

There's a particular passage in the Old Testament that's uniquely powerful, brilliantly foreshadowing the magnificent New Testament model to come. This passage is elegant in its deep simplicity...in its foretelling value...in its picturing of the proper relationship between God and man...and in its modeling for Christians about what our response to encountering God should be and ultimately will be. It's Abraham's "Melchizedek Event." Remember? Well, alongside the King of Sodom and some other kings, Abraham rescued his nephew Lot who was held captive by enemy kings. Abraham was returning when:

"...the king of Sodom went out to meet him at...the King's Valley. And Melchizedek king of Salem 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!' And Abram gave him a tenth of everything." (Genesis 14:17b-20 ESV) Now, at first blush, this passage can seem a bit out of place, a wisp of a short story that's mysterious. In the first five books of the Bible, this passage unapologetically sticks out like an unfinished or incomplete thought. Even someone like Moses, attributed by many as the author of Genesis, must have been pretty mystified.

But many centuries later, the writer to the Hebrews explains a whole lot more, beginning with this: "[Melchizedek] 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 7:2b-3) Then he adds:

"[Jesus] has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, 'You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.'" (v. 6-7) After that, the passage says this about Jesus, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.' ...This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant." (v. 21b-22) Wow. There are many pretenders for being a perfect priest or a perfect king. *But Jesus is both!*

Remember, this was written many centuries later than the account of Abraham and Melchizedek recorded in Genesis 14. *And that very fact is key!* This is the "bookend," the closing, conclusive revelation of the amazing position of Christ as *both King and High Priest, forever!* Jesus is the Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness, the King of Peace, even as He simultaneously is the High Priest who is perfect forever!

This is important. There was no one who legitimately, simultaneously filled the offices of King and Priest between Abraham's adventure and the time of Christ. No one, that is, *except* the original Melchizedek who blessed Abraham, and the final Melchizedek, Jesus, who blesses us! So, was the original Melchizedek Jesus himself or merely what theologians call a "type" of Christ? No matter, we'll surely find out in heaven!

Just as interesting in this amazing tapestry of truth, there are a couple of Scriptures that prophetically point to Jesus, Psalm 110 (which was quoted in Hebrews 7 that we just heard) and Zechariah 6, which speaks prophetically of the coming King and Priest, clearly Jesus Christ. And when ordinary men in the Bible tried to usurp roles by serving both offices simultaneously, huge penalties were levied by God...

In the case of King Uzziah, God was clearly with Uzziah as he served as king in mighty ways...*until!* That right, until Uzziah took on priestly duties, whereupon Uzziah was struck with leprosy until the day of his death. In the case of King Saul, his impatience prompted by losing followers spurred him to take on the role of priest to make burnt offerings. Samuel arrived, heard the report, and told Saul *that God would no longer establish Saul's kingdom forever...* so King Saul actually lost that unusual place in history to King David because of Saul's attempt to be a priest also! Wow, God was very serious that *only the person appointed to the order of Melchizedek is qualified to simultaneously be both Priest and King forever!*

Also, here's an extrabiblical story from antiquity, too. The Jewish Zealots occupied parts of the Holy Land during the so-called "years of silence" between the final book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and the time of Christ. But there was still plenty of action during those years. Judas the Maccabee was zealous for the removal of the ruling Greek overseers during the decade of the 160s BC, and, after winning, the Maccabean family established themselves as God's supposed priest-and-king. That's right, this new ruling Jewish family took both roles: not just king, not just priest, but *both at the same time!* And like all who would presume to precipitate events before God's timing and plans, they ultimately failed. That happened then, and it will happen now and later, whenever any pretentious king-priest claims that special status! That's because God's special purposes of the combined offices of King and Priest are reserved for the Only One Capable—Jesus Christ. No one else can legitimately be King and Priest at the same time.

Now let's go back to Abraham's Melchizedek Event and the very practical lessons he holds for us today. Genesis reveals many layers. See, *after* the Fall in the Garden of Eden, *after* the Flood, well into the era of fallen humanity stumbling in relationship to God—there was Abraham, in meaningful, deep relationship with the Lord. At the same time, that was *before* Moses, *before* the tablets, *before* the Law, *before* Israel, *before* the temple—and yes, again, there was Abraham in meaningful, deep relationship with the Lord, hearing the voice of God from the start. Now here's a continuation of the Genesis 14 passage:

"And the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.' But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. ... After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'" (Genesis 14:21-24a, 15:1) Wow, what a story...

Here Abraham reveals that he had taken an oath...he had "lifted his hand to the Lord." Indeed, Abraham knew God, he recognized the person and the purposes of God. And that's what happened when Abraham encountered and recognized Melchizedek for who he was, and he was blessed. And, yes, prior to the law, Abraham gave a tenth of everything, a tithe. Abraham perceived that he should honor this Priest-King Melchizedek...but at the same time, he told the King of Sodom he would not take "a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours." Then, poignantly, God's response, which bears re-quoting: "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'" Then a recounting of the covenant with Abraham followed. Powerful.

But just why is this "Melchizedek Event" important to you and me? Because Abraham was in relationship with God...he was a man of faith, equipped with a covenant with God. He was a confident, abiding man. All this *without his needing things yet to come*, things that are often presumptively considered so vital by many Christians over the centuries: the law as a key end-game for rewarding humanity, temporal nations as a key end-game for victory, human political power as a key route to fulfilling God's righteousness, and, yes, Christians striving to craft their way into king-priest types of arrangements that are, in reality, fallible. The true reality is that it's all about Christ and Him crucified, the Priest-King on the order of Melchizedek.

Uniquely appointed in his time, Abraham responded amazingly to the Melchizedek Event. And we are Abraham's offspring. But we also know of the crystal-clear rendering of Christ and Him crucified—yes, the full revelation of the New Covenant, including the privilege of the Great Commission to invite whosoever around the world to enjoin Jesus-Melchizedek as the true King and the true High Priest.

So, Abraham and his "Melchizedek Event." ...But now it's *you!* You also get to encounter the authentic Melchizedek...and honor him with your witness and testimony. Take a moment and...*revel...in...that...*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Have you truly had your own personal “Melchizedek Event”—completely recognizing Jesus Christ as the true King and Priest, accepting no substitutes? If not, seek after Him, perhaps by accessing a seasoned believer to help guide you in affirming this conclusion.

2. Perhaps Abraham had a better perspective than we Christians do because he was unencumbered by weak notions that the law and nations and politics are essential to the fullness of a life in God. Can a Christian *not* lead the fullest life in Christ by an overriding focus on Him as King and Priest? Or is that thinking just naïve in the midst of the complexity of this world?

3. Why have and why do so many political leaders, from Moscow to Washington—including many Christians—purpose themselves to simultaneously fulfill both kingly and priestly functions in the lives of the people they serve? After Jesus’s death and resurrection, did God change the expectations of and negative consequences for leaders like King Uzziah and King Saul and the Maccabees?