

Who in the World Is Melchizedek?

**A sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula
at the Champions Church of Christ, Houston, Texas,
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Tonight it is a genuine joy to be back here at Champions. I found my way here tonight by myself and I was on time. I am getting better. Last time I came I got lost and was 25 minutes late for Sunday morning class that I was to teach. I certainly earned my reputation as “the late Calvin Warpula.” Thank you for being so gracious to me and having the courage to invite me back again.

I enjoy coming to Champions. I like your spirit and passion for the Lord’s work. I appreciate your fine elders and ministers. You are doing a good work here. You have many good missions and outreach to this community and to the world. I appreciate your stand for biblical truth and for N.T. Christianity. This truly is one of the finest congregations of loving people in Harris County. I thank God for you.

I appreciate my friendship with John Qualls. I first met John some 35 plus years ago. I am thankful that we can both be serving the Lord here in Houston. Thank you, John, for your friendship and for inviting me to share in your summer series.

You have some good messages awaiting you this summer. I know you are eager to hear them all.

My topic tonight is a strange one. I am glad to speak on this biblical subject as requested.

My subject tonight is, “Who in the World Is Melchizedek?”

Our subject tonight is only mentioned once historically and once typologically in the OT. The only place he is mentioned in the NT is in the book of Hebrews, briefly in chapters 5 and 6, and a little bit fuller in chapter 7. That’s it.

Why is this man such a mystery? Why did the youth of Champions request a study of this man? One reason is what the writer of Hebrews says about him in chapter 7, verse 3. Here the writer describes him as a man “without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the son of God he remains a priest forever.” What in the

world does it mean for a man to be without father or mother, without beginning of days or end of life? Does this mean that he was never born and that he never died? Does this mean that he was some sort of space alien, some interplanetary space traveler of Star Trek fame or a character in Star Wars? Who is he any way? What is the Bible talking about?

The Story Begins with Abraham

Our story begins way back in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, chapter 14. Please turn with me in your Bible to that section, please.

The year is about 2000 years before Jesus, way back in the Middle Bronze Age. Abraham is God's great man of faith. Abraham is called the friend of God. Abraham has left Ur of the Chaldeans and Mesopotamia and has moved with God's guidance and direction to the land of Canaan. Here Abraham lives as a nomadic shepherd, moving from place to place. Abraham is 75 years old and his wife Sarah is 65. Because of Abraham's faith and trust in God, God makes him a great promise. That promise is found in chapter 12, the first three verses: [read them]

God is going to make a great nation out of Abraham's family, his descendants, and his posterity. The problem is though that Abraham has no children, no heirs, no son or daughter. So how in the world will God fulfill that promise?

Abraham trusts God and it is counted unto him for righteousness (15:6). God promises him all the land that he can see to the north, the south, the east, and the west (13:14-17) Abraham lived to be 175 years old, a 100 more years, but he never owned a square foot of that land, except a small burial plot, personally himself. The heart-touching, inspiring story of faithful Abraham is told in 13 chapters in the book of Genesis. God ultimately fulfilled his promise when little Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old. Isaac, the only son of Abraham and Sarah, did not marry until he was 40 years old, and he did not have children until he was 60 years old. Abraham lived to see his grandsons, Esau and Jacob, and he died when the boys were 15 years old. The rest of the OT is the story of God fulfilling that promise to father Abraham. Abraham is perhaps the greatest man in the OT. He is the father of the Hebrew nations, the father of the Jewish people. His name is 74 times in 11 NT books. His monumental faith is described in Hebrews chapter 11, James chapter 2 and Romans chapter 4. He is the beginning of the genealogy of Jesus Christ on the first page of the NT, Matthew, chapter 1.

So Abraham is one of the greatest men of God who ever lived. He is revered today by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. But what does all this have to do with this man we are talking about tonight, this man named Melchizedek?

Abraham Meets Melchizedek

You remember back on June 23, 1976 when some Palestinian terrorists hijacked an Air France jetliner with 12 crew and 248 passengers and had the plane flown to Uganda, to the land of that notorious, butchering dictator, Idi Amin? All the non-Jewish passengers were released and the captive Jewish passengers were threatened with death unless the terrorists demands were met. The plane was there on the ground for seven days in Entebbe, Uganda, while the Ugandan army troops guarded it, and Idi Amin deliberated what he would do with it. But back in Tel Aviv, 2500 miles away, the Israelis would not sit still and allow their people to be taken captive by this dictator. Under the cover of darkness, a deadly force of one hundred Israeli commandos boarded three C-130 Hercules transports and flew secretly to Entebbe Airport. In the deep of the night, they caught the enemy by surprise and killed all the terrorists and forty-five Ugandan soldiers. The Israelis captured alive 110 of the 113 captives. They flew them all safely back to Israel. Idi Amin learned a hard lesson: you don't mess with the Israelis. They mean business. They will act when nobody else will.

This is the same type of thing that happened to the father of the Israelites, the first Jew, Abraham. An area king, Chedorlaomer had ruled this area with an iron fist. Five kings of area cities decided they were not going to pay taxes anymore to Chedorlaomer and they rebelled. Chedorlaomer aligned with three other kings and fought against the five rebellious kings. The Bible says, [read 14:11-12].

Now who was going to act? Who could? If the four powerful kings had defeated the five kings or war lords of the area, who could do anything against them? Well, father Abraham could. The Bible tells us what happened {read 14:13-16}.

Abraham and his quickly gathered army of 318 servants defeated the forces of the five kings by a surprise attack. Abraham recovered all the goods and possessions, the women and other people, and most importantly, his nephew Lot.

On his way back, the Bible tells us in two short verses the only historical reference to this man Melchizedek. Hear the word of the Lord [read 14:18-21].

That's it. We know nothing more about this Melchizedek. We do not know how he became king or priest of the city of Salem, which probably is the same place called Jerusalem later. Note that Salem means "peace" from "shalom" and that word is the root word of Jeru---shalom.

This Melchizedek was king and priest at the same time. He did not inherit the throne; he did not pass on the throne to a son, if indeed, he was even married and had a son. We know nothing of his father or mother, of his family, of how he became king and priest, of where he came from, or what happened to him after this. He is a mysterious person that appears and then the Bible is silent about him after this brief reference.

This Melchizedek though was a priest of God. He was not a Jew, he was not an Israelite. He was a Canaanite, a person of the land. He knew about the one true God of heaven. He called God the most high, the creator of heaven and earth. This is the same language Abraham used in v. 22 to describe God. It is the language of the OT to describe God, who he is and what he has done. Melchizedek recognized that this God had saved Lot from destruction and had delivered the enemy into Abraham's hands.

After Melchizedek blessed Abraham, then Abraham gave him a tithe of all that he had recovered from the battle. Abraham paid a tithe, 10% of the bounty, to this king and priest who honored and revered the same creator, saving God that Abraham knew, too.

Now this is all we know of Melchizedek historically. He is a flesh and blood man, a priest and a king, someone that relates to Abraham, talks to him, and someone that can receive gifts from Abraham. He is not some weird alien from outer space. He is not an angel. He is not God in human form. He is just a believer in God, he is a priest who goes to God for the people, and he is a king who rules his people for God. He blessed Abraham and he receives gifts from Abraham.

Melchizedek in the Book of Psalms

There is only one other place in the OT where you will read of this man Melchizedek and that is in one of the most frequently quoted psalms in the NT. It is in Psalm 110. Turn there with me in your Bible, please

Here is a psalm of David written about 1000 BC. David says here, [read vs. 1, 2, and 4]. Note the word "the Lord" in verses one, two and four

is written in capitals letters. That's the translators way of telling us that this is the Hebrew word Yahweh, the name of God. The text says that Yahweh, the eternal spirit, creator, judge, ruler of all mankind, says to David's Lord. Note that the second word Lord is written in lower case letters. Notice what Yahweh says to David's Lord: "sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." The right hand of a king was the most powerful, honored and prestigious place in the world. You cannot be closer to the king than to be sitting right next to him on his right side. Yahweh says that this one will sit there until all his enemies have been subdued. A footstool is something that we prop our feet on. Maybe when you come home from a hard day of work, you pop your shoes off, get a big glass of tea, turn on the TV, and put your feet up on an ottoman. That's the equivalent of a footstool. In David's day, when kings conquered other kinds, they made the captured kings bow before them, and they literally put their foot on the backs of their necks to signify that they were a conquered people. Yahweh says in vs. 1 and 2 then that this Lord will be a king and ruler of all. Then in v. 4, Yahweh says that this king will also be a priest. A king rules the people for God; a priest intercedes with God on behalf of the people.

This promise is so sure that God swears it will happen. It is not necessary for God to swear. He never lies. He always, without exception, fulfills all his promises. So if God says it, it's true, he doesn't need to say it twice, he doesn't need to swear that it's the truth. But man is so fickle and we live in a world where a man's word is broken as frequently as pie crusts, so God doubles up his promises, and swears by himself, since he can swear by none greater, that he will do what he promised.

This one is to be a priest forever. He will never go away. He will never be replaced. He will never die. He will never have a successor. He is eternal, permanent, and indestructible.

He is in the order of Melchizedek. There's that name again. We have not heard it for 1000 years in the Bible. And now here it is again for the first time.

What does this mean?

The priests of Israel all had to come from the tribe of Levi and they had to be descendants of the first high priest, Aaron. No matter whom a man was, if he was not from the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron he could not be a priest. David was a good man, a man after God's own heart, who wrote that beautiful Psalm 23, but he could not be a priest. David was from the tribe of Judah, the wrong tribe. One time King Uzziah wanted to offer a sacrifice in the temple, He went in to do it. The priest told him, "No, you may be the king but you are not God, and you have no right to do the work

of a priest. Get out of the temple and stay out. This is not your territory. God will punish you for this if you don't." Well, King Uzziah decided he could do what he wanted to since he was king, and you know what? God struck him with leprosy and he had leprosy until the day of his death. God meant what he said. No priests except from Aaron's family of the tribe of Levi. Strictly it, no exceptions.

So no human could possibly be a priest under the Law of Moses which set in stone this rule of God. So if a person was to be a priest, it had to be from a different order, outside the Law, and beyond the law.

So when God promises a priest after the order or arrangement, or in the method of Melchizedek, he is saying that this kingly-priest, or priestly-king, will be specially appointed by God. Melchizedek was a priest of God 600 years before the Law of Moses was given at Mt. Sinai. Melchizedek was a priest of God long before Levi was ever born to Jacob who was born to Isaac who was born to Abraham. This one that is to be a priest forever then will have to be after the order of Melchizedek, specially appointed, specially approved, specially designated. He will be a priest without credentials of human pedigree. He will not have a Levitical portfolio. He will be one that God himself appointed. He will be without genealogy, that is, without genealogical basis of family inheritance. He will be without father or mother meaning that he did not receive the priesthood as in inheritance from his family. No. God made him a unique priest a one of a kind priest who stands alone.

So who is this kingly priest, or this priestly king? When did God fulfill this promise?

Jesus Is Our Kingly Priest and Priestly King

It could not be David or his family because they all died—they are not priests forever.

Who is this?

Well, Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted passage from the OT in the NT. Jesus knew this passage. He quoted it to the Jews during his disputes with them. Hear the word of the Lord in Mark, chapter 12, v. 35: [read]. Jesus knew the answer to the question. Jesus is the son of David according to the flesh. In his incarnation, he is the fleshly son of Mary, a descendant of David, but he is David's Lord, too, because he is the spiritual son of God, the second person of the Godhead, the word, who was with God

in the beginning. He was God the Word. Jesus then is one person in two natures: human and divine.

On the day of Pentecost, the day that the death and resurrection of Jesus was first preached and people believed in Jesus and were baptized in his name. Peter said this promise was fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection. Hear him in Acts 2, v. 29-36 [read].

Jesus then is Lord, king and priest on his throne; He lives forever by virtue of his resurrection from the dead. Later in the book of Revelation, Jesus says, "I am the alpha and the omega; I was dead and behold I am alive forevermore."

Now let's turn to the book of Hebrews in our NT. In chapter one, v. 13, the writer says, [read]. Here he quotes Psalm 110 and refers it to Jesus. Now turn to chapter 5, vs. 4-6. The Bible says, [read]. Here the writer says that Jesus was called by God. He did not appoint himself a priest, but just like God ordained Aaron to be a priest by his right of power and ownership of the earth, so God appointed Jesus to be a priest.

The writer goes on to explain how that Jesus is God's priest for us. He is the seed of Abraham that blesses all humanity. He is our hope in life and death. Hear the word of the Lord in chapter 6:13-20: [read].

So then the writer goes on to talk about Melchizedek. Hear God's word: [read 7:1-3].

This passage is based on the rabbinical method of interpretation of Scripture. Their idea was based on the silence of the Scriptures. If the Bible is silent about something, then they believed that it never occurred. Since the Bible is silent about Melchizedek's father mother, about his birth or his death, then their interpretation meant that he had no birth or death, no father or mother. They just said that he was in the present always, so since nothing is said about his priesthood beginning, that means it had no beginning, and since nothing is said about his priesthood ending, it had no ending, and thus it remains permanently valid.

The writer here is making the point that just as the priesthood of Melchizedek is permanently valid so Jesus is a priest in that same type arrangement.

It is important to note that Melchizedek is compared to Christ, not Christ is compared to Melchizedek. Note v. 3c, "like the Son of God." Again, I emphasize: Melchizedek is compared to Jesus, not Jesus compared to Melchizedek.

Now in vs. 4-10, the writer says that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. I have already spoken about how great Abraham is. But Melchizedek is greater. The greater always blesses the lesser and the lesser

always pays tithes to the greater, so since Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, then Melchizedek is even greater than Abraham. But, further, the writer says, Aaron and Levi were descendants of Abraham. So if Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, then Melchizedek is also greater than Aaron and Levi because they are part of Abraham's descendants.

So the priesthood of Jesus is far superior to the priesthood of Levi and Aaron.

Perfection could not come through the priesthood of Levi or his descendants. If so, why did God promise another one after the order of Melchizedek in Psalm 110?

Jesus is a priest of God, not according to genealogy from Levi, or any human reason, but his is priest because he was raised from the dead to rule and reign forever (vs. 16-17).

The way of Jesus gives us a much better hope than did the Law of Moses (v. 19).

God never did swear when priests of Levi were appointed but God swore about Jesus, his son. V. 21 quotes Psalm 110, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind; you are a priest forever."

This oath of God means that, according to v. 22, "Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant."

Jesus' priesthood is permanent. He lives and reigns by the power of his indestructible life. Priests of Aaron died. Josephus says that there were 83 priests from the time of Aaron to the destruction of the temple in A. D. 70. Other Jewish sources names hundreds more. But Jesus is a single, indestructible priest. Therefore, the writer concludes in v. 25: [read it].

Jesus completely meets all our needs. [Read v. 26]. Other priests, even the high priest, had to offer sacrifices for his own sins before he could intercede on behalf of the people and their sins. But Jesus had no sin. And he did not offer a dumb animal, which had no conscience, awareness of sin, or knowledge of God, whose blood really could not forgive sins. No, Jesus offered himself for us. He is both the priest that offers the sacrifice and the sacrifice that is offered. He does not need to offer sacrifices daily. He offered one sacrifice once and for all. His one offering is perfect forever. Through all his suffering, death and resurrection Jesus was brought to completion in forgiving our sins. He never, ever has to go through that again because one sacrifice forever takes care of all the sins of all humanity forever.

Wow! What a savior we have in Jesus. Melchizedek is greater than Abraham but Jesus is greater than Melchizedek. Praise God for our perfect,

all sufficient, total savior. When we have Jesus, we need nothing more. He, as v. 26 says, “meets our need.”

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