

15. Mysterious Melchizedek

March 22, 2015

King David, Moses, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jonah, Noah, and even that Israel bad boy Samson are well known among Christians as well as some non-Christians alike. But if I ask, "What can you tell me about Melchizedek?", the majority of Christians would look at me like a bewildered dog hearing a high pitched whistle. Or someone would say to me, "Gesundheit."

Melchizedek is like one of those characters in the movie or novel who appears briefly at the beginning. But if you missed who he was or didn't pay attention to what he did, when he comes back later in a very important position, you would wonder, "OK, I totally don't get this." His name is hard to pronounce properly and forget how you are going to spell his name correctly.

His name Melchizedek appeared once in Genesis 14:17-24 and disappeared until a psalmist referred him in Psalm 110:4. Jesus never mentioned him, nor did any of the apostles in any of their epistles. Obviously Melchizedek is not going to win a biblical character popularity contest any time soon.

We read his name in chapter 5 and 6 in this Book. Guess what? We finally get to study about him more in depth in this chapter 7. I know what you are thinking, "Who cares about this guy Melchizedek!?!?" You'd better care. You will find out why.

Just about every single ancient Israeli knew that no priest would come out of any other tribes than the tribe of Levi. They were chosen by the Lord to serve in the tabernacle. In spite of their many failures, they had served the Lord for centuries; but now the author of this Book has affirmed that their priesthood was no longer necessary because someone else took over that priest role for eternity. Somehow that was not sitting well in the hearts of these ancient Israelis.

The author of this Book was telling them that Jesus was the Chief High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. Let's pay attention the connection between our Lord and this mysterious Melchizedek.

A. NO PARENT, NO GENEALOGY

Hebrews 7:1-3 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," 3 without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

We find very impressive credentials of Melchizedek here in v1 through 3. Let's start to list them:

- 1) The name 'Melchizedek' means "king of righteousness".
- 2) He was the king of Salem, a.k.a. Jerusalem. – King of Peace
- 3) Priest of the Most High God
- 4) Without daddy, without mama, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life
- 5) Made like the Son of God
- 6) Remains a priest continually.

Who do you think this Melchizedek is? If you take what we just read literally, you would come to a conclusion that Melchizedek is Jesus our Savior. Some of you would say, "Hello, how did Jesus appear to Abraham? He didn't have a human body at that time, did He?" No, He didn't, but He appeared in a human form. There is a fancy, dancy theological word for that – "Christophany". Appearance of Jesus in His pre-incarnated state in the OT.

While I was preparing this study, I read a couple of the commentaries that I use often. The authors of those commentaries wrote that Melchizedek was not Jesus Christ. But they didn't specify whether Melchizedek was a human or angel. Because they couldn't.

Let me ask you a question. How many humans do you know or read about who've never had parents? Two – Adam and Eve. But do you think that Adam could qualify himself for the rest of the list that we just read? I think not and I know not.

Then, some of you may think, "But what about the possibility of an angel being Melchizedek?" Nope, not a chance. Because none of angel have a human body, so they cannot understand the salvation process, nor can they represent us to the Lord as a priest.

More importantly, the title and the name "King of Righteousness" can not be given to any sinful human.

Jeremiah 23:6 In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Here the Messiah was referred to by the name "Yahweh-Tsidkenu", in Hebrew, which means "Yahweh our Righteousness." I believe that seeking the identity of Melchizedek pretty much settles here in the first three verses.

There are a lot of talks about having peace around the world. All these man-made peace will not last. As we've seen in the Middle East, they sign a peace treaty in the morning, and then they launch rockets to each other right after lunch. No one can have true peace unless there is first righteousness. But the problem is that no human can come up with true righteousness, but only God can.

It is only through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross that righteousness and peace joined together. Melchizedek was the king of righteousness, the king of peace, and priest of the Most High God.

B. GREATER THAN ABRAHAM

Hebrews 7:4-9 Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. 5 And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; 6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. 8 Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. 9 Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak,

There are two points we must notice here:

1) Tithing

Abraham voluntarily gave tithes to Melchizedek before the Lord instituted tithing systems through Moses for the Israelis to follow in the future. This shows Melchizedek is in a position of authority over Abraham and his descendant Levi.

When Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils, it meant that he gave the choicest spoils of war, not left over which is the idea of the most of the Christians. The majority of Christians do not tithe which means 10% of their incomes, but they tend to give a few dollars every now and then.

One Christian couple who considers themselves very spiritual and godly said that they are tithing by helping their grandma. That's nice of them to help their grandma. I don't know how spiritual they are, but according to the Bible, they were wrong in tithing. The Bible tells us to bring all the tithes into the storehouse which was the temple where they worship and fed spiritually:

Malachi 3:10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.

Then, those who choose not to do 10% tithing would come up with an excuse, "We are living in the age of God's grace, not under the law. Jesus or any of the apostles never taught us to tithe." Yes, you are absolutely correct. But do you see anywhere in the NT that they taught us not to tithe? Since those people want to go by what Jesus said strictly, let's go to Mark 12:

Mark 12:41-44 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. 42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

Do you see here Jesus teaching His disciples that they shouldn't tithe any more, because they would not be under the law after His death and resurrection? He was NOT against tithing at all. Actually, He commended the poor widow who gave everything she had to the Lord. So those who are using Jesus not teaching tithing as an excuse not to tithe can give everything they have as Jesus commended the widow. I am sure that they wouldn't.

The bottom line with the people who do not tithe is that they'd rather not trust what the Lord promises to all of us – He will meet all of our needs. They'd rather trust their own money over God's promises and they allow their greed to overtake their faith in the Lord. For my wife and I, tithing is a must, no matter what. We want to be obedient to the Lord, including our pocketbook area. Listen, giving 10% of our income to the Lord is a good starting point for all Christians. By the way, as we read in Malachi 3:10, tithing is a commandment from the Lord, not a suggestion.

2) The better blesses the lesser

Abraham gave his tithe to Melchizedek and in turn, Melchizedek blessed Abraham. According v7 of this chapter, the better blesses the lesser which put Melchizedek in a higher position than Israel's patriarch Abraham.

I know what you are thinking. You are thinking, "I don't have a problem with that. I follow it completely. But I remember what Psalm 103:1 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His Holy name," just like we sang in the song "10,000 Reasons" right before the teaching started. How can we, the lesser bless the Lord, the better, if what Hebrews 7:7 said is correct?"

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, of "Bless" in Psalm 103 is the same word with a little variation as the word "blessed" in Hebrews 7:7 which is "eulogeo" in Greek. Yes, we get the English word 'eulogy' from this.

Before someone cries for an error in the Bible, we need to keep everything in context. When we bless the Lord, this is in the context of worship. Blessing the Lord is a lesser worshipping and praising a greater in Psalm 103:1. Now certainly, when Melchizedek blessed Abraham in Hebrews 7, the thought isn't that Melchizedek was worshipping Abraham as the greater is worshipping the lesser. The context is that a greater conferring something of substance on a lesser – usually something material or comforting with kind words.

C. NEED FOR A NEW PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews 7:10-19 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. 11 Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? 12 For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. 13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. 15 And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest 16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. 17 For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." 18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

I am not going to be dogmatic about the identity of Melchizedek, whether he was Jesus Himself or just a type of Jesus. Having descended from the tribe of Judah instead of Levi, Jesus was an outsider of the legal heritage for a priest of the OT. However, His priesthood was of a completely different order that was existed before the Levitical priesthood ever started. In other words, the priestly order of Melchizedek overrides the order of the Levitical priesthood.

From beginning to end the Levitical priesthood was based on the Law of Moses that was given to them to point out the shortcoming of human effort due to God's perfect standard and the desperate need of the Divine Savior/Priest without spot or blemish and intercede for us for eternity.

I know that it has been awhile since we learned this at the beginning of this Book, do you remember what the central theme of the Book of Hebrew is? The superiority of Jesus Christ. He is the holy and exalted one. He is superior to the prophets, the angels, and even to the OT Laws and the sacrificial systems. As our Chief High Priest forever, He represents us to God the Father.

So, what do all these deep theologies have to do with us in the 21st century? Many people still think that we have to go through some religious rituals to please the Lord. Listen, religious rituals were made by humans for humans' selfish religious satisfaction, nothing to do with our God. These rituals are their ways to approach Him, not through His way that is Jesus Christ.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Religious rituals do not please the Lord. He wants our devotions to Him from our hearts. Our actions will follow, when our hearts are right with Him.

2) Tithing is still a commandment from the Lord, not a suggestion; tithing is a barometer of our faith and trust in Him, not for Him. Be obedient.