

MYSTERIOUS MELCHIZEDEK

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Then after Abraham's 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; now Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High. And Melchizedek blessed Abraham and said,

'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;
And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.'

And Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all (that is, a tithe of his war spoils) (Genesis 14: 17-20).

Returning victoriously from battle after rescuing his nephew Lot from the four Mesopotamian kings, Abraham is met by a mysterious man who appears out of nowhere and disappears from the narrative just as quickly. Melchizedek is never encountered in person again --- *or is he?*

Melchizedek's significance is later explained in just two Bible passages. The first is in the prophetic oracle of **Psalm 110: 1ff**. There the LORD God promises to David's future descendant --- that is, to David's messianic lord --- the office of an everlasting priesthood, **according to the order of Melchizedek**.

The next mention of Melchizedek is in **Hebrews** where Jesus Christ himself is said to fulfill all that Melchizedek foreshadowed. More of these later references soon.

IS MELCHIZEDEK'S CAMEO A THEOPHANY?

The mystery surrounding the historical spectre of Melchizedek has spawned fertile imaginations into wondering whether Abraham encountered a theophany or, more precisely a christophany, when he met "mysterious Melchizedek".

So, we must ask: When Abraham received **bread and wine** from Melchizedek **a priest of the Most High God**, and when Abraham paid Melchizedek **a tenth of all** the plunder he had won in the battle that rescued Lot, did the patriarch actually meet "the pre-incarnate Christ" as some later theologians have speculated? Perhaps this explains, after all, why the Jews thought Jesus was implying that Abraham had seen him (**John 8:57**)!? ¹

Who could have imagined this brief cameo by Melchizedek in **Genesis 14: 17-20** would have led to such intense theological speculations millennia later? Was Melchizedek really "the Son of God" before being born of Mary millennia later?

This mystery intensifies when we come to the Book of **Hebrews** which says Melchizedek was **without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life** (Heb. 7: 1-3).

Now, there is no doubt that Scripture draws heavy comparisons between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ. But the question is, does Scripture make Melchizedek out to **be** Jesus the Son of God before his so-called incarnation? Is the type the anti-type himself, the shadow the substance? Does comparison equal identity? Before answering this specifically, let's briefly note the seven comparisons between Melchizedek and Jesus.

SEVEN SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MELCHIZEDEK AND CHRIST

¹ There is textual support for either, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" or, "You are not yet fifty years old, and Abraham has seen you" (John 8: 57)? We know that Melchizedek had an important place in Judaism of the First Century. The **Qumran** scroll labeled **11Q Melchizedek** portrays him as a heavenly deliverer of Israel and avenger against the enemies of God. Perhaps the Jews in their encounter with Jesus in **John 8** were familiar with this strain of thinking?

1. MELCHIZEDEK WAS BOTH A PRIEST & A KING... For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High ... (v.1a).

Melchizedek was first a king. The last part of his name *Zedek* turns out to be a Jebusite dynastic name. He was the king of Salem.²

We know this because centuries later when the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land, Joshua fought against the king of Jerusalem whose name was Adoni-zedek (*Joshua 10: 1*). (The name Adoni-zedek means “My lord is righteous”.) Thus, we see that Melchi-zedek’s name was a Jebusite dynastic name.

Evidently Melchizedek was a good king too, for his name means ‘King of Righteousness’. Because he was a good ruler, Melchizedek enjoyed it seems, a peaceful reign.

Melchizedek was also priest of God Most High, making him a priest-king. And it is these two characteristics which are applied to the Messiah.

2. MELCHIZEDEK AND JESUS SHARE SIMILAR NAMES AND TITLES.

Melchizedek is by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of peace (v. 2). These are the NT titles also given to Jesus. Do we therefore conclude that Melchizedek and Jesus are one and the same persons?

Just carry that line of reasoning to its logical conclusion. When God calls Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, the king of kings (*Dan. 2:37*) are we to conclude that because Jesus is called the King of kings that Nebuchadnezzar was also a christophany of the pre-incarnate Son of God? Or, just because the coming Messiah is prophesied to be called The Lord our righteousness that, the city of Jerusalem which is also called The Lord our righteousness must somehow be a person (*Jer. 23: 6; 33:16*)?

As a friend of mine said in a recent debate, “Same titles do not an identity make!”³

3. MELCHIZEDEK BLESSED ABRAHAM & HIS DESCENDANTS ... who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings blessed him (v.1b).

The Book of Hebrews goes into great detail to show how our High Priest Jesus blesses his people today.

4. MELCHIZEDEK RECEIVED TITHES FROM ABRAHAM... to whom also Abraham divided a tenth part of all (v.2).

By giving a tenth part of his war booty to Melchizedek, Abraham was recognizing the superiority of the one to whom he gave his tithes. The point the author of Hebrews makes is that, because Jesus functions as a priest in the order of Melchizedek, his priesthood is superior to and supersedes the subsequent Levitical priesthood that comes from Abraham’s descendants through the line of Levi.⁴

5. MELCHIZEDEK’S PRIESTHOOD WAS INDEPENDENT OF ANCESTRAL LINEAGE OR PEDIGREE ... without father, without mother, without genealogy (v. 3a).

When Melchizedek suddenly meets Abraham the text states only that he was priest of God Most High. There is no mention of his priestly lineage, or ‘credentials’.

² Salem is Jerusalem as per *Ps. 76: 2*.

³ Carlos Xavier in his debate *Does the Old Testament Teach the Trinity?* See www.thehumanjesus.org website.

⁴ This is not teaching Christians must necessarily pay tithes. Abraham’s tithe to Melchizedek was a one-off historical event that Abraham never repeated regularly thereafter. Also, Abraham did not pay his tithes from his regular income, but from the spoils of war! Abraham’s paying the tithe to Melchizedek is thus not a basis for teaching tithing today.

Later, to qualify to be a priest of the God of Israel, one had to prove his genealogy was from the family of Levi. No *bone fide* family tree to prove a man was of Levi meant automatic disqualification from serving as priest in Israel. ⁵

So, what do we make of the enigmatic statement that Melchizedek was **without father, without mother, without genealogy**? For reasons I shall soon show, this does not and cannot mean that Melchizedek was a superhuman (i.e. non-human) being.

What the text is saying, is that insofar as having any priestly genealogical record, the Scripture is silent. In other words, ancestry was not important for Melchizedek to serve God as His priest. Melchizedek's appointment as priest of the Most High God was independent of human connections or relations.

But what about the rest of the statement? After telling us Melchizedek was **without father, without mother, without genealogy**, we are told he had **neither beginning of days, nor end of life**. Surely, according to our modern and Western reading at least, this indicates Melchizedek had no beginning (no human birth) and that he never died?

This is a classic case in point where we must read the Bible in its own contextual and cultural setting otherwise we will run away with the wrong message. Don't forget the writer to the Hebrews is himself a Jewish Christian and it stands to reason he is going to use well-established lines of Jewish argumentation to make the point that Jesus has a superior priesthood to the Levites.

Anyone familiar with rabbinical discussions knows their classical default position is that, "if it's not in the text, it didn't happen". ⁶ The rabbis' hermeneutical principle was, "**what is not mentioned in the Torah does not exist**".

Our writer is thus arguing from what's written in the text, or more precisely, what's not written in the text! And the text does not record who Melchizedek's father was, or who his mother was, or what his genealogy was. Scripture is silent on these questions.

As a matter of interest, the Jewish rabbis said of Sarah, Abraham's wife, that she had no parents! ⁷ This is simply to say her parents' names are not recorded, not that Sarah had no father or mother!

So, when we read that Melchizedek had **neither beginning of days, nor end of life**, we are simply to understand there is *no record* of his birth or death. Historically he was born, and historically he did die, but we simply have *no record* of these events.

In case I be accused of stretching this line of argument just to prove that Melchizedek was not "the pre-incarnate Christ", allow me to cite just a few quotes from *trinitarian* scholars and sources. ⁸

The Expositor's Greek New Testament ... "**without father, without mother, without genealogy**," that is, he stands in Scripture alone, no mention is made of an illustrious father or mother from whom he could have inherited power and dignity, still less can his priestly office and service be ascribed to his belonging to a priestly family. It is by virtue of his own personality he is what he is; his office derives no sanction from priestly lineage or hereditary rights ... **having neither beginning of days, nor end of life**, i.e., again as he is represented in

⁵ When the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity, many claimed priestly pedigree from Levi, but those who could not prove with documentation their descendancy from Aaron were rejected (*Ezra 2: 61-63; Neh. 7: 63-65*).

⁶ Anyone today who is in the medical professions knows this principle. As a previous Advanced Care Ambulance Paramedic I know that if any case we were involved in went to the law courts, the only admissible evidence that carried any weight before the judge was what was written in our documentation from the time of the incident. We were constantly told, "if it's not written down, it didn't happen!"

⁷ The Jewish writer Philo, who was contemporary with Christ, also describes Sarah as "without mother" using the same word *ameter* here used of Melchizedek.

⁸ I mention these accredited sources as "trinitarian" because, of all people, trinitarians who do believe in the personal existence of "the pre-incarnate Christ" would be most keen to believe that Melchizedek was "the eternal Son of God"!

Scripture. No mention is made of his birth or death, of his inauguration to his office or of his retirement from it. (Underlining mine).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland General Editors under its entry on **Hebrews 7: 2b-3**) ... says the author draws on "the significance of what Genesis does not say ... he focuses on the silences of the Genesis text" (Italics emphasis original, underlining mine).

Ariel's Biblical Commentary: The Messianic Jewish Epistles, p. 97 ... " ... there is no record of the birth or the death of Melchizedek. Both events occurred, but there is no record of them ... As far as the biblical record is concerned, his priesthood was timeless; there is no record of it ending. (Underlining mine).

Professor William Barclay translates the verse thusly, **His father is never mentioned, nor his mother; nor is there any record of his descent; there is no mention of the beginning of his days, nor any of the end of his life ...**

Hebrews: Understanding the Bible Commentary Series by Donald A. Hagner sums up these comments,

The argument is rabbinic in character, drawing great significance from the silence of the text ... ⁹

As a matter of record however, Jesus does have a significant genealogy stretching all the way back to David, Abraham and Adam (**Matt. 1 and Lk. 2**)! And Jesus had a mother whose name we do know! But as far as his role in his high priesthood is concerned, such pedigree is not relevant or counted, except to prove he was not a Levite!

6. MELCHIZEDEK'S PRIESTHOOD WAS TIMELESS.

Our sixth comparison between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ concerns the timelessness of their respective ministries as priests of God. Because there is no biblical record of Melchizedek being succeeded by another priest in his office, we are told he **was made like unto the Son of God (v. 3b)**.

The Melchizedekian priesthood (as far as the Biblical text is concerned!) is timeless. We are not told when he began his office or when it ended. There was no fixed term. And we have no record (!) that any other priest succeeded him. And in this respect, Melchizedek **was made like unto the Son of God [in that] he abides a priest perpetually (v. 3)**.

Because there is no record of Melchizedek's death, and no successor, he therefore **remains a priest continually**.¹⁰

7. MELCHIZEDEK'S PRIESTHOOD WAS UNIVERSAL.

Being a Gentile priest of **God Most High** Melchizedek's service was not limited to any one nation. Whereas the Levites only served Israel, Melchizedek was not so limited. His priesthood was not national, but universal, and in this respect too, he **was made like unto the Son of God ... (v. 3b)**.

WHY THESE SEVEN COMPARISONS PROVE MELCHIZEDEK WAS NOT THE PRE-INCARNATE CHRIST HIMSELF.

So what is the point of these seven similarities, these seven comparisons, between Melchizedek and Christ? Do they prove the Jews listening to Jesus correctly understood him to be saying Abraham had actually seen him, in a pre-incarnate christophany as per **John 8: 57**?

Well, just from the case of pure logic this is ridiculous. To differ from somebody else proves I cannot be that other somebody! Difference in just one point proves distinction of identity. And before somebody objects by saying, "Aha! Greg, you are falling into the category of human reasoning and philosophy and not according to Scripture!" allow me to prove my contention from the Scriptures. But for the record, to be logical is not to be anti-biblical!

⁹ Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p 106

¹⁰ As far as the record goes! Remember, the Aaronic or Levitical priests could only serve between the ages of 25 to 50 as per **Numbers 8: 24-25**.

The writer to the Hebrews employs this very same reasoning when he says, **For this Melchizedek ... without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God ...** Observe carefully he does **not** say Melchizedek **was** the Son of God, but was **like** the Son of God!

To make his point he uses a unique word found nowhere else in the Greek NT. ¹¹ According to the *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “The verb *aphomoioo* 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 ... “ ¹²

And in this case we have not 1, nor 2, not even 3, but **6** similarities. To be like (similar to) somebody else means you cannot **be** that person! My younger brother is very much like me, but he is not me! **Likeness proves --- at one and the same time --- difference of identity!** If I may again quote the widely acclaimed *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, “[N]othing in the OT suggests Melchizedek historically had no parents, was not born, and did not die, and our author’s argument ... is rather an argument from literary silence, setting Melchizedek up as a literary model ... for the one who was to come, the Son of God ...” ¹³

PSALM 110:1, 4 DISTINGUISHES MELCHIZEDEK FROM MESSIAH

The observant reader will note that in verse **1** of **Psalm 110** the LORD addresses David’s future lord in the second person --- **The LORD says to my lord, “Sit at My right hand”** --- whereas in verse **4** the reference to Melchizedek is in the third person ... **The LORD has sworn, and will not change His mind, “Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4).** This prophetic psalm therefore *distinguishes* Melchizedek from the Messiah. ¹⁴

TO QUALIFY TO BE A PRIEST ONE HAS TO BE A HUMAN BEING

Furthermore, according to the Bible, one of the prerequisites to qualify for the office of priest is that the candidate had to be a man, that is, a human being, **For every priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God ... (Heb. 5:1).**

Indeed, are we not expressly told that Melchizedek was a man ... **Now consider how great **this man** was (Heb. 7: 4)?** Can’t get much clearer than that! Melchizedek was a man --- not an angel, not a heavenly figure, not the so-called “eternal Son”!

It ought to be evident that even under the trinitarian theory Jesus did not become a man until he was conceived by Mary through the agency of the Spirit of God. Trinitarians contend that before his incarnation Jesus was able to appear in the form of man, but he was not actually a human being in the OT dispensation.

And don’t forget the writer to the Hebrews has already laid down his foundational statement that, the Son of God did not speak anywhere in the OT ... **Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets in many and various portions, but in these last days He has spoken to us in a Son ... (Heb. 1: 1-2).**

¹¹ *Aphomoiomenos* ... is a *perf. pass. participle* literally translated as ‘being made like’ or ‘having been made similar to’. *The Greek Expositor's New Testament* renders it precisely by saying the particle *de* that attaches to this verbal participle means, **“but in this respect made like unto the son of God”** (Italic original). **“Such a comparison is decisive against attributing these characteristics to Melchizedek in a real sense. They belong to the portrait of him, which was so drawn that he was “made like” the Son of God --- that by the features absent as well as by the positive traits a figure should appear corresponding to the Son of God.”** (My underlining and bold emphases).

¹² Revised, G.W. Bromiley, Ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, Vol. 3, p 313.

¹³ Ibid, p 92. (My underlining). I have taken the liberty of omitting their unwarranted insertion of the word “eternal” here, to describe the Son of God. It’s not in the text where Jesus is called “the Son of God” --- as per the rest of the NT witness.

¹⁴ The translation **“according to the order of Melchizedek”** is quite unfortunate. It suggests a line of successive priests such as “The Order of Franciscan Monks”. Better to translate it as **“after the manner of”** or **“after the arrangement of”** which agrees far more admirably with the argument the writer to the Hebrews picks up later, when he states that Jesus’ priestly office does not require genealogical pedigree.

So, **the Son of God did not speak in the OT!** Only since Jesus Christ was brought into existence **in these last days** has God spoken to us in His Son. Jesus, the Son of God, never uttered a single syllable as God's messenger in the OT! That much is axiomatic for our author. However, Melchizedek as priest of God Most High spoke to Abraham saying, "**Blessed be the most High God Who has delivered your enemies into your hand**" (Gen. 14: 20)!

Now it may be objected, "But Greg, doesn't the verse literally read, that it was Melchizedek who was **made like unto the Son of God**. Doesn't this suggest that Melchizedek's priesthood was patterned after the original priesthood of the Son of God who existed before him? Just like the tabernacle was built after the pattern of the eternal and heavenly tabernacle as per **Hebrews 8: 5**, Melchizedek's priesthood would seem to be patterned after the pre-existing priesthood of the Son of God. Melchizedek was the copy of the original heavenly priesthood of the Son of God already existing in heaven!" ¹⁵

If you come at this from a trinitarian (or Arian) paradigm, this objection cannot be lightly dismissed! **Arthur Pink** for instance makes a big deal of it. He writes,

It is very striking to note that it is not the Son of God who was "assimilated to Melchizedek", but vice versa. In the order of *time* Christ subsisted before Melchizedek; in the order of *nature*, Melchizedek was a priest before Christ was. The priesthood of the Son of God, ordained and appointed by the Eternal Three, was the *original*, and Melchizedek's priesthood furnished the *copy*, and a copy given in advance is the same thing as the type. Melchizedek was "assimilated to the Son of God as a type." ¹⁶

So, we have to agree that the text does really say it was Melchizedek who was **made like the Son of God** --- and not *vice versa*! But one has to ask; Where does **Pink** get the idea that it is a question of, "**in the order of time Christ subsisted before Melchizedek**"? This is reading into the text what is not there ¹⁷

No, no. The writer to the Hebrews is saying Melchizedek was **made like the Son of God** with respect to his continuing priesthood --- not as to his personal pre-existence. **Just finish the sentence ... made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually!** The context concerns continuance of priesthood.

And when did the priesthood of Jesus the Son of God begin? Back in eternity past or at some point in time? Let the writer to the Hebrews answer himself: **But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12)**. The inspired answer is that ---
after his crucifixion,
after his resurrection,
after he entered the heavenly tabernacle to present his own blood in the Holiest of Holies,
after his exaltation to God's Right Hand --- **the man Messiah Jesus** received his priesthood!

THERE ARE NO 'SON OF GOD' VERSES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT LOCATING HIM ANYWHERE BUT ON EARTH!

In fact, every reference in the OT announcing the Son of God, located him *on earth in the future*. There are **no** Son of God passages in the OT that indicate he was in heaven prior to the birth of Jesus (e.g. **Psalm 2: 7; 2 Samuel 7: 12-14; Hosea 11:1**). ¹⁸ The Bible knows nothing of "the eternal Son of God", only a begotten Son of God, which by definition is a Son who had a personal beginning in time (**Luke 1:35**). Period!

Jesus --- by virtue of his resurrection to immortality and exaltation to the right Hand of God on High --- **now** has an everlasting priesthood. Melchizedek without father, or mother, or genealogical pedigree, or indeed even

¹⁵ For those wishing a fuller treatment of this theme go to the article on this site titled, *Jesus' Pre-existence - Literal or Ideal?*

¹⁶ Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI., Eight printing, 1975, p366

¹⁷ And did you notice Pink's unbiblical statement that Christ's priesthood was **ordained and appointed by the Eternal Three**? Did you ever read anywhere in Scripture about "the Eternal Three"?

¹⁸ Not to mention how the archangel Gabriel declares Mary's "holy child" comes into existence by a new act of pro-creation through the agency and power of the holy Spirit of God. He will be the "begotten" Son of God., i.e. he begins to be at his conception!

death as far as the record goes, is said to have a continuous priesthood. *In this regard* Melchizedek is **made like the Son of God**.¹⁹

THEOPHANIES WERE TRANSITORY!

Finally, here is the clincher as to why Melchizedek was a real human being, a man, and not a supernatural heavenly figure. A theophany or a so-called christophany was always temporary, and transitory. After delivering his message, or performing his action ... *POOF* ... the angel of the Lord would disappear from the physical scene. Suddenly he had appeared, suddenly he was gone. From all accounts it was rather eerie. And the person(s) visited were left in a state of awe and, sometimes fear to the point of thinking they would die.

A theophany never held any long-term, or permanent office, much less residency amongst men! Therefore, Melchizedek could not have been a christophany because he was the king of the city-state of Salem, making him a permanent resident!

CONCLUSION

Conclusion? We must read the Bible with Hebrew eyes, and not according to a Western-world mindset (I wrote a book about that trap!). Following this basic rule of hermeneutics will protect us from all sorts of wild speculations. In this case it will stop the theory that Melchizedek was Jesus Christ, the Son of God himself, dead in its tracks!

¹⁹ Which is to say, office and status are the context, not metaphysical matters about hypostasis (questions about essence of 'being').

