

MELCHIZEDEK AND HIS PRIESTHOOD

Jon Macon

Genesis 14:18-20 describes a meeting between Abram and a “priest of the most high God,” who was named Melchizedek: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.” Although we have only three verses of information about this meeting in Genesis, it holds great significance to us, because Jesus Christ the Son of God is our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

King of Salem

Melchizedek is referred to as the “king of Salem” in Genesis 14:18. Salem is not known as a geographical location in Canaan. The only other reference to Salem in the Old Testament is in Psalm 76:1-2: “In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. *In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.*” This does not seem to be in reference to an earthly city. For one thing, the tabernacle was located in Shiloh for the entire history of the Judges, from Joshua to Samuel (Josh 18:1; 1 Sam 1:20-24). The original tabernacle in Shiloh was destroyed (Psa 78:60-61; Jer 7:12-14; 26:2-6). This likely occurred when the Philistines defeated Israel in battle in 1 Samuel 4, killed Hophni and Phinehas the two wicked sons of the High Priest Eli, and captured the ark of the covenant and took it back to their own land for a time. After that, there was a replacement tabernacle in Gibeon, but the ark of the covenant was not in it, as it had been brought from Kirjathjearim to Jerusalem by King David (1 Chr 1:3-4). Next, Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, and there was never another tabernacle in Israel. Thus, no physical tabernacle ever existed in a place called Salem.

God’s dwelling place

Psalms 76:2 also declares Zion to be God’s dwelling place in the same verse and sentence in which God’s tabernacle is stated to be in Salem. God’s *name* (i.e. authority) dwelt in the tabernacle and temple under the Law of Moses (1 Kgs 8:13). When he dedicated the temple he had built, Solomon himself said in 1 Kings 8:27, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” Solomon plainly stated on that occasion that God’s actual dwelling place is in Heaven (1 Kgs 8:30,39,43,49). Isaiah 66:1 says, “*Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?*” Jesus Christ referred to Isaiah 66:1 in the Sermon on the Mount, when he said, “But I say unto

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you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Matt 5:34-35). Stephen also quoted Isaiah 66:1 in his sermon in Acts 7:49. In scripture, "Zion" is a term used in a spiritual sense for Heaven.

Hebrews 12:22-23 says, "*But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.*" Of course, the very name Jerusalem incorporates the Hebrew word for "peaceful" which is *Salem*. As in Psalms 76:2, the combination of God's tabernacle and his "holy hill" (i.e. Zion) is used in Psalms 15:1 as a clear reference to God's eternal dwelling place in Heaven (where we also seek to spend our eternity): "*Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?*" That certainly fits the context of God's description of where Melchizedek comes from.

The priestly order of Melchizedek

The very name "Melchizedek" is a compound word, made up of the Hebrew words *melek*, meaning "king," and *tsedeq*, which means "the right, which is the common Hebrew word for "righteousness." Hebrews 7:1-2 says, "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; to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; *first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.*" Here is a classic example of the Holy Spirit providing the interpretation of his own words. Hebrews 7:1-2 explains Genesis 14:18 in terms of its interpretation. Rather than identifying an earthly location that Melchizedek reigned over as king, God instead points to the interpretation of his name, and also of "King of Salem." Details of his unearthly origin are then given, as he was "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God" (Heb 7:3). This Melchizedek was a "priest of God" (Gen 14:18; Heb 7:1), and he "abides a priest continually" (Heb 7:3). The greatness of his priesthood is illustrated by the fact that Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Gen 14:18-20; Heb 7:1,6-7), and received tithes from Abraham (Gen 14:20; Heb 7:2,4-6,8-10). Psalm 110:4 says, "*The Lord has sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*" Jesus Christ is indeed a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,15,17,20-21,28). This great priesthood of Christ was foreshadowed in Genesis 14, predicted in Psalm 110:4, fulfilled in the New Testament, and will never come to an end.