

I have a love/hate relationship with technology. I love tech gadgets, but I hate the price. That's one of the reasons I only have a tracfone and not a Blackberry! But I also hate the built in obsolescence with tech gadgets. All technology, almost by definition, is built to be obsolete within a few years. The first digital camera I bought was a massive one megapixel. I was so disappointed with it that I went back to a film camera for a few more years. The six megapixel camera we have now will soon be part of the fossil record—an obsolete dinosaur which will soon be about as popular as a Commodore 64 computer. If you blow your hard-earned money on an ipad or iphone or iwhatever, by the time you take it out of the box and charge the battery, it is well on its way toward becoming obsolete. Technology is planned obsolescence.

If you read your Bible carefully you will see that when the Law was introduced by Moses it was also a planned obsolescence. The Levitical priesthood initiated by Aaron and his sons was the prescribed way to atone for sins but it was never meant to be the final and complete method of atonement. We who live under the new covenant know this to be true because we have the words of Jesus and the entire New Testament, but do you think that everyone living under the old covenant knew that the Law was planned to be obsolete? There is a short and somewhat mysterious story in Genesis chapter fourteen that gives a hint, a foreshadowing that this would be happen. The events just prior to this passage describe a battle of four kings against five. The four kings win the battle and take his nephew Lot captive. Abraham assembles 318 of his men, defeats the four allied kings and brings back all of captives and all of the goods.

¹⁷ After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.”

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

²¹ The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”

²² *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath ²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ ²⁴ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”*

What makes this story fascinating is not so much the offer of the king of Sodom but the sudden appearance and disappearance of Melchizedek, the king of Salem. He was not one of the kings that Abraham helped out. Melchizedek comes out of nowhere and then we never see him again. Volumes have been written over the centuries about these few short verses. Many have thought that Melchizedek was an Old Testament appearance of Jesus. By the end I think you will see that though Melchizedek was not Jesus, he pointed the way to Jesus in a remarkable way. Because the book of Hebrews explains the Melchizedek story, we also need to read from chapter seven.

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, ² and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” ³ Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

⁴ *Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! ⁵ Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. ⁶ This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. ⁸ In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. ⁹ One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, ¹⁰ because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.*

OK, now do you know who Melchizedek was? ☺ We need to work through this carefully to come to a full understanding. We'll start with the basic question: who was Melchizedek? The author of Hebrews tells us what we already knew from Genesis—Melchizedek was king of Salem. We are also told the meaning of key words. Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” and king of Salem means “king of peace.” Salem is a variant of shalom, meaning peace. One could say the Melchizedek was “king of shalom.” Righteousness and peace—are these important words in the New Testament? A key verse would be Romans 5:1. *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. To be justified means to be “made righteous.”* Therefore, when we are made righteous we attain peace with God. This is foundational salvation language.

So far, so good, that is, until verse three. *Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.* From this verse, you can see why some people have thought Melchizedek was an OT appearance of Jesus. In order to understand this verse we need to look to the genealogies in Genesis. This time we will start with Abraham and move forward (figure 1). We should all know the order of the patriarchs—Abraham, then Isaac and then Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons. If you follow the line of

Judah you eventually get to King David and then King Jesus. If you follow the line of Levi you eventually get the Aaron, the brother of Moses, who started the Levitical priesthood. The Levitical priesthood is the prominent feature in the OT. The book of Leviticus and half the book of Exodus are exclusively about the Levitical priesthood. They describe every detail of the Tabernacle, the sacrificial system, the priestly garments, the altar, the Holy of Holies. We also see the Levitical priesthood throughout the rest of the OT. There was great neglect and abuse of the sacrificial system, but it was the foundation of the entire Old Testament. And one of the keys to the Levitical priesthood was to trace your genealogy to whom? If you could not trace your roots to Levi, if you didn't have incontrovertible evidence that you were a direct descendant of Levi, you could not become a priest, and anyone who tried would be put to death.

Some people, like Tony Baxter, do take great interest in their genealogy. As you probably know, Tony has found some long lost relatives through his genealogical research, which is very cool. He has worked so hard on it that he has traced his roots all the way back to Noah! Though some do, most people don't take genealogies all that seriously. But we know that the Bible takes them seriously. We have spent some time studying the importance of the genealogies in Genesis and you can see from this diagram, they are extremely important for the succession of priests. But Melchizedek does not have any genealogy. We don't know his father or mother. We don't know how many sons and daughters he bore. We can make some educated guesses, however. Since he lived in Canaan, he was probably a Canaanite, a descendant of Canaan and ultimately descended from Ham. But we are not told any of this. When the author of Hebrews says that Melchizedek is without genealogy he means that we do not know his genealogy. He was not an angel or a ghost or even Jesus. He was a human king who served as a priest of God Most High. But his genealogy was intentionally withheld to us so that he could be a type or foreshadowing of Jesus. As verse three puts it, *Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.*

Now I know what most of you are thinking—we do know Jesus' mother and father. In fact, we know his exact genealogy all the way back to David and Abraham and Noah and Adam. We all know that the OT goes to great lengths to trace the genealogy of Jesus, so how can the writer say that Jesus is "without genealogy?" Let me ask you a simple question? Does Jesus have a beginning or an end? Of course he does not. He is the eternal Son of God. In terms of his incarnation he did have a beginning. We know his biological mother and his adopted father. All of these things are absolutely crucial to his humanity. Because Jesus was 100% human he was able to function as our substitute on the cross. To save mankind he had to become a man. But Jesus was also 100% divine, the eternal Son of God and this is what the writer means when he says that Melchizedek was "like the Son of God." Jesus did not have a beginning or end and Melchizedek is presented as not having one either. Melchizedek is pointing straight at Christ, specifically at the priestly function of Christ.

In pointing to Christ, Melchizedek is greater than Abraham in two primary ways—he gave a blessing to Abraham and received a tithe from Abraham. Look back to verse five. *Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham.* Figure 1 illustrates that the eleven tribes of Israel all paid the tithe to the tribe of Levi because that was Levitical priesthood. Giving a tithe was a form of worship in gratitude for the atoning sacrifices carried

out by the priests. It is the same reason we give a tithe or more. Giving is a form of worship done out of gratitude to the Lord for our salvation. The Levitical priests also received a tithe as part of their payment for service.

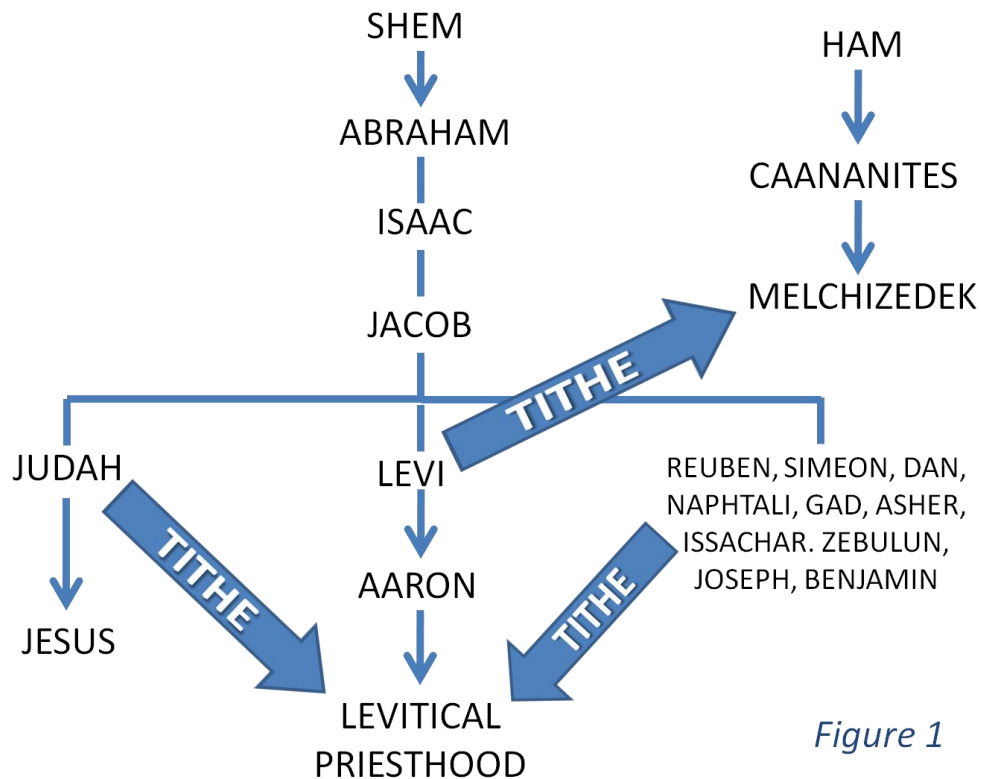


Figure 1

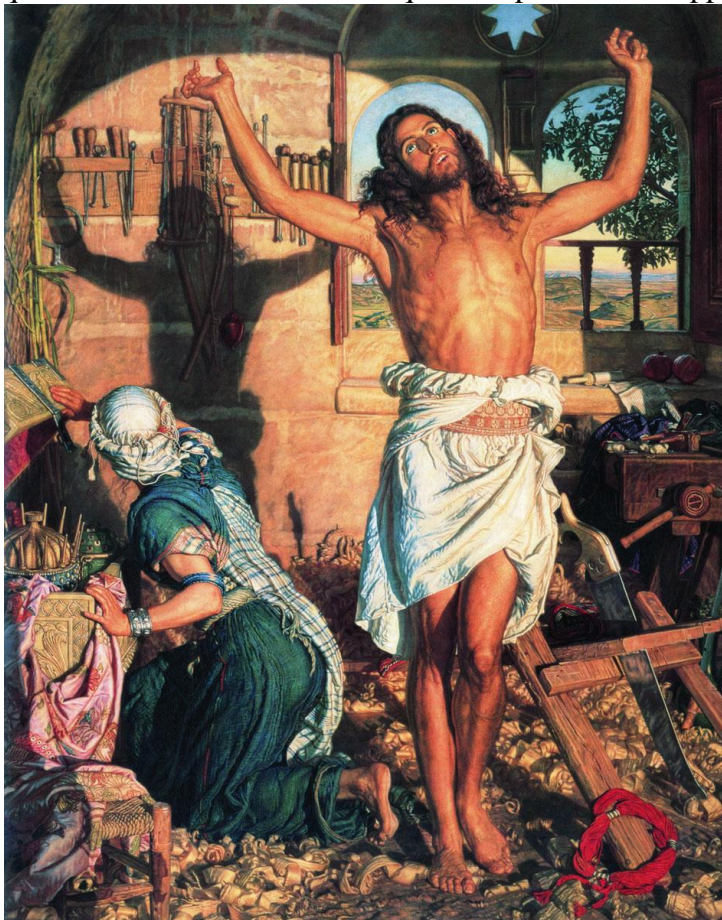
However, verse six introduces a major twist. *This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.* Melchizedek was paid a tithe by Abraham and in so doing, shows that his priesthood was greater than the entire Levitical priesthood. Verses and ten nine describe the genealogical descent. *One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.* Four thousand years ago, no one understood chromosomes and DNA replication, but they did know enough to be able to make the claim that “Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.” The Levitical priesthood always received the tithe, except in the case of Melchizedek, whose priesthood was greater than that of Abraham and Levi.

In case there was any doubt, verse seven drives the point home. *And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.* This is downright shocking to a Jewish reader or anyone who has carefully read the Old Testament. Abraham was the most prominent—we could say, greatest figure in all of Jewish history. In John chapter eight, the Jews questioned Jesus, “Are you greater than our father Abraham?” The implication was that no one was greater than the patriarch Abraham, who received the promises from God, yet here we see that “the lesser person was blessed by the greater.” Melchizedek was superior to Abraham because he was a foreshadowing of Jesus.

This takes on more clarity if we jump down to verse thirteen of Hebrews seven.

¹³ He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. ¹⁵ And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, ¹⁶ one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, which was not the priestly tribe. Jesus’ humanity was traced through his ancestry. This is vitally important, but his priestly function was not traced through a human ancestry. To drive home this point, the writer of Hebrews quoted from Psalm 110 four separate times—“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” Psalm 110 is the most quoted Psalm in the NT. Jesus quoted a portion of it applied it to himself in Matt 22.



Melchizedek was not Jesus, but he was the ideal foreshadowing of Jesus. We know that the law could not invalidate the promise to Abraham, neither could the Levitical priesthood surpass that of Melchizedek. I always want us to be able to see the gospel all throughout the Scriptures—not because I want to force the gospel into the OT where it isn’t present, but to draw out the most obvious and clear examples

It’s like this painting from William Hunt titled *The Shadow of Death*. Jesus, as a carpenter, is stretching in the rays of the sun. As he does so, his shadow falls on the wall in the image of the cross. His carpenter’s tools form the cross beam of his future instrument of death. His mother Mary was peering into a chest that contains gifts from the Magi and is probably started to see the shadow of the cross. So in this one painting, we look back on the birth of Jesus and look forward to the

death of Jesus. The window above his head forms a halo, which is a well known mark of Christian art depicting the deity of Christ.

Next, the writer of Hebrews makes explicit what is only implicit in Genesis—the perfect priestly work of the eternal Son of God.

²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able

to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶ *Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.* ²⁷ *Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*

I especially love verse 26—*Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.* If I were to ask you what your greatest need is, how might you answer? Our first reaction would be to fill in the blank with something material. I need a new car. I need a better job. I need to get that house project completed. We might even insert a spiritual need. I need more patience in my parenting. I need to talk with that person who I may have offended. I need to read my Bible more regularly.

These are all good things, but what you and I really need is a perfect high priest, *one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.* Sometimes we can't grasp the holiness of God, or else it is something by which we are constantly falling short. For all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. Yeah, we know. We feel this every day. We fall short all of the time. But do you see—the God who is holy, blameless and set apart from us, is the same one who *sacrificed for our sins once for all when he offered himself.* The holiness of Christ separates us from the Lord and is the reason we deserve to be eternally separate, but this holiness is also what we need most in life. Without his perfect holiness, he cannot be a perfect high priest.

Probably my favorite sections of Hebrews is 4:15-16.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶ *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Like most people, these truths move me because Jesus, my high priest, is able to sympathize with my weaknesses. This draws upon the humanity of Jesus and reveals the wonderful level of intimacy that we can have with the Lord. But what about verse sixteen—how is it that we are able to approach the throne of grace? The throne of grace is the holy of holies. It is the inner sanctum of the Lord that was forbidden to enter, except by the high priest once per year on the day of atonement. The only way we can approach the throne of grace is because our high priest is *holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.* Our great high priest was the perfect, once for all sacrifice because he was perfectly holy. His eternal Sonship and deity allowed him to function in this perfect, priestly role. But too often, we approach the throne of grace in order to get something. Of course this is true—we will receive grace and mercy—but ultimately this grace and mercy is Christ himself. We should not think of the throne of grace as a place to get something and then be on our merry way. The throne of grace is not a wayside on a journey to somewhere else, it is the destination! Jesus does not merely give mercy and grace, he is mercy and grace.

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