in Genesis 12.
- These promises to Abraham are then reemphasized in Genesis 15 and a covenant is cut.
- You remember how that fire passes through the cut animals and Abraham passes through it as well?
- This is that *same Abraham*, and yet, Abraham pays Melchizedek a tithe!
- And not only did Melchizedek *receive tithes* from Abraham, but he also “*blessed*” him.

⁷ *It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.*

- The giving of blessing was a significant act in antiquity. As Calvin puts it, *“Blessing is a solemn act of prayer with which one who is endowed with some outstanding public honor commends God to private individuals under his care.”*
- There are senses of the word “bless” in which men “bless” God, i.e., praise him, or in which an inferior prays that God will prosper some superior.
- But the word is not used in that way here. What the author is talking about here is an official pronouncement given by an authorized person.

⁷ *It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.*

- When that happens, there is no denying that it proceeds from a superior: “*the inferior is blessed by the superior.*”
- In the Genesis account, neither Melchizedek nor Abraham make any **explicit** claims about their relationship.
- But Abram gave a tithe from the spoils, thus **implicitly acknowledging** the **superior status** of Melchizedek.
- And Melchizedek proceeded to bless Abraham, **accepting** the implied superiority.
- The situation is clear to all parties involved.
- So the author is simply drawing attention to what the narrative clearly implies when he brings out the superior status of Melchizedek.

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.*

- Here the author of Hebrews makes a further point: we know that the Levites died generation after generation after generation and when they did, new people were put in their place.
- Therefore in the “*one case*” (the case of the Levites), the tithes received from the people “*are received by mortal men.*”
- “*...but in the other case [i.e., in the case of Melchizedek tithes are received] by one of whom it is testified that he lives...*” that is to say, by him who *according to the account*, has no mention of death whatsoever.

⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

- Then, to push this even further, the author says, “*that Levi himself, who receives tithes*,” according to the law of Moses, “*paid tithes through Abraham*” – in the sense that Levi “*was still in the loins*” of his great-granddaddy when Abraham was paying a tithe to Melchizedek.
- Now all of this is designed to point out the *greatness* of Melchizedek historically and how he is a biblical *type* of something yet future, but none of this is worked out yet in Genesis 14.
- That’s going to come from the *next* text of Scripture that our author deals with concerning Melchizedek: Psalm 110 – which I plan to cover *next* week.

⁹ One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

- And when we see the author's comments on Psalm 110 next week, it's going to shed **more light** on his handling of Genesis 14 that we looked at this week.
- Because the author of Hebrews interprets the Melchizedek narrative of Genesis 14:17–20 **in light of** that which the psalmist declares in Psalm 110:4: “*You are a priest **forever** in the order of Melchizedek*”.
- The author picks up on the word “*forever*”, and sees that Scripture here associates **eternity** with a Melchizedekian-type priesthood – a fact he will explain in more detail in the **rest** of chapter 7.

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- The logic inherent in the author's argument in Hebrews 7:1–10 is perhaps, a bit perplexing for those unfamiliar with his conventions.
- Following a common exegetical practice known as "argument from silence," the author uses what the Old Testament narrative does **not** say to make his argument.
- Specifically he sees Genesis 14's lack of any reference to Melchizedek's ancestry, birth, or death as the Melchizedekian priesthood is an **eternal** priesthood.
- In our discussion time, I thought it would be good for us to reflect on how or perhaps **if** the method of interpretation used by the author is something that we should use when doing biblical interpretation?