

## Who Was Melchizedek? Why is He Important?

[Hebrews 7:1-3](#)

Hebrews, Day 22

*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. - Hebrews 7:1-3, ESV*

If you want to start a fight among baseball fans, ask what they think of the Designated Hitter or using instant replay to determine balls and strikes. If you want to start a fight among evangelical Bible scholars who all agree on the full inerrancy of Scripture, simply ask, "Who was Melchizedek?"

In the Old Testament, the answer to this question seems simple enough: Melchizedek's story is told at the end of Genesis 14, when Abraham is returning from his battle to rescue Lot from the hands of Canaanite kings. On his return from battle to Sodom, Abraham is met by "*Melchizedek king of Salem [who] brought out bread and wine. (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 hand!" (Gen. 14:18-19, ESV)*

The story seems simple enough. Melchizedek was the king of Salem, probably Jerusalem. He was also a priest, which may seem strange, but remember that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was also a priest. People outside of Israel did worship the LORD and some were priests in the worship of the one true God, God Most High, even though they were not Levites. In fact, in Abraham's day, no such thing as Levites existed yet.

So far, all is clear enough. The only other reference to Melchizedek in the Old Testament is in Psalm 110, which most Bible scholars agree is a Messianic psalm, which has this promise:

*The Lord has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
"You are a priest forever  
after the order of Melchizedek."*

So the Messiah is promised to be a priest forever "*after the order of Melchizedek.*"

Hebrews 7 picks up these two references and interprets them in the light of Christ: Just as Melchizedek was a priest and a king, so Jesus is also a priest and a king. Furthermore, just as Melchizedek was a legitimate priest of God even though he was not a Levite, so Jesus also is a legitimate priest of God, even though He is not a Levite.

Are you not seeing anything worth fighting over yet? Well, hold on, because Hebrews says much more about Melchizedek. Hebrews says Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, the father of the faithful. After all, Abraham paid his tithe to Melchizedek, and Melchizedek in turn blessed Abraham. This certainly seems to indicate the superiority of Melchizedek. Even more, Hebrews points out that Melchizedek's name means "king of righteousness" and that his title, king of Salem, means "king of peace," so he is the king of righteousness and peace.

What really pushes the envelope and starts the Bible scholar brawl is verse 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.*" Is Hebrews saying Melchizedek is a divine, supreme, eternal priest? It sure seems like it. Is Melchizedek also a priest forever, just like Jesus?

The strong language of verse 3 has led many Bible scholars to conclude that Melchizedek must be nothing short of a Christophany, an Old Testament manifestation of Jesus in the flesh before the incarnation. So, is he? Honestly, I don't know. Hebrews 7:3 doesn't definitively say he is, but it's hard to imagine such lofty language applying to any mere human being. What human could be so great as to be like Jesus in these incredible ways without being a manifestation of Jesus Himself?

So, my stirring and provocative answer to this intense Bible debate is, "I don't know." But it sure does seem to me like Melchizedek is something extra-ordinary. If not a full-fledged manifestation of Christ, he is certainly a powerful type or foreshadowing of Christ, as we'll see in the days to come.