

Melchizedek

Melchizedek was a king and priest of God Most High who ruled over Salem (Genesis 14:18–20), a location probably identified later as Jerusalem. He encountered Abram after a military victory, presented him with bread and wine, blessed him, and received a tithe of Abram’s spoils in return (Genesis 14:18–20).

The biblical account of Melchizedek is remarkably sparse, yet his significance extends far beyond this single encounter. His name means “king of righteousness,” while Salem means “king of peace” (Hebrews 6:20–7:17). Both of these titles foreshadow and exemplify Christ’s character.

The text describes him as existing “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life,” making him resemble the Son of God (Hebrews 6:20–7:17). This description reflects the fact that the biblical records contains no genealogy, birth record, or death record for Melchizedek, which emphasizes the absence of information regarding his priestly credentials.

Melchizedek’s historical obscurity contrasts sharply with his theological importance. Though he possessed no legal genealogical right to collect tithes as a Levitical priest would, Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham as a voluntary gift, implying Abraham’s recognition of his personal greatness and superiority. This detail becomes crucial in New Testament interpretation: Abraham, the patriarch from whom the Levitical priesthood descended, gave tithes to someone outside that lineage and accepted his blessing (Hebrews 6:20–7:17), establishing Melchizedek’s superiority.

Psalm 110:4 declares that the Lord’s priest will serve “forever according to the order of Melchizedek,” and this prophecy is applied to Christ, who became High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:6–10; 6:20–7:17). Christ’s priesthood operates from an entirely different order that does not depend on the Levitical genealogy. Unlike the Levitical priesthood, Jesus Christ carries no temporal or genealogical limitations.

Regarding Melchizedek's identity, many divergent traditions exist. Some identified him as a Canaanite king of Jerusalem, while the Jewish rabbinical tradition held that Melchizedek was Shem, Noah's firstborn son. Shem's lifespan would have allowed him to meet Abraham and have some influence over his life.

Some interpreters speculated that he was an angel who belonged to an order in which there was not end to the ministry in which they were engaged. If Melchizedek was an angel, the phrase "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life" takes on a different meaning. It would infer that as an angel, he was appointed the priestly duties when he was created and remains a priest forever or without interruption. Hebrews 7:8, declares that Melchizedek was still living or lives perpetually. If he was an angelic being who reigned over Salem (Jerusalem) this does not elevate him to the level of the Son of God. He was a priest and Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the High Priest in an order which Melchizedek is simply a priest.

Hebrews 6:20 NIV84 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus Christ has become High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, who was both a king and a priest. Jesus Christ is King of kings and our eternal High Priest in heaven.

Regardless if Melchizedek was Shem, an angel or some other unidentified person, he entered into his priestly office without genealogy (he did not come from a priestly order, neither his father or mother were from a priestly line). Jesus Christ entered into His High Priestly office without a genealogical heritage and as our High Priest, He daily makes intercession for us before God continuously.

Much additional information can be gleaned from a study of Hebrews 5:6,10; Hebrews 6:20- Hebrews 7:17; also, Psalms 110:4; Genesis 14:18-20.