

MELCHISEDEC

Opening Hymn: #138—Jesus shall reign

It is because we have the book of Hebrews that we have anything to say on our subject. Melchisedec is mentioned twice in the Old Testament and nine times in the New Testament—all instances in the book of Hebrews.

HISTORICAL STANDPOINT Genesis 14:14,16-23

“And when Abram heard that his brother [Lot] was taken captive, he armed his trained servants and pursued unto Dan. And he brought back all the goods and also brought again his brother Lot and his goods, and the women also and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him...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 [meaning Abram] gave him [meaning Melchizedek] tithes of all. And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that ... I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.”

We have a saying: To Victor Belong The Spoils. That was no saying in olden times: that was the law. Abram had a perfect right to keep the people as slaves if he so chose. One can imagine that the king of Sodom was somewhat deferential to Abram as he made his request. It is true that Abram did not take a thread as his own, but in returning everything to the king of Sodom, one must understand that 10% had already been given away to Melchisedec.

The book of Genesis is filled with genealogies, but outside of what we just read, nothing is said about Melchisedec. That fact was to later support a strong argument made by the Apostle Paul. The next reference to Melchisedec was written perhaps 1000 yrs later.

PROPHETIC VIEWPOINT Psalms 110:1,4

“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

The thought of the Psalmist when he says “order” evidently is that Christ’s reign will be in like **manner** to Melchizedek’s—that is, that Christ will be both a king and a priest upon his throne. In all likelihood, it was this single prophetic reference that caused Paul to use the Melchisedec incident with such force when he wrote to the Hebrew Christians.

DOCTRINAL VIEWPOINT Hebrews 7: 1-4,6,7,9-12

“For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; to whom 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); without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils But he whose descent is not counted from them [from Levi] received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.. ..And as I may so say, Levi also, who received tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him. If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec

and not be called after the order of Aaron? **For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.**

Prior to this chapter, Paul mentions Melchisedec three times, setting the stage for this important point. He is teaching that it was God's consistent purpose to abolish the Levitical priesthood, setting up something else in its stead.

The Jews so revered their law, their priests, their traditions, that this would be a particularly bitter doctrine to swallow. He uses several arguments which might not sound particularly impressive to us today, but would be very powerful to a Jewish audience:

1. (vs 7) The less (meaning Abraham) is blessed of the greater (Melchisedec).
2. (vs 9) Although Levi received tithes, he also paid them (to a greater one).
3. (vs 21) Psa. 110 says this priesthood is confirmed by God's oath—something that was never claimed for Aaron's priesthood.

From the rabbinical debating point of view, these were extremely strong points. Paul knows his audience. Thirty-two times he quotes the Old Testament as an authority. This book of Hebrews is unique in its discussion of the "priesthood" of Jesus. He must marshal all the evidence he can to overcome the natural prejudice they would have.

WITHOUT FATHER, WITHOUT MOTHER

This is strange language indeed. Although Genesis doesn't talk about Melchisedec's parents, are we to assume that he was immortal? Some have, implying that Melchisedec was really Jesus in a human form—but Jesus did have a beginning of days.

Our problem really is in translation. According to Br. Jim Parkinson, this is really a Hebrew idiomatic expression. Greek translators who know little Hebrew invariably have difficulty with this text.

Br. Parkinson brought this to my attention: On ancient Assyrian cuneiform tablets, two lists of kings were found. At the end of the second list was found this expression: "A total of ten kings who have fathers." Commenting on this language, *The Journal of Near Eastern Studies* [vol. 1, p. 271, 1942] said:

"The phrase "who have fathers" refers, of course, to the fact that for each of these kings the name of his father could be given. This phrase implies, moreover, that the fathers of the kings on the first group were not known to the compiler [because he did not say they had fathers]."

There are several translations that render Hebrews 7:3 properly. This one is from the Syriac New Testament (Murdoch's Translation):

Of whom neither his father nor his mother are written in the genealogies; nor the commencement of his days, nor the end of his life; but, after the likeness of the Son of God, his priesthood remaineth for ever.

MELCHISEDEC AND AARONIC PRIESTHOODS CONTRASTED

Obviously both priesthoods represent The Christ. But each shows a different aspect of Christ, and it is this contrast that Paul brings to the minds of his readers in his book.

Aaronic: symbolizes sacrifice, sufferings—shows we must die with him

Heb. 13:12,13 Jesus, also, that he might sanctify a people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

Aaron died and his son inherited—death ends the sacrifice

The picture shows a High Priest and Under Priests

The law separated priestly and kingly offices

Melchisedec: symbolizes reigning—shows we will live with him

2 Tim. 2:11,12 For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him....

no record of Melchisedec's death—the glory of office is not interrupted

The picture shows one single entity:

The Christ, head and body

No separation between blessing and reigning

If Jesus were on earth, he could not be a priest. Everyone knew that he came from the tribe of Judah, and not Levi. Therefore a new order was called for. The Aaronic priesthood showed the preparatory work, the sacrifice. The Melchisedec showed the future work of glory, a reigning priest.

Luke 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

The word “Melchisedec” means: King of Righteousness. He reigned as king of Salem, which means Peace.

1 Cor. 1: 30_Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness....

Isa. 32:17 And the work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness [shall be] quietness and assurance for ever.

It is interesting to note that from an earthly point of view, Jesus was without father—that is, without a human father. From a spiritual viewpoint, he was without mother—that is, without a spiritual mother (He was the only begotten of the Father).

WHO WAS MELCHISEDEC?

Speculation has existed on this point for centuries. We will perhaps never know this side of the veil. Some have thought he was an angel, others that he was Jesus in a materialized form; Job has been another suggestion, and Ham, a son of Noah, was considered a possibility because some of Ham's progeny settled in the land of Canaan. Modern commentators believe that Melchisedec was a Canaanitish priest. Old tablets have been found recording words sent from the locale of Jerusalem to a king of Egypt making reference to a priest in that area who had received his crown from “The Mighty King” and not from inheritance.

BUT... Why would Abraham willingly give over 1/10th of everything to a heathen? Was Paul deceived, using as he did, a heathen as a picture of Christ?

One old Jewish tradition about Melchisedec seems to have more credence than these others. We are going to investigate this viewpoint through a few slides so that the time intervals may be easily visualized. Bear in mind: What we are presenting is speculation!

Slide #1—Creation to the flood

Following the chronology in the 2nd Vol., p. 42, we date Creation at 4128 BC. Adam lived 930 years. Methuselah lived 969 years and died shortly before the flood, in 2472 BC.

Slide #2—Adam, Methuselah, and Abraham

Adding Abraham to our chart at the proportional time, we ask: was there any individual that overlapped the life span of Methuselah and Abraham? The answer is yes!

Slide #3—Adam, Methuselah, SHEM, Abram and Isaac

Shem, the oldest son of Noah, overlapped Methuselah by 98 years, and Apraham by 150 yrs. Apart from any other consideration, we note that the events of Creation need pass through only two people [Methuselah & Shem] to be told to Abraham. Thus the length of time that

passed need not be a barrier to our faith in what has been recorded. Let's look at Shem's life a little closer.

Slide #4—Shem's life

Shem was born 98 years before the flood. Some believe that he built the Great Pyramid in Egypt. According to the date in the 3rd volume, that would be about here on the chart (although several encyclopedias place it earlier than here). Abram was born, and 75 yrs later his father, Terah, dies. Sometime after that Abram met Melchisedek, but before Isaac was born. Shem died a few years after Isaac married Rebecca, and Abraham died 25 yrs after that.

If Shem really was Melchisedec, then Abraham would be more than happy to see him since he would be a relative of his.

Slide #5—Shem's relationship to Abraham

Tracing backward, we see that Terah was Abraham's father, Nahor was his grandfather, Serug his Great-grandfather, and so on, until we get to Shem, who was his

Now there are a few problems about believing that Shem really was Melchisedec.

Slide #6—Melchisedec is without geneology. Shem's is well known.

This is true, but a picture was being made back in those old days. If the incident had been reported as Abraham meeting Shem, Paul would be robbed of important material for his comments on Christ's priesthood.

Slide #7—Why was his name changed?

Melchisedec means King of Righteousness. Undoubtedly in time people referred to Shem, possibly, by this title instead of by his name, somewhat like reporters addressing the head of state by calling him "Mr. President."

Slide #8—How did he come to reign in a country inhabited by Ham's descendents?

We are fairly sure where the descendents of each of Noah's sons eventually migrated, but undoubtedly that was a long process that took centuries. Since we are on the subject of Ham, perhaps we can consider what happened to his progeny.

Slide #9—Dispersal of the descendants of Noah

In this somewhat complicated map, we see the dispersal of the families of Noah. Japheth migrated to the north and is shown by the black lines. The descendants of Shem—called Shemites, then later Semites—are shown in the blue lines. Ham had four sons and their migration is shown in the red lines: Canaan; Phut; Mizraim; and Cush.

Taking a tangent, we'd like to discuss what we believe to be a misconception in the minds of many Bible Students, namely that the Negro race resulted from a curse that Noah placed upon Ham. This simply isn't so.

Jer. 13: 23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?

The word “Ethiopian” in Hebrew is Cushite, or a son of Ham. Clearly there is no doubt that Jeremiah is talking about a dark skinned person, but this condition hardly resulted from any curse. In fact, surprising as it may seem, Noah never cursed Ham at all.

Slide #10—Genesis 9:25,26

“And he said, Cursed be Canaan [NOTE: **not** Ham]; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”

The curse was one of servitude and was placed upon the Canaanites. Eventually the Semites—Israelites—conquered the land of Palestine and this prophecy was fulfilled. Clearly Cush had nothing to do with any of this.

Where did the Negro race come from? Or, for that matter, the Oriental and red races? Br. Russell had something to say about it.

Slide #11—Beginning of quotation [Reprints 3043]

“In attempting to account for the wide differences between whites and blacks, and the lesser differences between these and the yellow, brown, and red, we are treading upon uncertain ground—as all ground must be in which our imperfect knowledge ... has not inspired direction from the Lord’s Word.

Slide #12—Concluding portion of quotation

“Hence it should be understood at the outstart that all that we or others can do is to guess on this subject—respecting the differences in shape of head, color of skin, etc. Undoubtedly the climate and the soil have much to do with these differences just as they have much to do with changes in vegetation.”

The argument that individual differences resulted from climatic differences is reasonable. There is even one scripture that hints at this as the reason for the negro race.

Slide #13—Song of Solomon 1:5,6

“I am black, but comely, O ye Daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me...”

It has been thought that the queen of Sheba was a negress and this is a reasonable thought. Descendants of Cush migrated to Sheba. This scripture states that it was sun exposure that made the woman black. And this is my conclusion also.

[Lights On]

SUMMARY

In our study together we have considered a most mysterious character—Melchisedec.

He is given a title not even accorded to Abraham: **PRIEST OF THE MOST HIGH GOD**

He crosses momentarily the path of Abraham and is unhesitatingly recognized as a person of higher spiritual rank than “the friend of God.”

This most unusual person is used to prophetically state that Christ’s priesthood will be of like manner. Paul, in his letter to the Hebrew Christians, explores this in great depth, showing that the old Levitical priesthood has been superceded by something much grander—a never-ending priesthood, one after the order of Melchisedec.

We explored an old Jewish tradition that has it that Melchisedec was really Shem and found no chronological argument against that position.

Finally, we took Issue with an old idea of some Bible Students to the effect that the negro race was produced by a curse on Ham—finding that Ham was never cursed at all.

The beauty of this Melchisedec picture would never have been so clear were it not for the lessons contained in the book of Hebrews. Yet most translations do not convey the full beauty of the thought. We'd like to close this lesson with Hebrews, chapter 7, from Knox's translation:

It was this Melchisedech, king of Salem, and priest of the most high God, who met Abraham and blessed him on his way home, after the defeat of the kings; and to him Abraham gave a tenth of his spoils. Observe, in the first place, that his name means, the king of justice and further that he is king of Salem, that is, of peace. That is all; no name of father or mother, no pedigree, no date of birth or of death; there he stands, eternally, a priest, the true figure of the Son of God. Consider how great a man was this, to whom the patriarch Abraham himself gave a tenth part of his chosen spoil. The descendants of Levi, when the priesthood is conferred on them, are allowed by the provisions of the law to take tithes from God's people, although these, like themselves, come from the privileged stock of Abraham; after all they are their brothers; here is one who owns no common descent with them, taking tithes from Abraham himself. He blesses him, too, blesses the man to whom the promises have been made; and it is beyond all question that blessings are only given by what is greater in dignity to what is less. In the one case, the priests who receive tithe are only mortal men; in the other, it is a priest (so the record tells us) who lives on.

Now, there could be no need for a fresh priest to arise, accredited with Melchisedech's priesthood, not with Aaron's, if the Levitical priesthood had brought fulfillment. And it is on the Levitical priesthood that the law given to God's people is founded. When the priesthood is altered, the law, necessarily, is altered with it. ... And something further becomes evident, when a fresh priest arises to fulfill the type of Melchisedech, appointed, not to obey the law, with its outward observances, but in the power of an unending life; (Thou art a priest in the line of Melchisedech, God says of him, **for ever**). The old observance is abrogated now, powerless as it was to help us; the law had nothing in it of final achievement. Instead, a fuller hope has been brought into our lives, enabling us to come close to God. And this time there is a ratification by oath; none was taken when those other priests were appointed, but the new priest is appointed with an oath. ... Of those other priests there was a succession, since death denied them permanence; whereas Jesus continues for ever, and his priestly office is unchanging, ... Such was the high priest that suited our need, holy and guiltless and undefiled, not reckoned among us sinners, lifted high above all the heavens; one who has no need to do as those other priests did, offering a two-fold sacrifice day by day, first for his own sins, then for those of the people. What he has done he has done once for all; and the offering was himself. The law makes high priests of men, and men are frail; promise and oath, now, have superseded the law; our high priest, now, is that Son who has reached his full achievement for all eternity.

Closing Hymn: #190—The Precious Blood