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The Melchizedekian Priesthood Pt 1

Genesis 14:17-22

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Good morning, Bereans. For our study this morning, I want to share with you something that I have been studying. This is going to be something that you have probably never heard before, so I ask that you be Bereans and not accept it or reject it until you have studied it. Let's begin by looking at Exodus 19.

Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them." And Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.'" And the LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them." Exodus 19:22-24 ESV

Does anything strike you as odd or out of place here? Who were these priests? The Aaronic priesthood had not yet been created. That doesn't happen until chapter 28.

"Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood. Exodus 28:1-3 ESV

So, who are these priests that Yahweh talks about in Exodus 19 before the Law of Moses was ever given? The first priest mentioned in the Bible is Melchizedek.

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, 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. 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, Genesis 14:17-22 ESV

Here Abram meets Melchizedek who is called, "*a priest of God Most High, El Elyon*" in Hebrew. This is a universal name for Yahweh. If you question this, consider Genesis 14:22.

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, Genesis 14:22 ESV

Here it is, "*Yahweh El Elyon.*" "El" is a shortened form of Elohim and speaks of God's strength. Elyon is like the superlative of "El" and could be translated "strongest." El Elyon, therefore, is the strongest strong One or "the Most High God." The Bible interprets this to mean that El Elyon is the "possessor of heaven and earth." El Elyon knows no bounds. The authority of the Most High God transcends boundaries between nations, whereas the name YHWH is typically associated with Israel. El is in the designation of the chief God. The authority of the Most High God transcends boundaries between Heaven and earth, between spirit beings and physical beings, between angels and demons, and between humans and animals. His authority and dominion span time and distance alike. There is nothing and no one within an infinite universe that does not fall within His domain and jurisdiction. He is El Elyon, the Most High God—the strongest strong One—the possessor of Heaven and earth.

The Aaronic priests were priests of Yahweh (a covenant name of God). God took the name of Yahweh for the earthly nation of Israel. But here the author uses El Elyon - "Most High God"—the universal name for God. It includes both Jew and Gentile and gives a far broader name than the name Yahweh. Whereas Aaron's priesthood related just to Israel, Melchizedek related to all men, as seen in Hebrews 6.

where Yeshua has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:20 ESV

Do you see the significance? Yeshua is not just the Messiah of Israel but also of the world. Yeshua is superior to every Levite office, including the priesthood, because like the first high priest, Melchizedek, his priesthood extends to every nation, tribe, and tongue, and

This makes Yeshua the guarantor of a better covenant. Hebrews 7:22 ESV

He does not do his work inside the earthly Tabernacle, but he does it in the heavenly realities. Why? He is a priest of a different order—an eternal order, one that has no beginning and no end. His priesthood extended beyond all national and dispensational distinctions. This universal priesthood is a very important issue to understand. It is continually illustrated in the New Testament, but many people miss it.

The next day he saw Yeshua coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! John 1:29 ESV

The word "world" here means "Jew and Gentile, all nationalities and races." This is also its meaning in John 3:16.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 ESV

Many have taken the word "world" to mean "every single person," but that is not its meaning. It means that God loves people from all races and nationalities.

From this title, we know exactly of whom Melchizedek was a priest—the God of Gods and Lord of Lords who created all things. Notice what Jeremiah says.

Thus, shall you say to them: "The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens." Jeremiah 10:11 ESV

The writer of Hebrews expounds on the Genesis text.

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. Hebrews 7:1-2 ESV

Melchizedek comes from two Hebrew words: "*Melek* which means "king" and *tsedeq* which means "righteousness." We could translate Melchizedek as "my king is

righteous." He uses Melchizedek's name and title as a means of pointing to two well-known features of the Messianic ministry—righteousness and peace.

Righteousness and peace are so obviously features of the work of Christ that their mention alone carries his point. The LXX version of Isaiah 6:9 uses both righteousness and peace in its rendering.

The writer of Hebrews says, "*king of Salem.*" The city that is represented by "Salem" is Jerusalem. David, 1000 years after Abraham, refers to Jerusalem by this title in Psalm 76.

**His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion.
Psalms 76:2 ESV**

Salem and Zion (Jerusalem) are clearly synonymous. It is clear that Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and peace, who ruled over Jerusalem before it became the city of God, prefigured the One who ultimately will (from the writers perspective) rule over Jerusalem—the One who is righteousness and is peace, Yeshua the Christ.

By the way, this is always the biblical order: righteousness and peace. You can't have peace without righteousness. And this goes for the practical aspects as well as the positional. The only way to have peace with God is through righteousness. And we become righteous through faith in Christ.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

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 7:3 ESV

What does this verse mean? Our author is basing his typology not on what Scripture says about Melchizedek but on what Scripture does not say concerning him. He is not saying that Melchizedek is a biological anomaly as though he really didn't have a father or mother.

This is not to be taken literally. He wasn't a freak, he wasn't hatched. The Scriptural silence makes him a type of Christ. The silence of Scripture is intentional. The book of Genesis emphasizes genealogy. Of all the worshipers of God in the Tanakh, Melchizedek is the only one whose ancestors and decedents are not mentioned. There is no record of his birth or death or the end of his priesthood.

What was true typically of Melchizedek is true in reality of our Lord Yeshua the Christ. He was made *like* the Son of God, but not the son of man. What is true of Melchizedek from a literary point of view in verse 3 is true in fact of our Lord Yeshua the Christ.

You don't read of an end of Melchizedek's priesthood. This is really true of the anti-type, the Lord Yeshua. His priesthood never ends, really!

Let me sum it up. what he is saying is that Melchizedek is a type or a foreshadowing of Yeshua the Christ on the basis of what Scripture does not say about Him. So far as the biblical record is concerned, Melchizedek typifies the eternal Son of God in that he has no parentage, no pedigree, no birth, no death, but abides a priest forever. And thus, what is true of Melchizedek, only insofar as the biblical record is concerned, is true of Yeshua in fact and in reality. What is true of Melchizedek in a literary point of view as a type is realistically true of our Lord Yeshua the Christ as the anti-type.

Why these particular omissions in verse 3? These were all absolutely essential requirements of the Aaronic priesthood. It was of immeasurable importance that an Aaronic priest be able to demonstrate that his mother and father were Israelites and of the tribe of Levi and of the family of Aaron. That was essential.

So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned had offered, and they were hammered out as a covering for the altar, to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the LORD, lest he become like Korah and his company—as the LORD said to him through Moses. Numbers 16:39-40 ESV

The text in Hebrews 7:3 states that Melchizedek was "*without descent.*" This is the Greek word *agenealogetos*, and means "without genealogy." This word is coined by the author, and it is found nowhere else in either biblical or classical Greek literature. The Aaronic priest had to prove his genealogy.

The text says of Melchizedek, "***He continues a priest forever***"—the Aaronic priests not only served a limited people, they served for a limited time.

And after that the Levites went in to do their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and his sons; as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "This applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall come to do duty in the service of the tent of meeting. And from the age of fifty years they shall withdraw from the duty of the service and serve no more. Numbers 8:22-25 ESV

The Aaronic priests began at age 25, and they served the temple until age 50. Melchizedek remains a priest continually as far as the record is concerned, but Yeshua abides continually in reality.

Yeshua is superior to the Aaronic priests of old. His office and ordination are based not on his pedigree but on the dignity of his person.

who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. Hebrews 7:16 ESV

He is a priest based upon the worth of his eternal being.

See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! Hebrews 7:4 ESV

Speaking of Melchizedek, the author says, "*See how great this man was*" Why does he argue for the greatness of Melchizedek? He wants us to understand that though Abraham was a great man, Melchizedek was greater. Because Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, Melchizedek's priesthood must be greater than the priesthood which traces its descent from Abraham.

The word "see" is from the Greek word *theoreo* which is used of one who looks at a thing with interest and attention. It would be used of a general officially reviewing or inspecting an army. It speaks of a critical, discriminating inspection. They are commanded to "consider" Melchizedek because it is of the utmost importance that they and we understand his significance.

The readers are to consider how great Melchizedek was. We are not told this concerning any other man because it is not the custom of Scripture to set forth the greatness of man. Abraham recognized his greatness, and the readers are to recognize it also.

The text says, "Abraham the patriarch"—the word "patriarch" is the Greek word *patriarches* which comes from *patri* meaning "father" and *arches* meaning "first. Thus, Abraham is their first father. In Acts 7:8-9, the sons of Jacob are called patriarchs, and in Acts 2:29 David is called a patriarch. This term is used of no one else in the Tanakh or New Testament. David and Jacob's sons all sprang from Abraham, thus he was preeminently "the patriarch." This word comes last in the Greek for emphasis.

The great boast of the Jews was that they were descendants of Abraham. Naturally, he was the founder of the Jewish nation, and spiritually he is the father of all believers.

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, Romans 4:16 ESV

We find someone in their own scriptures, then, who is manifestly Abraham's superior. As great as Abraham was, Melchizedek was greater.

Verse 4 says, "*Abraham... gave a tenth of the spoils.*" The dedication of one tenth of the spoils of war to a deity was practiced among the Greeks and other nations. The word "spoils" is from the Greek word *akrothinion*, which means "the top of the heap" and was used of the choicest spoils of war. From these spoils an offering would be made to the gods as a thanksgiving for victory. Abraham gave a tenth of the very best to Melchizedek who was a priest of *El-Elion*, the Most High God.

Abraham, "the patriarch," paid tithes to Melchizedek, therefore, Melchizedek is greater.

So, let me ask you this: How long did the "type" of Melchizedekian priesthood last? The writer of Hebrews says:

For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. Hebrews 7:12 ESV

Because Abram is associated with the priesthood of Melchizedek, I see no indication of a change of this priesthood until the Law is given to Israel. I see the priests in Exodus 19 to be those of Melchizedek. Then when the Law was given, the priesthood changed.

I see a transition happening from Melchizedek to Aaron at the beginning of the Exodus. Fifty-three days after the first Passover the Mosaic Law was given on Pentecost. And the priesthood went from a universal priesthood to a national priesthood. I see the people from Adam to Moses under the priesthood of Melchizedek.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. Genesis 11:1 ESV

They were of one language and one nation under one priesthood. Then at Babel, because of their sin, the languages were divided, and the people separated into various nations.

So, the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Genesis 11:8 ESV

I don't believe that when Yahweh dispersed the people that all of them were put under other gods. I believe that Yahweh always has a remnant. And that remnant would have continued to worship Yahweh through the Melchizedekian priesthood. Melchizedek shows me that God was known to more than Abraham's family. Melchizedek gives us a glimpse of God's work in people outside of the Bible's story line.

We have further details about this disbursing in Deuteronomy.

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 ESV

When he divided mankind"—when did he do this? At the Tower of Babel. Yahweh in effect decided that the people of the world's nations were no longer going to be in relationship with him. He would begin anew. He would enter into covenant relationship with a new people that did not yet exist—Israel.

All the nations were placed under the authority of members of Yahweh's divine council. God apportioned or handed out the nations to the sons of God. We are told that God "allotted" the gods to those nations. God decreed, in the wake of Babel, that the other nations he had forsaken would have other gods besides himself to worship. The other nations were assigned these lesser gods as a judgment from, Yahweh, the Most High. At Babel, the people were divided and put under other gods. But those who didn't rebel against Yahweh may have continued to follow the priesthood of Melchizedek.

God was declaring that "If you don't want to obey me, I'm not interested in being your god—I'll match you up with some other god." Those disinherited would be in spiritual bondage to the corrupt sons of God. Yahweh disinherited the nations, and in the very next chapter of Genesis, he called Abram out of Mesopotamia. Yahweh took a man from the heart of the rebellion and made a new nation—Israel.

So, was that the end of the Melchizedekian priesthood? No! The Aaronic priesthood didn't start for another 430 years.

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.

Galatians 3:16-17 ESV

From Abraham's departure from Ur in Chaldea unto the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt was 430 years. From the calling of Abram to the entrance of the family of Jacob into Egypt was 110 years. Israel was in Egypt 220 years. I see them being under the Melchizedekian priesthood all this time because there was no change in priesthood until the Law was given and the Aaronic priesthood was established.

Other than the Melchizedekian priesthood, we have no priests mentioned in Scripture until Joseph was taken to Egypt about 100 years later.

And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On. So, Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. Genesis 41:45 ESV

In the context of ancient Egypt, "priest of On" refers to a person who held a religious position and served as a priest in the city of On, also known as Heliopolis. On was an important religious and cultural center in ancient Egypt. It was located near modern-day Cairo. The city was dedicated to the worship of the sun god Ra and housed important religious institutions and temples.

About a century after Babel, we see Egyptians, with their different language and culture, worshiping Ra. And they have priests of Ra. The next mention of priests is in Exodus 3.

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Exodus 3:1 ESV

The priest of Midian was a priest to the people of Midian. The Midianites were descended from Abraham, making them Semites. The apocrypha states that at one time Jethro was a religious advisor to Pharaoh. Eventually Jethro studied from the disciples of Shem. Shem was also known as Melchizedek. Jethro's conduct suggests that he was a priest of El Elyon.

Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people." And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. Exodus 18:10-12 ESV

Because we see no indication that there was ever an end to the Melchizedekian priesthood, I assume that it continued in effect until the Aaronic priesthood was instituted. The Aaronic priesthood began at the feast of Pentecost fifty-three days after the Exodus and ended at the feast of Pentecost in AD 30. What replaced the Aaronic priesthood? The Melchizedekian priesthood.

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:5-6 ESV

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Yeshua has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:19-20 ESV

The priesthood of Christ ended the Aaronic priesthood on Pentecost. Let's back up to the original Pentecost.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. Exodus 19:18-19 ESV

Moses then went up alone onto the mountain, and as he neared the top, a mighty voice announced the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:20-25; 20:1-21). No date is actually associated with the giving of the Decalogue in the Bible. Yet, ask any observant Israelite concerning this event and he will tell you that it is celebrated fifty days after the Feast of First Fruits.

So, a very notable historical event happened on the first Shavuot, and that was the giving of the Ten Commandments. Israel came to Mount Sinai on the third day of the third month (Exodus 19:1). Yahweh visited the people three days later (Exodus 19:10-17). Therefore, the Law was given by God on the sixth day of the third month of the biblical religious calendar, which is the month of Sivan (Sive-in). This day is exactly 50 days from the crossing of the Red Sea.

Shavuot is called the season of the giving of the Torah in Hebrew because this is the literal day that God revealed Himself to the people of Israel as they stood at the base of Mount Sinai. Shavuot at Mt. Sinai is sometimes considered the day on which Judaism was born. Rabbinic tradition says that the Torah was actually given on the sixth of Sivan, the Shabbat following the new moon of Sivan that year (which would make the new moon of Sivan a Monday [Shabbat 86b]).

From Adam to Moses, then, God's people were under the priesthood of Melchizedek. Then in the forty-year exodus period the priesthood shifted to Aaron. This priesthood continued until the birth of the church on Pentecost where it shifted to the everlasting priesthood of Melchizedek. So, between the two priesthoods of Melchizedek, type and anti-type, we have Israel and the Aaronic priesthood. Old Covenant Israel is, therefore, bracketed by two forty-year transition periods. There is a universal priesthood then a national priesthood and then an everlasting universal priesthood.

I said that at Pentecost in Acts 2, things changed. The believers received a new priesthood. Let me show you.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:1-4 ESV

The Scriptures declared that the annual feasts, including Pentecost, were given for the purpose of sacrifice.

"These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day, Leviticus 23:37 ESV

This was a priestly act. Thus, the observance of Pentecost itself was a participation in the priestly services. But in Acts 2 we do not find any mention of presenting typical offerings or animal sacrifices or anything else which was part of the typical priestly law. What we do see at the third hour is the Spirit coming down upon them [Note that the third and ninth hours were the times of sacrifice in ancient Israel. See Josephus' Antiquities 14.65; Apostolic Tradition 41:6; 11Q19]. Fire from heaven signaled the acceptance of certain sacrifices in the Old Covenant.

And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. Leviticus 9:24 ESV

But now we see that the acceptance of the believers on the day of Pentecost was indicated by the same symbol. Notice what Paul says.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Yeshua to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:15-16 ESV

"The priestly service"—is Paul a priest? Of what order? It couldn't be the Aaronic order because he was of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul saw himself a priest after Christ's likeness and in connection with Christ. Since Christ is High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, then that is the only priesthood in which Paul could have participated by co-operating with Christ in priestly activity. If Paul had been under the Levitical order, he would have been asking the death sentence upon himself for falsely claiming to be a priest. But Paul was not under the Levitical priesthood; he was in the antitypical

priesthood—the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. Instead of offering priestly rites of grain, drink, or animals, he offered the Gentiles as living sacrifices.

Paul was not the only one to refer to these clearly non-Levitical sacrifices; Peter similarly exhorted:

you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Yeshua the Christ. 1 Peter 2:5 ESV

Believers, we are a holy priesthood in the order of Melchizedek and are to be offering spiritual sacrifices to God. What is a spiritual sacrifice? The author of Hebrews says

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Hebrews 13:15-16 ESV

As part of the priesthood of Melchizedek, we offer the sacrifice of praise, and we do good. These are sacrifices that are pleasing to God.

All this language is that of sacrifice and priesthood, and yet no one can deny that it is being used in a way which is clearly different from the Aaronic order. If these New Testament writers had been under the Levitical system, they would have been breaking the law. But, since they were under the priesthood of Melchizedek, their priestly activity was to be done in connection with the heavenly temple and therefore was not centered around the temple in Jerusalem.

Christ is the anti-type of Melchizedek, and the priesthood of Christ is a universal priesthood. I think that this view destroys the Israel Only position. It was never just about Israel. Yahweh started with the nations and ended with the nations. I think it also damages the Covenant Creation view because the first 11 chapters are not about Israel; they are about the universal priesthood of Melchizedek who was a type of the eternal priesthood of Christ.

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