



Conducted by
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MELCHIZEDEK. Heb. chs. 5:10 and 7:1-9.

Recently there was brought to my attention a subject which inevitably fascinates every Bible Class that studies the letter to the Hebrews. The very mention of the name '*Melchizedek*' is sufficient to awaken the flagging interest of any group of students, because he appears to be such a mysterious Old Testament figure.

I have a clear memory of discussions held in the Bible Class that I attended as a boy in my home-congregation many years ago, and I must say that when Melchizedek was studied those discussions generated a great deal of heat, but very little light.

Hebrews ch.7:3 invariably prompted such questions as,

How could he be 'without father or mother?' and,

What is the meaning of 'having neither beginning of days nor end of life?'

There was always more speculation than illumination, with the result that, as far as I was concerned, this man - if he was a man! - remained a mysterious and mystical figure.

Not that in this *our* Bible Class was any different from others. I suppose it was to be expected that we should encounter these difficulties, because for centuries Melchizedek has fascinated both Bible commentators and Bible students alike, and many and varied have been the theories advanced to explain his identity, and especially his origin, in the light of the statements made in that verse.

1. Such is the mystery that has always surrounded the name '*Melchizedek*' that, in the 3rd century A.D., a sect arose known as '*the Melchizedekians*', whose members believed that he was a '*Christophany*', that is, a pre-Christian manifestation of the Son of God Himself. Or, they said, he was the Holy Spirit in human form. Or, at the very least, they declared that he was an angelic being.

2. There is a theory, of Jewish origin from an even earlier period, which claims that Melchizedek was actually Shem, the son of Noah, who, having survived the flood, lived long enough to meet Abraham. I recall having read that at least one of the preachers of the early '*Restoration Movement*' held this view, but the notion seemed so ridiculous that I did not bother to record where I read it!

3. Yet again, there are other writers who have refused to accept that such a person as Melchizedek ever existed, claimed that he is an imaginary figure; an idealised, stylized character. But this view is impossible to sustain since the account of his meeting with Abraham is as factual as any other historical event recorded in the Bible.

What The Scriptures Reveal.

When we turn to the Word of God, we very quickly discover that, in the Old Testament scriptures there is not a great deal said about Melchizedek. He first appears, very briefly, in the days of Abraham in **Genesis 14**.

The second brief mention of him occurs 1000 years later in **Psalm 110:4**.

After this, we wait another 1000 years before he appears in the New Testament, in the two passages already mentioned, where most of what we learn about him is to be found.

'Melchizedek - King of Salem'

In **Genesis 14:18** we read that it was after Abraham had rescued his nephew Lot, that his meeting with Melchizedek occurred, and, in this verse, *'Malkiy Tzedeq'* is described as *'king of Salem'*, and *'priest of El Elyon'*, or, of *'God Most High.'*

This means that in this man were combined the offices of Priest and King - a fact which is of profound significance, as I hope we shall see.

His name, *'Malkiy Tzedeq'* means *'King of Right'* - or *'Righteous King'*, whilst the name of the city over which he reigned, *'Salem'*, is a form of *'shalom'*, which I think most people know, means *"peace"*. In later times this became the name of several towns or cities in Palestine, but it is interesting to notice that Salem is mentioned in the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, which date back to before 1400 BC, and, even before the time of Abraham, the city was known by that name.

Centuries later, in the days of Joshua, it was the city of the Jebusites which the Israelites were unable to capture (Josh, 15:63), and it is probable, because it was occupied and held by the Jebusites as their stronghold, until it was captured by King David several centuries later, (**2nd Sam.5:9**), that the city of Salem had acquired the name *'Salem of the Jebusites'* or *'Jebu-salem'*, which eventually became *'Jerusalem'*.

Certainly, the identification of *'Salem'* with *'Jeru-salem'* is established quite clearly in **Psalm 76:2**.

"In Judah God is known, his name is great in Israel. His abode has been established in 'Salem', his dwelling place in Zion."

Josephus, the Jewish historian, who lived in the 1st century AD, stated,

"The first founder of Jerusalem was a chief of the Canaanites, who, in our tongue is called "Righteous King"."

Thus, Melchizedek was King and Priest in the city which was later to become 'the City of David.'

'Melchizedek - 'Priest of El Elyon'

The fact that Melchizedek was both King and Priest surely reveals what a remarkable person he must have been. In an age of polytheism, here was a Canaanite king who knew the One True God - *'God Most High'*. or *'The Supreme God'*, and who served Him as priest.

In **Psalm 7:17** God, is described as *'Yahweh, the Most High.'*

Notice, also, that this is the first time the word "priest" (kohen), occurs in the Old Testament scriptures. From then on, it is used a massive 724 times, and it probably means *'one who mediates'*. When the New Testament scriptures describe Melchizedek as a priest, the word used is *'heireus'*, which means *'one who is holy and set apart for the service of God.'*

Furthermore, Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek's priesthood as being that of the God who had called him out of 'Ur of the Chaldeans', because,

i) He offered a tithe to Melchizedek. Later, according to the Mosaic Law, the people were required to recognize the position of the Priesthood by the giving of a tithe.

Here, Abraham, the federal head of Hebrew people and the Father of the nation, gave a tithe, not merely for himself, but for all his descendants - and this included the entire priestly tribe of Levi *and Aaron, its first High Priest.*

- ii) Abraham accepted bread and wine from Melchizedek,
- iii) And received a blessing from him.

This blessing of Abraham by Melchizedek is something that the Scriptures stress as very significant, pointing out that *'the lesser is blessed by the greater'* Heb.7:7. Or, as the R.S.V. renders the verse, *'the inferior is blessed by the superior.'* No wonder the inspired writer of the letter to the Hebrews exclaims, *"See how great he is!"* (7:4).

(To be concluded next month)

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THE "CHURCH" AND "WORSHIP"

The letter to the Ephesians outlines the "church" most clearly and gives us a picture of faithful obedient people who delight in doing everything that Jesus wants us to do and it also reveals the reason for this obedience. If we say that it does not matter how the "church" conducts itself, we demonstrate a lack of understanding in our relationship to Jesus. This relationship is revealed in this letter to the Ephesians.

Question: What is the foundation of the "church"?

Answer: The "rock" (Rom. 9:33, 1st. Cor. 10:4-5, 1st. Peter 2:7-8, Ps. 62:1-2).

Jesus himself said he would build his "church" upon the "rock" (the statement that Peter had just made - that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God - Matt. 16:16)

Rev. 21:9 "I will show you the bride; the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:2) the Holy city adorned as a bride prepared for her husband.

As we read through the Ephesian letter and see outlined all of the things pertaining to acceptable conduct for those who believe and who have obeyed, we finally come to a metaphorical outline of the relationship between Jesus and the "church".

HUSBAND AND WIFE

Ephs. chapter 5:22 *Wife and husband* are used as the example; with Christ being the head of the "church".

Picture if you will, a young bride and groom, with the groom so much in love with his bride that he would willingly give his life for her if necessary (and in the case of Jesus, that is exactly what he had to do, purchasing his bride (the church) with his own blood.) Now picture the bride who loves her husband so much that she will do anything and everything to please him and nothing pleases her more than when she can do his will in every little seemingly insignificant detail.

5:24 The "church" (the bride of Christ) submits to Christ joyfully and willingly, finding satisfaction and fulfilment in every act of submission.

5:26 Jesus, the bridegroom, made his bride Holy (set apart for service to God) cleansing her by washing with water (baptism) through the "Word" (the word of God, the sword of the Spirit ch. 6:17)

5:29 Christ cares for his bride (the "church") and feeds her and she is (we are) members of his body (Matt. 19:5-6) "one flesh"

5:29 No man ever hated his own flesh but feeds it and cares for it just as Christ does the "church"

5:32 I am talking about Christ and the "church"

Have you heard the saying "she worships the ground he walks on" in reference to a