

MELCHIZEDEK

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Meaning of the name “Melchizedek” = “king of righteousness”—see *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* and Hebrews 7:2
- B. Melchizedek was king of Salem—see Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1-2. Salem = shortened version for Jerusalem—see Psalm 76:1-2: Notes: (1) We know from history that the tabernacle (ie., Temple) was in Jerusalem during the time that this particular Psalm is talking about (ie., defeat of Assyrians in about 701 B.C.), which was more than 200 years after King Solomon reigned (it was Solomon who built the Temple at Jerusalem); and (2) notice the poetic parallelism between Salem and Zion—we know that Zion was another name for Jerusalem, and since Salem is in the parallel position with regard to Zion, that it [Salem] too is the same as Zion and Jerusalem.
- C. Meaning of the name Salem = “peace”—see *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* and Hebrews 7:2; thus, Hebrews 7:2 also calls Melchizedek the “king of peace.”
- D. Melchizedek was also a priest, even a high priest—compare Genesis 14:18; Psalm 110:4 (a Psalm about the Messiah); Hebrews 5:6 (which quotes Psalm 110:4), 10:6:20; and 7:1, 11, 15, 17.
- E. The information above thus far shows us that Melchizedek was both a king and priest, which, of course, Christ is also—see Revelation 17:14; 19:16, etc. (King) and Hebrews (Priest)—see the entire book of Hebrews. Also, both were appointed as priests directly by God instead of them inheriting it as Levites did—see Hebrews 7:21. Indeed, the Old Testament priesthood, which was based on the Levites, was not originated until just after the Exodus from Egypt in 1445 B.C., approximately 425 years after Genesis says that Abraham paid tithes to the king-priest Melchizedek (see comments on Biblical chronology two paragraphs below).
- F. Hebrews 7:3 states that Melchizedek was without parents, a genealogy, beginning or end, and that he is a priest forever. Does that mean he was God? No. Verse 4 calls him a “man”. And even though Christ was a man too, He was also God—the God-Man—which Scripture never says about Melchizedek. Hebrews 7:3 simply means that there is no written record of Melchizedek’s parents or genealogy; therefore, he can be used as a type of Christ.

II. CLUES IN THE BIBLE EVIDENCE

- A. Even though there is no known record of who Melchizedek was, are there any clues which might suggest a known historical figure in Bible times? I think there are some good clues. First, Hebrews 7:1-2 refers to the story of Abraham paying the tithe (ie., tenth) of the spoils of a regional war in Palestine to Melchizedek. That event is originally told in Genesis 14 (see especially verses 18-20). According to the Genesis story, that event occurred sometime between Genesis 12 (when Abram first entered Canaan) and Genesis 16 (when Ishmael was conceived). My own Biblical chronology study (in unpublished notes), suggests that this means it took place sometime between 1875 B.C. (he 1st entered Canaan) and 1865 B.C. (Ishmael was conceived; 16:3). This chronological information considerably narrows our choices.
- B. Second, we know that his real name was not Melchizedek because that “name” is really a title, meaning “king of righteousness.” Thus, we should look for a real name, if possible, of someone who lived as an adult man in the early 19th century B.C. (see paragraph above—early part of 1800s B.C. would be in the high numbers of that century since B.C. time runs the opposite of what we’re used to in A.D. time), and who is known in ancient Biblical history as a righteous man.
- A. Third, Hebrews 7:4 makes a major point about Melchizedek being a greater man than Abraham. Notice the language of “how great this man was” (NKJV). Then the same text declares that Melchizedek was so great that “even the patriarch Abraham” gave him tithe. Notice the words “even” and “patriarch”. By using the word “patriarch” to further describe Abraham, the inspired author of Hebrews is laying it on thick; of course, the Jews viewed Abraham as their spiritual father anyway—see John 8:39 and Romans 4:1, etc.
- D. Fourth, the fact that Melchizedek was the earliest known king of Jerusalem (a righteous and peaceful city) demonstrates that he was the political and religious (ie., priest) leader of a group of ancient post-Flood people who still believed in the true God—at a time in which most of the known world had already apostatized from the true religion. And since ancient peoples tended to look to either the strongest man (among the violent and heathen) or to the most respected and wisest man (among God’s faithful people) for their king, this further points to someone who was then already far more famous for being a leader of God’s early post-Flood people than Abraham.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Given the above four (4) major clues, the only known ancient person among God's faithful people then who clearly fits all the evidence is Shem, the son of Noah through whom God eventually came as Messiah in the form of Jesus.
- B. Again, from my own study of Biblical chronology, Shem died in 1800 B.C. This means that he lived for 75 years after Abraham first entered Canaan—and then he died when Isaac was 50 years old (which was 10 years before Jacob and Esau were born). This was plenty of time to have been the king-priest to whom Abraham paid tithes back in 1875-1865 B.C.
- C. We also know that Shem lived a total of 600 years (Genesis 11:10-11), which would have made him 525-535 years old about the time that Abraham paid tithes to him as the high priest of God and king of Jerusalem. The information in Genesis 11 proves, not only that Shem would have been the oldest living man during that time period, but that he was highly unusual in that no one in the post-Flood era had ever lived to be that old. And since ancient people usually revered wise men of great age, Shem would have been the natural choice among God's faithful people to be their king (as well as a natural choice for God to have appointed him a high priest too).
- D. Furthermore, even secular historians know that the descendants of Shem—called Semites, or Semitic peoples—primarily settled in Mesopotamia (which is mostly in modern-day Iraq) and Canaan. Thus, Shem himself almost certainly did so also.
- E. One more intriguing piece of evidence is the meaning of the word “Shem” in the Hebrew language: it is related to a word carrying the idea of a definite and conspicuous position, and implies honor, authority, and character—see *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*.
- F. The fact that Melchizedek may be identified as Shem does not undo the book of Hebrews' comments about an unknown genealogy. The point here is that Melchizedek is never identified as Shem in Scripture; instead, Melchizedek is pictured as a kind of “mystery man”. Of course, there is no absolute proof that Melchizedek was Shem, but the possibility (ie., probability?) is intriguing.

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