



MELCHIZEDEK: ONE MADE LIKE THE SON OF GOD

Hebrews 7:1-10

In preparation for his **theological** discussion of Christ's Priesthood that serves to clarify the high priestly office of Jesus, our author begins with a full portrait of the king-priest Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-10. This unit displays a concentric symmetry that may be exhibited as follows:

- A Melchizedek meets Abraham (1a)
- B Melchizedek blesses Abraham (1b)
- C Abraham gives a tenth of the spoils (2)
- X MELCHIZEDEK MADE LIKE THE SON OF GOD (3)**
- C' Principle of giving the tenth (4-6)
- B' Principle of the lesser is blessed by the greater (7-10a)
- A' Melchizedek meets Abraham (10b)

By introducing three points of contact between Abraham and Melchizedek (A//A', B//B'; C//C'), and then reviewing them in reverse order, our author assists his readers to become involved in discovering the theological significance of Genesis 14 with that of Hebrews 7:1-10.

The first three verses of this chapter are one whole compacted sentence. To condense the sentence, omitting the intervening clauses, the main idea is, "Melchizedek abides a priest forever". Nevertheless, the subordinate clauses are a necessary exposition both of the character of this royal personage and of the uniqueness of his priesthood that was of an order entirely distinct from that of Aaron's.

Between the opening words of verse one and the closing words of verse 3, our author lays down ten observations regarding Melchizedek:

- Melchizedek was the king of Salem (Jerusalem)
- Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God
- Melchizedek met Abraham as he was returning from war
- Melchizedek blessed Abraham
- Melchizedek received a tenth of all Abraham's spoils of war
- Melchizedek's name is translated as "king of righteousness"

- Melchizedek's realm is king of Salem, which is "king of peace"
- He is without father, mother, or genealogy
- He is without beginning of days or end of life
- He is assimilated to the Son of God

In Hebrews 7:1-2 our author draws from Genesis 14 what can be known about Melchizedek from the historical record. He first comments briefly on the meaning of his name/character ("king of righteousness") and of his royal title ("king of peace"). He then draws important implications from Genesis' silence concerning the Melchizedekian priestly lineage in verse 3 to that of Christ's High Priesthood.

(X) MELCHIZEDEK: MADE LIKE THE SON OF GOD (Heb. 7:3)

³Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually.

Scholarly discussion about the historical personage of Melchizedek as a christophany continues to center around this single verse in Hebrews. The reason for this interpretation of Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18-20 is almost universally agreed upon because of his sudden appearance in Genesis 14 and his sudden disappearance. He is tied to no genealogy, nor are his parents mentioned. No account of his birth or of his death. Hence, because of Genesis' silence on these matters, Melchizedek is *assumed* to be a christophany.

However, are we to interpret that Melchizedek is a christophany from an appeal of silence in Scripture? Strangely enough, most Bible commentators are satisfied with such appeal to silence as justification for making Melchizedek as a christophany. Appealing to Jethro in Exodus 3:1 and 18:1-27 may make a strong objection to this kind of interpretation. Jethro was the priest-king of Midian who was intimately associated with Moses, and who offers sacrifice and aids Moses in matters of administration.

Much more is said of Jethro than of Melchizedek, and the historical connection between Jethro and Israel's later history is much more direct than for Melchizedek. Jethro is directly connected with the wilderness wandering which is thematic within Hebrews. Furthermore, no genealogy is given for Jethro. His birth and death are not narrated, nor are his parents given. Thus, the reason Melchizedek was selected over a figure such as Jethro in Hebrews depends not so much upon the silence of Scripture as upon another important consideration.

The reason the author of Hebrews chooses Melchizedek, is not because he is a christophany, but because of the originality of his priesthood. The reason for this conclusion is because of the fortuitous circumstance that Melchizedek is the first priest-king of the Most High God mentioned in Scripture. Melchizedek was not just a *priest-king*, he was the first priest-king, the progenitor of all priesthood. Abram might well have received tribute from some other priest-king of a city, but in this case we are dealing with the one from whom all priesthood, and especially the Levitical priesthood, derives. If a tithe was given, Abram must have given it to Melchizedek.

Let us now proceed to examine Hebrews 7:3 in the light of what has been discussed thus far. Hebrews 7:3 recapitulates the originality of Melchizedek's priesthood. The silence of Scripture about the life and parentage of Melchizedek is mentioned as an amplification of the concept of the originality of Melchizedek's priesthood and not as a proof of that originality. The author of Hebrews has not selected just any figure without genealogy from the Old Testament; rather, the first priest-king on earth who is not given any genealogy, a fact which goes to support his originality. The absence of genealogy, the failure to mention birth and death are unimportant deficiencies for unimportant figures, but for the first priest-king such omissions take on deep significance.

Because Melchizedek is without genealogy, and because he has no end of life nor beginning of life, the priesthood which he possesses comes about not through priestly succession, but through the very infinite quality of that life (Heb. 7:16). Christ is a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" in that He is "according to the likeness" of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:15). Christ is "another priest" (Heb. 7:15). Melchizedek's priesthood continues into perpetuity (Heb. 7:3), and hence it would be improper to speak of Christ being Melchizedek's successor in the priesthood. Melchizedek has no successor in the priesthood. Every feature of significance in Melchizedek's priesthood is recapitulated on a grander scale in Christ's priesthood.

Just as Melchizedek is the first priest in the earthly order, so is Christ "another priest" forever in the heavenly order. The author of Hebrews is engaging into "antitypology". The author thinks of Christ as the type and Melchizedek as the antitype. We might compare a similar case of antitypology in Hebrews 9 with the earthly and heavenly tabernacles. The earthly sanctuary is but an antitype of the true heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:24). The earthly sanctuary (the antitype) gives us a correspondence of what the true heavenly sanctuary (the type) represents. In fact, in Hebrews 9:9 the earthly sanctuary is called a "symbol" (or "type") of the heavenly one in the present time.

[Where antitypology is employed, the normal typological scheme is altered severely in favor of a futuristic eschatology. For example, in Hebrews 9:2

the earthly tent, the antitype, is also the “first” tent, whereas the true tent is the “second” tent, access to which is closed so long as the first tent is standing. There is a chronological separation between antitype and type, the earthly tent (antitype) being first and the heavenly sanctuary being second. In relation to Christ and Melchizedek, the antitype (Melchizedek) is chronologically first and the type (Christ) second.]

As the earthly sanctuary corresponds to its heavenly one, so does the earthly Melchizedekian priesthood correspond to Christ’s heavenly one. The antitypology of the author involves taking an earthly entity and contrasting it or connecting it to its heavenly counterpart or type. The words “made like the Son of God” assure us that in Hebrews 7:3 the same scheme is operative. We gain an understanding of Christ’s priesthood, the eternal heavenly priesthood, by understanding the features of the earthly perpetual priesthood of Melchizedek. Each significant feature of the antitype is to be found in its true form in the type.

The conclusions about Melchizedek and Christ in Hebrews may now be stated briefly.

- The author of Hebrews sees no succession in Melchizedek’s priesthood. Melchizedek, as the first priest, comes to be priest without benefit of the hereditary process by which the Levitical priesthood was carried on.
- Melchizedek’s priesthood is superior to that of the Levites since through Abraham Levi himself paid tithes to Melchizedek.
- Exploiting the silence of Scripture, the author shows that Melchizedek’s priesthood had no beginning and no end and that Melchizedek remains a priest perpetually.
- This priesthood of Melchizedek, however, is but the antitype of the higher priesthood of Christ, and every significant feature of Melchizedek’s priesthood is recapitulated in Christ’s priesthood.
- Christ is not Melchizedek’s successor, for Melchizedek, possessing a perpetual priesthood, has no successor. Rather, Christ’s priesthood is of another order, a heavenly order.
- Any thought of Melchizedek as a christophany, angelic, or heavenly being would have completely destroyed our author’s scheme. Antitypology depends upon understanding the heavenly in terms of the earthly. If Melchizedek were a heavenly being, the antitypology, which the author uses so successfully, would be impossible.

One last consideration needs to be asked. Why did Abraham pay the tithe to Melchizedek? Because Melchizedek already in measure possessed what Abraham still only hoped for in the promises from God (Heb. 7:6). By faith, Abraham recognized Melchizedek reigned where Abraham’s seed was destined

to reign (cf. Gen. 13:14-17), and exercised a greater priesthood (Aaronic priesthood) that in future generations was to be committed to his lineage. Abraham recognized the union of the two offices, king-priest, held a greater position before God than separate.

In Abraham, on the other hand, was the seed of a new and higher order of things. He was the receptor of a better inheritance of blessing; and when the seed should come in whom God's promise rested, then the more general and comprehensive aspect of the Melchizedek order was to reappear, and find its embodiment in One who could both place it on firmer ground, and carry it to unspeakably higher results. It was this day that Christ referred to in John 8:56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad".

Here, then is the wonder-working finger of God when we approach the meat of His Word. Abraham, in one respect, relatively great, and in another relatively little. He was personally inferior to Melchizedek, and yet the root of a seed that was to do for the universe incomparably more than Melchizedek had done; himself an antitypological type of a type higher than Melchizedek, and yet Melchizedek a more peculiar type than he! Only God could have so admirably fitted the past to be such a singular image of the future!

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