

Old Testament types of the Lord Melchizedek's Priesthood like Christ's

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Our subject today is how Melchizedek's priesthood is an Old Testament type or illustration of Christ's priesthood. We are first introduced to Melchizedek in Genesis chapter 14. This chapter is about conflict. It begins with a rebellion by the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, and their allies against Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, who they had served for twelve years. As a result, Chedorlaomer and his allies launched attacks on these states and defeated the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, who fled from the battle and lost all their goods and provisions. Lot, Abraham's nephew, who dwelt in Sodom, was taken captive by the victorious Chedorlaomer. Abraham was not involved in these conflicts, but when he heard his nephew was taken captive, he prepared a force of three hundred and eighteen trained men and set off to rescue Lot. At Dan, Abraham divided his small army. Then, in a night attack, similar to Gideon's famous victory in Judges, he routed the opposing forces and recovered the many enslaved people and their possessions, including Lot and his family.

The history of Lot is one of the saddest in the Old Testament. His life had so much promise, and he received many blessings, but the last we read of him is living in a cave (Genesis 19:30). We can trace the downward direction of his life through two critical decisions. The first was not his responsibility; the second was. He lived alongside the great man of faith, Abraham, his uncle. Abraham lived by faith in God. He was a pilgrim who built altars and walked with God. But when famine struck the land that God promised him, Abraham made the dangerous decision to move his family to Egypt and lived a lie. But God protected him and brought him back to the promised land, "to the place of the altar which he had made there at first" (Genesis 13:4), and his life before God prospered. But there were consequences to Abraham's decision to go down to Egypt. We often think that our choices are personal, but we should never forget that we rarely affect just ourselves in making them.

Abraham took Lot into Egypt, which profoundly affected his nephew. In chapter 13 of Genesis, Abraham was wealthy, and Lot shared his prosperity and became rich. But their success created tension among their herdsmen as they shared resources to feed their flocks. Abraham did not want strife between his brethren and invited Lot to choose which part of the land he wanted to move into, and whatever he decided, Abraham would go in the other direction. Abraham teaches us how important it is to solve difficulties between the people of God and to pursue peace. And, in doing so, to be willing to sacrifice one's own interest to benefit others. He also teaches us faith and humility. He had the authority and power to command his nephew to move elsewhere. Something he did with his family in later circumstances. It was a power he would later use to rescue Lot.

So, Lot was given an excellent opportunity for a new, exciting life of faith. What did he do? "Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar" (verse 10). He chose the place that reminded him of Egypt and pitched his tent toward Sodom. Soon he stopped living as a pilgrim and decided to live in that wicked city. When

Sodom was defeated and plundered, Abraham rescued Lot from the consequences of his choices and gave him a fresh opportunity to return to the life of faith he once knew.

Peter calls Lot 'righteous Lot' (2 Peter 2:7). Lot was a child of God. But he did not grasp the opportunity God gave him to live his life of faith in response to the God who blessed him. He did not pause to ask his godly uncle's advice or pray to God. Instead, like the prodigal, his heart was captured by a superficial view of the world. He made an instantaneous decision based on what he saw, leading to his ruin. God uses Lot's life to solemnly warn us of the spiritual, moral, and physical dangers of the world we live in, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15, KJV). God teaches us to carefully reflect on the critical decisions we make; to consider those we will take with us in the path we chose; to take time and wise counsel; above all to go into the presence of God to seek the wisdom that is from above (James 3:17) and to ensure we keep ourselves from idols (1 John 5:21). It was Lot's decision to live in Sodom. It endangered him, his whole family, and everything he possessed until Abraham rescued him. This gave Lot the opportunity for a fresh start and to return to a life of faith. But Lot returned to Sodom. He lived there until the city was destroyed, his wife perished, and as an old man, he would end his days in the most desolate and degrading circumstances. He is a vivid and powerful warning of a wasted life that began with so much promise.

C.H. Mackintosh makes the helpful point that Melchizedek appears between two conflicts in Abraham's life. The first conflict was straightforward. It was a battle to release those he loved and many others from slavery, and he responded immediately with faith and foresight. It is interesting to see Abraham's wisdom. Abraham had his army of trained men ready to protect, defend and recover all that he loved and simultaneously save the defenceless.

The second conflict was more subtle but had dangerous consequences. It was a meeting with the king of Sodom. But before the king of Sodom meets Abraham, Abraham is met by Melchizedek, king of Salem and the priest of God Most High. We must go to the Book of Hebrews for a fuller description of this great man. The writer of Hebrews describes him as "king of righteousness" and "king of peace" and "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God" (Hebrews 7:2-3). Melchizedek is a mysterious type of Christ, the "King of kings and Lord of lords" and also our High Priest in heaven, ever living to make intercession for us (Romans 8:34). Melchizedek suddenly appears then disappears from the Book of Genesis at a critical moment in the life of Abraham.

Melchizedek doesn't meet Abraham empty-handed but with bread and wine. It is the first time bread and wine are mentioned in the Bible. On the Passover night before the Lord went to the cross, He used bread and wine to illustrate His life given and His blood shed for us. In these simplest foods, we remember the most profound act of the love of God. As our Great High Priest, Christ feeds our souls through the word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Abraham must have been exhausted from chasing down the army of Chedorlaomer, the battle that followed and the return home. Melchizedek fed Abraham and then blessed him. We often find ourselves off guard after significant progress and victory on the pathway of faith. And we can be vulnerable to spiritual and moral attacks. As we have seen in Genesis 12, after Abraham built an altar to the Lord and his faith grew stronger, a famine occurred. And instead of learning about faith in God during the famine, as the Book of Ruth teaches us, he decided to go to Egypt. It was not a happy experience, and when he was protected and recovered by God, he returned back to the place where he had built his altar.

This time God intervenes through the ministry of Melchizedek in Abraham's life in advance of another spiritual danger he was about to face. Melchizedek refreshes the patriarch physically and emotionally and then spiritually blesses Abraham,

"And he blessed him 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"" (Genesis 14:19-20).

Abraham responds to Melchizedek by giving him a tithe or a tenth of the spoils of war. This demonstrates the greatness of Melchizedek's person. Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham prepared him to meet with the king of Sodom. The king of Sodom didn't appear as a roaring lion like the army of Chedorlaomer. Instead, he appeared as an angel of light in a cloak of self-sacrifice,

"Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself"" (v.21).

But Abraham's reference point was not on earth and its possessions of material wealth but in heaven linked by faith to the Living God. He takes the words of Melchizedek's blessing,

"But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'" (vv.21-23).

He made a clear line of separation between his walk of faith with God and the evil city the king of Sodom ruled over.

In John chapter 17, the Lord prayed to His Father for His people,

"But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (vv.13-18).

The Saviour continues this ministry of intercession in heaven. The Saviour who died on earth for us is the same Saviour who lives in heaven for us. And he gives us the power to live for him in a world which has rejected Christ.

After the record of Melchizedek's meeting Abraham in Genesis, we next read of him in Psalm 110. This is a Messianic Psalm which looks on to the reign of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. And it also refers to Christ's priestly glory.

"The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'" (v.4).

It is an extraordinary reference to a man who appears so briefly at the beginning of the Bible. Despite the long history of the Aaronic priesthood, which Israel was so familiar with, at the centre of the Bible in the Book of Psalms, we have a prophetic presentation of Melchizedek's priesthood illustrating Christ's priesthood. It is not until we come towards the end of the Scriptures that the writer of the Hebrews unfolds Melchizedek's person and priesthood in detail to present the glory of Christ's heavenly priesthood.

This presentation begins in Hebrews chapter 5. Every high priest from Aaron onwards was appointed to go into the presence of God on behalf of God's people and to come out of God's presence to minister to God's people. The High Priest headed a family of priests, and he was responsible for compassionately addressing the sins of the people of God and interceding for

them. Unfortunately, we see the failure of this priesthood during the lifetime of Christ on earth, particularly highlighted in the Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10,

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring in oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him" (vv.30-34).

Christ condemns the failure of the Aaronic priesthood and priestly tribe of Levi for their lack of compassion. They, above all other Jewish tribes, should have fulfilled the Law's requirement to love their neighbours as themselves. The Good Samaritan illustrates Christ's compassion demonstrated on earth and now in heaven as our Great High Priest.

Christ presents Himself as the despised Samaritan stranger in his parable of the Good Samaritan. In Hebrews 5:5, we learn Christ "did not glorify Himself to become High Priest." As the Son of God, He came into the world in all the lowliness and wonder of His peerless life to accomplish the work of Salvation by sacrificing Himself as the Lamb of God. "He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9). In consequence of this great work of redemption and in the power of His resurrection, He was "called by God as High Priest 'according to the order of Melchizedek'" (v.10). This was a theme the writer of Hebrews had much to say about but was concerned his hearers had become "dull of hearing" (v.11). Being dull or slow to hear indicates wanting to avoid effort in understanding God's word and being spiritually lazy. This attitude should not characterise the Christian. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we should be ready to have our minds, hearts, and eyes, opened (Luke 23:27,31-32). And like the writer of Psalm 119, we should be ready to have our eyes of faith opened to see "wondrous things from Your law" (Psalm 119:18).

The subject of Melchizedek priesthood is taken up again at the end of chapter 6. God promised Abraham, swearing by Himself, to bless the father of the faithful. This promise was fulfilled in Christ through His redemptive work and ascension back into heaven to become the heavenly High Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. This is the fourth time we get the expression, "according to the order of Melchizedek." It is presented in connection with our hope and future in the One who died for us and now lives for us in heaven,

"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:19-20).

The Aaronic High Priest served in the Holy place of the Tabernacle and Temple dressed in symbolic clothing. Two of the most striking features of the clothing are described in Exodus 28. First, Aaron had two onyx stones, one on each of his shoulders, engraved with the names of the sons of Israel. Aaron bore the names of the tribes of Israel before the Lord on his two shoulders. They were set in gold and illustration of the righteousness of God (vv. 9-14). Aaron also wore the breastplate of judgment. It was a tapestry of gold, blue, purple, scarlet thread, and fine woven linen. On it were set four rows of precious stones, each engraved with a name of a tribe of Israel.

"So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy place, as a memorial before the LORD continually. And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD. So Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually" (vv.29-30).

Although Melchizedek's priesthood superseded the Aaronic priesthood, the features of the Aaronic priesthood provide illustrations that help us to understand the character of Christ's heavenly priesthood. This is most clearly seen in Aaron serving in the presence of God with the names of the children of Israel upon his shoulders and over his heart. Jesus illustrates His power to save when He tells the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15,

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'" (vv.4-6).

In John 10, the Lord says,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (v.11).

And then of His power to save,

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (vv.17-18).

It is John alone who records the soldier piercing the Saviour's side in John 19,

"But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (v.34).

In the following chapter, John also records Jesus appearing in resurrection to His disciples and showing them His hands and His side,

"Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (vv.19-20).

It was from the side of Adam that God took a rib next to His heart to create Eve. Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 5 that "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (v.25). These themes of Christ's eternal power and love are central to His ministry as our Great High Priest.

Hebrews 7 unfolds Christ's High Priesthood ministry. It begins with reminding us of the description of Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18. There, he is described as the king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. As we have seen, he met Abraham as he returned from the victorious battle over the kings and the rescue of Lot. We also learned that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, indicating Melchizedek's greatness as "king of righteousness" and "king of peace." Both these

attributes relate to the Person of Christ demonstrated in His peerless life and sacrificial death, which met God's righteous requirements. In Psalm 85, we read,

"Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven" (vv.10-11).

Christ is our righteousness and the basis of our peace with God.

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

At the cross, mercy and truth met. The love of God was demonstrated through the righteousness of God, and peace was procured by Christ.

Melchizedek is described as "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." In other words, he represented the Eternal Son of God Jesus Christ and foreshadowed His continual priesthood (Hebrews 7:1-3). His greatness is further affirmed by his blessing of Abraham because "the lesser is blessed by the better" (v.7). The other key point is that Levi was a descendant of Abraham. So, Abraham's acknowledgement of the greatness of Melchizedek demonstrated his priesthood was pre-dated and superior to the Aaronic priesthood, which emerged from the tribe of Levi.

We are told to "consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils (v.4). Under the Law, the priestly tribe of Levi received tithes from the people, and they were descendants of Abraham. But Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises of God. The Jewish people could not imagine men greater than Abraham their father, or Moses who gave them the Law. But the principle of the lesser being blessed by the better (v.7) was indisputable. The writer highlights that not only did Abraham pay tithes to Melchizedek, but Levi, still to be born and who would later receive tithes, paid tithes through Abraham. Melchizedek illustrates and foretells Christ's great and perfect priesthood.

If the Levitical priesthood given under the law was perfect, then there was no need for a new priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek. Christ was of the tribe of Judah, which had no priestly responsibilities under the Law. But the Old Testament promised a new High Priesthood in the likeness of Melchizedek (Psalm 110). This High Priest would not be subject to death, corruption, or failure. Instead, he would fulfil His priestly ministry in the power and purity of an endless life (Hebrews 7:16). History records the collapse of the Levitical priesthood down the centuries culminating in the corrupt spiritual leadership which planned and executed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The law "made nothing complete" (v19). It only looked forward to what Christ, not man, would do. God brings in a better hope in the Person of His own Son, Jesus Christ. God himself establishes this eternal priesthood with an oath, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (v.21).

The Levitical priesthood was based on the law. Melchizedek's priesthood illustrates Christ's priesthood is based on the grace of God displayed in Christ. The Lord was from the tribe of Judah, the kingly tribe and not the priestly tribe of Levi. The Aaronic priesthood was an earthly time-limited priesthood. The Melchizedek priesthood superseded the Levitical which was subject to death. The Melchizedek priesthood was based on "the power of an endless life," Christ's life in heaven. Christ guarantees a better covenant than that founded on the Law. Aaron was the first of many high priests whose ministry ended in death. They were all men in need of Salvation themselves. But Christ has an unchangeable priesthood. He conquered death and lives for us in the power of an endless life. The Levitical priesthood could only cover, not take away, sins. It was always looking forward to the Salvation only Christ could provide. The Passover

Lambs prescribed in Exodus 12 awaited the day the Lamb of God would enter the world and be announced by John the Baptist. "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Christ alone could undertake the work of Salvation as the Book of Hebrews later explains,

"And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:11-14).

The Saviour who died for us now lives for us in the power of an endless life. He is "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25). Christ, our High Priest, is presented as "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens" (v.26). This is a progressive statement about His sinless life on earth, "holy, harmless and undefiled", His Resurrection, "separate from sinners", and His Ascension, "become higher than the heavens." His sacrifice was the one offering of Himself once and for all.

Now we stand in Christ, upheld by His power and love. We are metaphorically always upon His shoulders and over His heart. In glory, Christ undertakes the ministry of a faithful high priest. He lived, suffered, and died, in this world and feels what we experience on earth in heaven.

He demonstrated this in His words to Saul of Tarsus, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul's persecution of Christians on earth was felt by Christ in heaven. It was not only as a Saviour that Christ spoke to Saul but as a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Living in heaven for his people on earth. Paul had unknowingly witnessed this when Stephen said as he was stoned to death, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (Acts 7:56). He knew the presence of his High Priest in heaven. Years later, as an aged apostle, Paul would write of the same experience. "At my first defence no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (2 Timothy 4:16-17). Paul knew the closeness of his Great High Priest. Peter had the experience of knowing the Lord had prayed for him. "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32). So Peter encourages us to cast "all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). In John 17 we see and hear the Lord's priestly prayer for His people. It is a beautiful insight into His present heavenly priesthood.

The Lord is not the distant, cold, indifferent, uncompassionate priest and Levite who passed by on the other side in Luke 10. Instead, our High Priest refreshes, restores, blesses, and protects as Melchizedek did for Abraham. We are never unwelcome in His presence but encouraged to come boldly before our High Priest with faith, hope, and love in our hearts (Hebrews 10:19-25).

Our High Priest is Jesus, the Son of God. He is not a stranger to us but our Saviour, Lord, and Friend, who sympathises with our weaknesses and invites us to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Melchizedek's Priesthood, like Christ's. Talk number T1303.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.