

THE PRIESTLY MINISTRY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Gen. 14.17-24, Heb. 7.1-22

After Abram defeats the kings of the east and returns to Canaan, he is greeted by Melchizedek. This man emerges spontaneously and makes this brief but significant appearance.

We see Melchizedek's full significance through salvation history (Psalm 110.4, Hebrews 4.14-5.10, 6.13-8.13).

Melchizedek performs the offices of King & Priest

The name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness" (Hebrews 7.2). He is the king of Salem, meaning peace (Hebrews 7.2).

He brings bread and wine to Abram for refreshment (Genesis 14.18). Reading canonically, we find echoes in the Lord's Supper.

We also learn that Melchizedek is a priest (Genesis 14.18). In the Old Testament, God placed kings and priests in separate lanes. Melchizedek occupies both offices as a priestly king.

Melchizedek blesses Abram by speaking on behalf of God. He also pronounces blessing to God because of His working through Abram (Genesis 14.19-20). Melchizedek serves as a priestly mediator between Abram and God. He represents God to Abram and praises God on behalf of Abram.

Abram honors Melchizedek with a tithe, literally a "tenth" of his possessions (Genesis 14.20). This shows the fittingness of contributing to the ministry. We also see that Abram felt compelled to honor this man.

Melchizedek serves as a type for the Lord Jesus

Scripture is one story. It often works on a promise-fulfillment scheme. The Old Testament contains "images and shadows" that prefigure their "substance" in Christ (Calvin, Institutes 2.11.4). The life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ provide the hermeneutical key to understanding God's Word.

Another way of stating things is that the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.

B.B. Warfield spoke of the Old Testament as a richly furnished room dimly lit.

Melchizedek foreshadows the Levitical priesthood insofar as the Levites represented God before the people (performed Temple duties; received sacrifices) and represented the people before God (i.e. Leviticus 16, sprinkling blood on the Ark of the Covenant).

We encounter Melchizedek again in Psalm 110, a chapter widely cited in the New Testament. Here the Messiah (Israel's anticipated King) is approximated to the eternal priesthood of Melchizedek.

Christ is our great high priest

The book of Hebrews explicitly and extensively connects Melchizedek and Jesus (Hebrews 5.7-10; 7.15-17).

Christ is a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Jesus alone perfectly represents God to the people and, through His sacrificial death on the cross, becomes the righteousness of all who believe (Colossians 2.9, Philippians 2.6-11; 1 Corinthians 5.21; Ephesians 5.2).

As those who abide in the Great High Priest, we are charged corporately as a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2.9). As followers of Christ, we represent King Jesus to the world and give our bodies as living sacrifices as an act of worship to God (Romans 12.1-2).

Key Idea: As followers of our Great High Priest, we collectively occupy the priestly office.

Application Questions:

How does Psalm 110 understand the relationship between the Messiah and Melchizedek?

According to Hebrews 7, what are the differences between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood according to Melchizedek? In the same chapter, how is Melchizedek like God's Son?

What are the implications of the gathered church being a "holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2.9)?