

ABRAM'S RECOMPENSE (VV. 17–20)

The setting was the Valley of Shaveh, the King's Valley, a brief distance south of Jerusalem.¹¹ There two kings greeted Abram and his warriors, the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. Both were Canaanite kings. The kings are a study in contrast. The king of Sodom viewed Abram's victory as a human feat, but the king of Salem saw it as divine. The king of Sodom made a businesslike offer to Abram. But the king of Salem "offered him, in token, a simple sufficiency from God, pronounces an unspecified blessing (dwelling on the Giver, not the gift), and accepts costly tribute" (Kidner).¹²

Melchizedek. The king of Salem was none other than the mysterious Melchizedek, actually the king of Jerusalem. Both etymology and rabbinic commentary as well as [Psalm 76:2](#) confirm that Salem is Jerusalem.¹³ So he was king of what

¹¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 408.

¹² Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), p. 121.

¹³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* pp. 409, 410 explains:

Melchizedek is connected with the city of *Salem*, traditionally identified as Jerusalem. [Ps. 76:3](#) (Eng. 2) explicitly connects Salem with Jerusalem (Zion). But how can we connect Salem (*šālēm*) with Jerusalem (*y^erûšālayim*)? For it was not customary among the Hebrews to shorten a compound name by dropping the first element.

would become the Holy City. Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” or “my king is righteous.” Either way his name stresses his righteous character. And in addition to his royalty and righteousness, he was a priest of the Most High God. Add to this the fact that he was a Canaanite, and you have the reality: *Melchizedek was the God-fearing, Canaanite priest-king of Jerusalem.* He was a Canaanite like the king of Sodom, a descendant of Canaan, the cursed son of Ham. He was not a physical descendant or relative of Abram. Yet he was like Abram in this: He believed that there is one God, God the Most High. Unlike Abram, he did not know that God’s name is Yahweh. But he would know immediately (cf. v. 22). Gordon Wenham explains:

Within Genesis, however, Melchizedek is primarily an example of a non-Jew who recognizes God’s hand at work in Israel: like Abimelech (21:22), Rahab (Josh. 2:11), Ruth (1:16) or Naaman (2 Kings 5:15). Similarly, he may be seen as a forerunner of the Magi (Matt. 2:1–12), centurions (Matt. 8:5–13; Mark 15:39; Acts 10), or the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:26–30), let alone the multitude of Gentile converts mentioned in Acts. They are those who have discovered that in Abram all the families of the earth find blessing.¹⁴

This union of *priest* and *king* at *Jerusalem* will move David, the first Israelite *priest*¹⁵ (or at least having priestly functions)

¹⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Vol. 1, p. 322.

and *king*, to sit on a throne in *Jerusalem* to sing of a greater Melchizedek to come (cf. [Psalm 110:4](#)). The significance of this is explained in depth in [Hebrews 7](#), as we shall see in our next study.

What did this God-fearing Canaanite priest-king do? First, he refreshed Abram: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine” (v. [18a](#)). This expressed his goodwill and his generosity. Bread and wine was royal fare (cf. [1 Samuel 16:20](#)). He laid out a royal banquet for the returning conquerors in the valley of the kings.

Melchizedek’s blessing. Secondly, while his hands were full of gifts, his lips were full of blessing.

*And he blessed him and said,
“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth.” (v. [19](#))*

¹⁵ Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 729 explain:

Melchizedek is named only one other time in the OT, in [Ps 110:4](#). Here, in what appears to be a royal psalm of coronation, the Davidic king in Jerusalem is said to be “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” In other words, because Melchizedek was a king and priest in Jerusalem, the Jewish king, who also has priestly functions, can be likened to Melchizedek. The Psalm came to read as properly messianic (as in the NT and the targum).

This looks back to [12:1–3](#) when God promised Abram that he would be a blessing and that all the families of the earth would be blessed in him. This was the initial fulfillment of that promise, as Melchizedek, one of the families of the earth, blessed Abram. This suggests that Melchizedek himself would be blessed through Abram. This was in stark contrast to the king of Sodom who was outside the blessing.

Melchizedek’s identification of God Most High as “Possessor of heaven and earth” grounded the blessing in the ultimate power in the universe. These blessings “invite us to take creation faith out of the arena of ‘origins’ and see it as source for life buoying, and joy in the trials of the day” (Brueggemann).¹⁶ God’s cosmic power is the ultimate ground of faith.

Then as Melchizedek’s blessing echoed over Abram, Melchizedek blessed God:

*“... and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” (v. 20)*

Melchizedek understood what was lost on the king of Sodom—that the source of Abram’s victories was God. His doxologies flowed not only outward but upward. This mysterious Canaanite was himself a man of faith. And he was now living under God’s blessing. He was the prime example of God’s promise, “and in you [Abram] all the families of the

¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. [137](#).

earth shall be blessed” (12:3b).

Abram tithes. Abram recognized Melchizedek’s blessing as the voice of God and implicitly that Melchizedek, too, was a man of faith. “And Abram gave him a tenth of everything” (v. 20b). Abram validated Melchizedek’s priesthood by his tithe, as was customary for priestly services. At the same time he was giving his tenth to God.

ABRAM’S DECLARATION (VV. 21–24)

Seeing the exchange, the king of Sodom offered his own deal: “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself” (v. 21). Sodom gave nothing, whereas Melchizedek brought a banquet. Melchizedek blessed Abram, but Sodom offered a crude, rude deal that can be summarized in six words: “Give me people; take property yourself.”¹⁷ As rescuer, Abram was entitled to all. Sodom’s deal was an ungracious, self-serving demand.

But observe Abram’s response to him, which he delivered in the form of an oath before “the LORD [Yahweh], God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth.” Now Melchizedek learned that the Lord Most High is Yahweh. From now on, he would know of and believe in the name of God. Abram’s oath closes the account:

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to

¹⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Vol. 1, p. 318.

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. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.” (vv. 22–24)

This oath, this refusal, was Abram’s declaration of dependence upon God. Abram knew the name of God and lifted it high. He believed God’s word with all his heart. He risked everything because of his trust in God’s word. He was at that moment a victorious king. His faith had made him so. This closing oath was a militant statement of faith and also a polemic against the perspective of the king of Sodom¹⁸—and all who trust in the things of this world.

Such magnanimity! Such greatness of soul! Again the veil is lifted. We see Abram in his true colors. He is living as king of the land. Abram’s glory is briefly and clearly seen by those closest to him. He is riding a faith ascendancy that will take him to [Genesis 15:6](#)—“he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Abram trusted God’s word implicitly. That is the great continental divide in our lives as believers. Do we really trust his word? Distrust will implode us, shrink us, compact us, reduce us, and hermetically seal us in the smallest compass of self. But if we truly believe God’s

¹⁸ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 138.

word, that will enlarge our souls, not just in generosity, not just in opening our hands, but in moving us to sacrifice for the welfare of others—to be like Jesus himself. In this great moment, Abram foreshadowed his great heir and ultimate seed who said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” ([Matthew 4:4](#)). Abram believed the words that came from the mouth of God. His heart became great. He lived in magnanimity.

25

Melchizedek the Priest- King

GENESIS 14:18–20 WITH PSALM 110 AND
HEBREWS 7:1–10

On June 27, 1976, armed operatives for the Popular Front for

the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) surprised the twelve crew members of an Air France jetliner and its ninety-one passengers, hijacking it to a destination unknown. The plane was tracked heading for Central Africa, where indeed it did land under the congenial auspices of then Ugandan President Idi Amin. And there it remained apparently secure at Entebbe Airport, where the hijackers spent the next seven days preparing for their next move. The hijackers were by all estimations in the driver's seat.

However, 2,500 miles away in Tel Aviv three Israeli C-130 Hercules transports were secretly boarded by a deadly force of Israeli commandos who within hours attacked Entebbe under cover of darkness. In less than sixty minutes the commandos rushed the old terminal, gunned down the hijackers, and rescued 110 of the 113 hostages. The next day, July 4, Israel's Premier Yitzhak Rabin triumphantly declared the mission "will become a legend"—which it surely has.¹ Israel's resolve and stealth in liberating her people is admired by her friends and begrudged by her enemies.

Actually, Israel's resolve is nothing new because the same quality can be traced all the way back to the very beginning of the Hebrew nation in the prowess of their father Abraham. The kidnapers in his day (the Middle Bronze Age) were an international coalition of four eastern kings headed by King

¹ *Facts on File: World News Digest with Index*, Volume 36, No. 1, 1861, July 10, 1976 (New York: Facts on File), pp. 485, 486.

Chedorlaomer who attacked the Transjordan, defeating the city states of Sodom and her neighbors, carrying off a large number of hostages that included Abraham's nephew Lot (cf. [Genesis 14:5–13](#)). Undaunted, Abraham recruited “318 trained men” (proto-commandos!) from his own household and took off in hot pursuit—until he closed in on the kidnappers some 120 miles later at the northernmost border of Canaan. And there, under the cover of night, Abram deployed his small forces in a surprise attack. His troops, riding slathering mounts, bore down on the hijackers and their hostages. Deadly arrows flew in the night, and bloody swords were raised gleaming in the dusty moonlight—and the four kings were put to flight. The Genesis account gives this Entebbe-like summary of Abram's success: “Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people” ([Genesis 14:16](#)). Abram could be formidable. It was not wise to fool with Father Abram.

So when Abram returned to his home after the defeat of the kings, he was a hero at the pinnacle of martial success. Can you see him proudly astride his lumbering mount, smeared with the dirt and blood of battle, leading his 318 proud men plus Lot and *all* the captives and all the plunder through Salem? If so, you have the feel necessary to begin to appreciate Abram's strange, mystic encounter with a shadowy figure of immense grandeur—Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem.

Genesis says:

*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 14:18–20)*

So mysterious. And think of this—this is the *only* historical mention of Melchizedek in the Old Testament. Puzzled, some ancient Jewish commentators identified Melchizedek with Shem, who was thought to have lived until Abram’s time (Targum Neofiti I).² But if this was so, certainly Moses or David or the writer of Hebrews would have made much of it. Also such speculations are based on a very constrained reading of the genealogies of Genesis. Others have theorized that Melchizedek was a Christophany (a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ) rather than a historical person. But the statement of Hebrews 7:3, which refers to Melchizedek as “resembling the Son of God,” will not allow this because the Greek verb translated “resembling” always assumes two distinct and separate identities.³ The Son of God and Melchizedek were distinct

² Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 313.

³ *Ibid.*, where D. W. Burdick explains:

persons.

The truth is that Melchizedek was the godly, residing Canaanite priest-king of Jerusalem. Whereas Abram was a descendant of the blessed Shem, Melchizedek was a descendant of the cursed Canaan (cf. [Genesis 9:24–27](#)). Nevertheless, Melchizedek, like Abram, had come to believe in the one true God. Abram had found him to be a true spiritual brother and therefore accepted his provision and blessings—and then gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything. In effect, Abram bowed before Melchizedek in paying him tithes. “Abram bows only to Melchizedek, in a story filled with kings” (Von Rad).⁴ Abram bowed before the one who was holding the place for the future Davidic dynasty and its ultimate son.

That was around 2000 B.C., and for a millennium there was no mention at all of Melchizedek, not even in retrospect. But in the tenth century B.C., when the psalmist David became King of Israel and made Jerusalem the royal city (making his house, in effect, the successor to Melchizedek’s earlier dynasty of priest-kings),⁵ David gave the famous oracles of [Psalm 110](#):

The verb *aphomoiōō* always assumes two distinct and separate identities, one of which is a copy of the other. Thus Melchizedek and the Son of God are represented as two separate persons, the first of which resembled the second.

⁴ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 181.

⁵ J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI:

*The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.” (110:1)*

*The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.” (v. 4)*

Here, though David was celebrating his own ascendancy to the throne, he also had in view one greater than himself because the Psalm begins with David calling him “LORD”—“The LORD says to my Lord ...” (cf. [Mark 12:35–37](#)). David was indicating that the ultimate application of Melchizedek extended beyond himself. [Psalm 110](#) declared that God was going to do something *new* by bringing into history a priest-king like Melchizedek. His priesthood would last “forever.” He would be appointed directly by God. A divine oath guaranteed it: “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind.” What an intriguing prophecy! God was going to establish a totally new priesthood.

Eerdmans, 1962), p. 806 explains:

In Ps. [cx. 4](#) a Davidic king is acclaimed by divine oath as ‘a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’. The background of this acclamation is provided by David’s conquest of Jerusalem c. 1000 BC, by virtue of which David and his house became heirs to Melchizedek’s dynasty of priest-kings.

Now let your mind course ahead another thousand years to the apostolic age and imagine for a moment that you are the writer of the book of Hebrews, whose purpose in writing was to encourage the soon-to-be persecuted Jewish church. Also imagine yourself reflecting on Melchizedek's *history* and *prophecy* and the apostolic teaching that connects [Genesis 14](#) and [Psalm 110](#), showing that they point to Christ (cf. Christ's teaching in [Matthew 22:44](#) and [Luke 20:41–44](#) and Peter's teaching in [Acts 2:34, 35](#)). You begin to muse and pray, and then everything falls into place.

Now in [Hebrews 7](#) you write out what you have learned as a means of encouragement to the storm-tossed church. There is no teaching like it anywhere. This is, as we say today, *heavy*.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MELCHIZEDEK (HEBREWS 7:1–3)

In the writer's opening statement, he concisely lays out the significance of the historical Melchizedek as a type of the ultimate priesthood of Christ.

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.” (vv. 1–3)

Foreshadowing Christ’s character. For starters, the author of Hebrews has noted that Melchizedek’s titles foreshadowed the character of Christ. Melchizedek bore the title of king, which is mentioned four times in verses 1, 2. Jesus is, of course, the ultimate “King of kings and Lord of lords,” as will be written bold on his robe and thigh when he returns ([Revelation 19:16](#)). Significantly, Melchizedek was a priest-king, something that, by law, no Levitical priest could ever be. But Jesus became the ultimate priest-king, fulfilling to the letter what was promised through Zechariah regarding the Messiah: “Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a *priest on His throne*, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices” ([Zechariah 6:13](#), NASB, italics added; cf. [Psalm 110:1, 4](#)).

The title “Melchizedek,” our author explains, means “king of righteousness,” and the title “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” Significantly here, we should note that both the qualities of righteousness and peace were prophesied about the coming Messiah in [Isaiah 9:6, 7](#), where his fourth title is “Prince of peace” (v. 6), and he is said to go on to rule with “righteousness” (v. 7). The New Testament identifies Jesus specifically as “Jesus Christ the righteous” ([1 John 2:1](#)). Jesus is the King of righteousness! Likewise the New Testament says of

Jesus, “For he himself is our peace” ([Ephesians 2:14](#)). Jesus is the King of peace! So Jesus brings righteousness and peace together in his person. As the psalmist so beautifully had sung, in the Lord “righteousness and peace kiss each other” ([Psalm 85:10](#)). Righteousness and peace form the tell-tale kiss of his character.

But he is more: Jesus is *King*, the sovereign of righteousness and peace. As such, he is the bestower of all righteousness and peace. He is the sovereign giver of the kisses of peace and righteousness. As we shall see, he is the only one in whom peace and righteousness can be found. Therefore, we see that Melchizedek foreshadowed the *character* of Christ—his priesthood, his kingship, his righteousness, and his peace. Jesus came as a perfect king, a perfect priest, perfect righteousness, and perfect peace.

Foreshadowing Christ’s qualifications. Going deeper, the writer of Hebrews also sees a foreshadowing of Christ’s qualifications, because he writes that Melchizedek was “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” (v. 3). As we have noted, some have inferred from these words that Melchizedek must have been an angel who took on human form for Abram, or even a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ himself. But such interpretations are unnecessary, because the writer is simply using a rabbinical method of interpretation from silence. His point is

that the Genesis account does not mention Melchizedek's parents or genealogy or when he was born or died, thereby giving a type of what would be fleshed out in the qualifications of Christ.⁶

No genealogy. All Levitical priests had to have a priestly genealogy that could be traced all the way back to Aaron. But Melchizedek was “without father or mother or genealogy”—he had no priestly genealogy through Levi or Aaron. Likewise, while Jesus' bloodline could be traced to Judah, he had no priestly genealogy. Jesus was in effect “without genealogy.” The point is, Jesus' priesthood, just like Melchizedek's, was based solely on the call of God, not on heredity. Jesus and Melchizedek were appointed as “priest[s] of

⁶F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 137, 138 explains:

The important consideration was the account given of Melchizedek in holy writ; to him the silences of Scripture were as much due to divine inspiration as were its statements. In the only record which Scripture provides of Melchizedek—[Gen. 14:18–20](#)—nothing is said of his parentage, nothing is said of his ancestry or progeny, nothing is said of his birth, nothing is said of his death. He appears as a living man, king of Salem and priest of God Most High; and as such he disappears. In all this—in the silences as well as in the statements—he is a fitting type of Christ; in fact, the record by the things it says of him and by the things it does not say has assimilated him to the Son of God.

the Most High God.”

No beginning/end. Secondly, all Levitical priests served limited terms of office—no more than thirty years.⁷ But with Melchizedek, there was no set beginning or end of his life. As William Lane says, “Melchizedek’s sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance from recorded history awakens within a sensitive reader the notion of eternity.”⁸ What was foreshadowed in Melchizedek’s being without beginning or end was fully realized in Christ’s eternal priesthood. The writer of Hebrews caps his thoughts at the end of verse 3, say-

⁷ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 189 says:

A priest might assume his priestly duties “as soon as the first signs of manhood made their appearance,” but according to rabbinical tradition “he was not actually installed till he was twenty years of age.” The period of service for a priest might cover twenty to thirty years, but the end would come.

Kistemaker also references Emile Schurer, *History of the Jewish People*, Vol. 1, Div. 2, p. 215 and comments, “Note also that the following passages imply that a priest was installed at age thirty and served until he reached the age of fifty: Num. 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47; also see I Chron. 23:3. Num 8:23–26 speaks of Levites twenty-five years of age. And I Chron. 23:24, 27; II Chron. 31:17; and Ezra 3:8 mention the twenty year old priest.”

⁸ William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), p. 106.

ing, “resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever”; or more exactly, “but being *made like* the Son of God he remains a priest continuously.” The silence of the Biblical record regarding Melchizedek’s days suggests a continuous priesthood for Melchizedek that foreshadows what perfectly was, and is, fulfilled in Christ, who ministers continually without interruption.⁹

Whereas the earthly high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year and with great trepidation, Jesus lives in the heavenly Holy of Holies. There he perpetually prays for us. His whole being is one unceasing intercession for more life, for more blessing, for more holiness, for more love. There is no interruption. Just as the sun does not exist for one moment

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), pp. 63, 64 writes:

And it is the Son of God who is the standard, not the ancient priest-king. The writer says that Melchizedek is “made like” (*aphomoiomenos*) the Son of God, not that the Son of God is like Melchizedek. Thus it is not that Melchizedek sets the pattern and Jesus follows it. Rather, the record about Melchizedek is so arranged that it brings out certain truths that apply far more fully to Jesus than they do to Melchizedek. With the latter, these truths are simply a matter of record; but with Jesus they are not only historically true, they also have significant spiritual dimensions. The writer is, of course, speaking of the Son’s eternal nature, not of his appearance in the Incarnation.

without pouring out its light, so our Lord Jesus, our Priest, cannot exist a single moment without interceding for his children—“he always lives to make intercession for them” ([Hebrews 7:25](#)).

The big picture that the writer wants us to see is that Jesus perfectly fulfills what was foreshadowed in the Genesis account of Melchizedek. Melchizedek’s *character* type as king, priest, righteousness, and peace was fulfilled to perfection in Christ. Melchizedek’s *qualifications*, being without genealogy and without beginning or end, prefigured Jesus’ who had no priestly genealogy or priestly term of service but was appointed by God and ministers eternally.

No one had ever brought all of this together in writing as the writer of Hebrews presented it. His heart was full, and he expected that his Jewish hearers would feel the same as they reflected on their unsure situations. So brimming over with joy, he then took them even higher in presenting the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priesthood.

SUPERIORITY OF MELCHIZEDEK (HEBREWS 7:4–10)

Melchizedek’s superiority is presented through two events in his meeting with Abraham—*tithing* and *blessing*.

Tithing and superiority. In the ancient world, paying tithes to another was recognition of the other’s superiority and a

sign of subjection to that person. In the event of Abram's presenting his tithe to Melchizedek, we must remember that when Abram returned from his victory over the four kings, he was on a personal mountaintop. He had proven himself a man of great courage and of considerable capability. Moreover, in the eyes of succeeding generations of Jews he was considered to be the greatest of men. He was called "a friend of God" ([James 2:23](#); cf. [2 Chronicles 20:7](#); [Isaiah 41:8](#)). He was the father of the nation of Israel—the patriarch.

But when he met Melchizedek, he recognized that personage's greatness and paid him a "tenth part of everything"—literally, "the top of the heap"—the choicest spoils of war. It was a reasoned recognition by Abram that he was in the presence of one greater than himself. Our writer expresses proper astonishment: "See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!" (v. 4). Melchizedek was a person of arching superiority.

The author has made a powerful point, but he realizes that some may diminish it in their minds by saying, "What's the big deal? Levitical priests collect tithes too!" So in anticipation he further argues, "And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham" (vv. 5, 6a). His point is that the Levites' ability to collect tithes came

from the provision made by the Law and not from any natural superiority. But Melchizedek was different. He did “not have his descent from them,” and yet as a figure of immense superiority he collected tithes not from his people, *but from Abram!*

The author further builds on Melchizedek’s established superiority through tithing by noting that since the Scriptures do not list his end, he represents a living superior priesthood: “In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives” (v. 8).

For the final expression of the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood over the Levitical priesthood due to Abram’s tithing to Melchizedek, the writer appeals to the common belief that an ancestor contains all his descendants within himself. Thus he argues, “One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him” (vv. 9, 10).

Even the Levitical priesthood acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood—because it paid tithes to Melchizedek in advance.¹⁰ Our writer has taken the common

¹⁰ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, p. 142, writes:

Reverting for a moment to the tithe receiving tribe of Levi, our author points out that Levi, the ancestor of that priestly tribe and the embodiment of its corporate personality, may be said himself to have paid tithes to Melchizedek (thus conceding the superiority of the

Hebrew understanding that tithing to another established his superiority and has demonstrated from every angle that Melchizedek is superior.

Blessing and superiority. The other principle he uses to establish Melchizedek's superiority is that in the matter of a formal biblical blessing, the superior always blesses the inferior. Just as Abram knew he should present a tithe to Melchizedek, he knew that he must bow and receive his prayer of blessing. Therefore, verses [6b](#), [7](#) tell us that Melchizedek "received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior."

What a stupendous act on Abram's part. Remember, God had told Abram, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" ([Genesis 12:3](#)). Abram was the supreme blesser. All the rest of mankind were blessees! But he saw himself as inferior to Melchizedek who towered above him with mystic

Melchizedek priesthood) in the person of his ancestor Abraham. Levi was Abraham's great grandson, and was yet unborn when Abraham met Melchizedek; but an ancestor is regarded in biblical thought as containing within himself all his descendants. That Levi may be thought of thus as paying tithes to Melchizedek is an afterthought to what has already been said about the significance of this particular payment of tithes; lest it should be criticized as far-fetched, our author qualifies it with the phrase "so to say" ("it might even be said," NEB).

grandeur and received his blessing.

So we must conclude that Melchizedek's priesthood, though it has only briefest mention in Scripture, is superior in every biblical and logical way to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. Yet, realizing that, we must note that it was only a type of the ultimate superior priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ who is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" ([Psalm 110:4](#)). And as the antitype to the type, he supersedes it, just as living reality supersedes a photograph!

Though Melchizedek was "king of righteousness" and "king of peace," he could never make men righteous or give them peace. He was only a type.

Righteousness. But Jesus—the grand, the true, the eternal Melchizedekian Priest-King—gives righteousness and peace. As to righteousness, we understand this: First, he *is* righteousness incarnate—"Jesus Christ the righteous" ([1 John 2:1](#)). He is intrinsically righteous, the essence of righteousness, the source of righteousness, the sum of righteousness. Second, Jesus is the *bestower* of righteousness. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" ([Romans 3:21, 22](#); cf. [Romans 1:17](#); [1 Corinthians 1:30](#); [Philippians 3:9](#)). Third, he is the priestly *mediator* of righteousness. In bestowing it, he becomes our personal Melchizedekian priest who prays for the working out of his

righteousness in every area of our lives. He remains forever our King and Priest of righteousness.

Peace. But he is also the King of Peace, of which we understand this: His peace comes with the gift of righteousness—and never before it. The sequence is always righteousness, then peace. We understand, first, that he is peace—the “Prince of Peace” ([Isaiah 9:6](#))—that he is the source and sum and essence of all peace—and that there is no peace without him. We understand, too, that he is the *bestower* of peace. When he came to earth the angels sang, “peace among those with whom he is pleased” ([Luke 2:14](#)). On the eve of his death he said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” ([John 14:27](#)). And after his glorious resurrection, he came to his disciples again with the words “Peace be with you” ([John 20:19](#)). And finally, as our eternal priest he *mediates* our growth in peace as he prays for us. Jesus, our High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, is praying for our *shalom*—our wholeness and well-being. He is praying for it now!

Righteousness and peace have kissed in Christ—and that is the kiss that the King repeatedly bestows on his bride.

And this is what our gospel offers today to every heart that comes to Christ by faith.

- *Righteousness*, the King’s righteousness, which he will give to every heart that believes, so that person becomes the very righteousness of God.

- *Peace*, the King's peace, that will become your constant possession in both good times and bad. Peace with God. Peace with yourself. Peace before your enemies.

- *Prayer*, the King's prayers—unceasing unending, unrelenting.

*Intercessor, friend of sinners,
Earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
Where the songs of all the sinless
Sweep across the crystal sea.*

WILLIAM C. DIX, 1866