

# Session 16 The King And Priest Before Aaron

*Before the Silence: A Study of Hebrews*

Session 16 | Hebrews 7:1-3

## The Priesthood Behind The Promise (Hebrews 7:1-3)

Session 15 ended with Jesus already within the veil, the forerunner and High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (**Hebrews 6:19–20**). Chapter 7 explains that priesthood. The discussion interrupted at 5:11 now resumes: the Hebrew hearers must understand why their hope rests securely in this Priest.

The writer begins with Abraham's encounter in **Genesis 14:18–20**, interprets Melchisedec's name and kingship, and describes his continuing priesthood. In this study's late pre-70 setting, the visible Temple and Aaronic priests remain familiar to the hearers. Their own Scriptures, however, already testify to a priesthood that existed before Aaron and did not depend upon his ancestry.

### The Encounter In Genesis 14:18–20

*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.*

*And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:*

*And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.*

## Hebrews 7:1 - King And Priest Of The Most High

*For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;*

### Exegesis

- **“For this Melchisedec”** takes up the name at 6:20. Verses 1–3 form a connected description whose concluding declaration is that he **“abideth a priest continually.”** The historical meeting introduces the priestly argument.
- Melchisedec holds both **kingship and priesthood**. His royal office concerns Salem; his priestly office concerns the Most High God. Under the later Mosaic arrangement, being a king would not by itself qualify someone to serve as priest.
- **“The most high God”** is the God Abraham worshipped. Genesis 14:22 joins this title with the LORD. Abraham's recognition of Melchisedec does not require him to honor an unrelated pagan deity.
- Abraham returns from rescuing Lot and recovering the captives and goods taken by the eastern coalition. Melchisedec meets the victor, brings bread and wine, and blesses him. His blessing credits God with delivering Abraham's enemies into his hand (**Genesis 14:20**).
- **“Blessed him”** becomes important in Hebrews 7:6–7: the priest blesses the patriarch who possesses God's promises. The encounter demonstrates Melchisedec's greatness even in relation to Abraham.

- The account moves from **provision**, to **blessing**, to **the tenth**. Melchizedek brings refreshment and speaks before the payment is mentioned. The stated explanation for Abraham's victory is God's deliverance.
- The surrounding scene also includes **the king of Sodom**. Abraham's interaction with the two kings distinguishes his recognition of God's priest from his refusal of Sodom's enrichment. His response is governed by allegiance to the Most High, possessor of heaven and earth.
- Genesis introduces the king-priest without explaining his ancestry or appointment. Hebrews will give extended attention to this brief account because Psalm 110 later attaches Melchizedek's name to God's promise of a priest for ever.

### Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Genesis 14:12–20** - Lot's capture leads to Abraham's pursuit, victory, and meeting with Melchizedek.
- **Genesis 14:22–24** - Abraham acknowledges the LORD as possessor of heaven and earth and refuses enrichment from Sodom's king.
- **Psalm 76:1–2** - Salem appears alongside Zion, supporting its identification with Jerusalem.
- **Zechariah 6:12–13** - The Branch will bear glory and be a priest upon His throne, joining royal and priestly expectations.

### Text And Translation Notes

- **“Melchisedec”** is the KJV New Testament spelling; **“Melchizedek”** is its Old Testament spelling. Both refer to the same figure.
- **“Slaughter”** describes the defeat of the kings. The statement does not separately identify the fate of every ruler or combatant.

### What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not make every king eligible for priestly service.
- It does not identify the bread and wine as an instituted sacrament. Hebrews builds its argument upon the priest, blessing, tenth, and continuing life.

## Hebrews 7:2 - Righteousness, Peace, And Abraham's Tenth

*To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;*

### Exegesis

- **“To whom also Abraham gave”** identifies Abraham as the giver and Melchisedec as the recipient. The great patriarch acknowledges the significance of the priest who blesses him.
- **“A tenth part of all”** belongs to the battle and recovery described in Genesis 14. Hebrews 7:4 calls it a tenth of the **“spoils.”** The passage does not describe a recurring payment from Abraham's lifetime earnings.
- The writer interprets the name as **“King of righteousness”** and the title connected with Salem as **“King of peace.”** These meanings are supplied by Hebrews itself and fit the Messiah's righteous, peaceful reign.
- **“First ... after that also”** orders the explanation: first the name, then the title associated with Salem. The words do not independently establish a timetable of separate kingdom stages.
- The tenth follows the blessing in Genesis 14:19–20. The sequence fits acknowledgment and thanksgiving; no bargain is recorded in which Abraham purchases the blessing. His giving to God's priest stands beside his refusal to let Sodom's

king claim to have made him rich.

### Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Genesis 14:18–20** - Supplies the titles, blessing, and tenth that Hebrews interprets.
- **Isaiah 9:6–7** - The Prince of Peace rules David's kingdom with judgment and justice.
- **Isaiah 32:17** - The work of righteousness produces peace, joining the two ideas in Israel's promised restoration.

### Text And Translation Notes

- **“By interpretation”** introduces the explanation of a name. The writer is not quoting another speech Melchisedec delivered to Abraham.
- Versions that insert **“spoils”** in verse 2 make the connection with verse 4 explicit. The word is not separately present in verse 2's Greek. The explanation may fit the context while still being an addition to the wording of this verse.

### What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not establish a present tithing doctrine. Historical description does not itself prescribe a giving rule for the Body of Christ.
- It does not explain why precisely ten percent was selected or record Melchisedec demanding a payment.

## Who Is Melchizedek: A Jewish View

Jewish sources offer several interpretations of this encounter. The traditions below provide possible settings for the welcome, blessing, and tenth; they come from different periods and schools of interpretation. Alongside them, the biblical narrative supplies a case for an earthly priest-king. Distinguish that textual argument from the traditional identifications.

### Shem And The Welcome After Victory

- **The prominent rabbinic identification is Shem, Noah's son.** Rashi reports this interpretation, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan inserts it into its expanded rendering of Genesis 14:18. The Hebrew/KJV genealogy allows Shem's lifespan to overlap Abraham's. If this identification is followed, Abraham meets an ancestral priest who links him to the world before Babel. (Rashi, Genesis 14:18:1; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Genesis 14:18.)
- **Rashi explains the bread and wine as refreshment for weary soldiers.** Under the Shem identification, the welcome also shows that he holds no resentment for Abraham's killing some of his descendants. Elam, whose king led the invading coalition, belongs to Shem's line in Genesis 10:22. The priest's welcome thus transcends family loyalties. (Rashi, Genesis 14:18:2.)
- **Josephus describes a generous welcome and thanksgiving.** Melchisedec supplies Abraham's army, praises the victor, blesses God for the victory, and accepts the tenth. His

retelling emphasizes the actions of a hospitable priest-king without identifying him as Shem. (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.10.2, §181.)

- **The priestly office explains the recipient of the tenth.** Rashi grounds Abraham's giving in Melchisedec's priesthood; Ramban explains that Abraham honors God by giving to His recognized priest. Within the Shem tradition, respect for an ancestor could accompany this recognition. (Rashi, Genesis 14:20:2; Ramban, Genesis 14:18:2.)

### The Case For An Earthly King And Priest

- **Genesis introduces a territorial ruler.** “Melchizedek king of Salem” follows the chapter's pattern of naming kings and their locations. Armies, captives, recovered goods, hospitality, and meetings between rulers give the passage an earthly setting. His priesthood distinguishes him, but Genesis does not explicitly identify him as a divine appearance. An earthly priest-king is a natural reading of the narrative.
- **His priesthood implies worship beyond Abraham's household.** He already serves the Most High when Abraham meets him; the account does not describe Abraham converting or appointing him. A recognized priest who blesses and receives a tenth suggests some established religious practice. Genesis supplies no details about a temple, priestly staff, or the beliefs of Salem's entire population.

- **Abimelech recognizes God's activity.** God warns him directly, and he later acknowledges God's presence with Abraham (**Genesis 20:3–8; 21:22–23**). This supports knowledge of God outside the covenant household, although Abimelech is not called a priest.
- **Laban knows the LORD's name but retains other gods.** He recognizes the LORD's direction and blessing (**Genesis 24:31, 50; 30:27**), yet his household possesses images he calls his gods (**31:19, 30**). He illustrates knowledge mixed with idolatry, not faithful priestly worship. He also belongs to Abraham's extended family.
- **Jethro provides the strongest priestly parallel.** The priest of Midian blesses the LORD, brings sacrifices, and shares a meal before God with Aaron and the elders (**Exodus 3:1; 18:8–12**). His declaration "Now I know" cautions against assuming all his previous worship was faithful. Midian descends from Abraham through Keturah (**Genesis 25:1–2**), so the example concerns worship outside Israel, not necessarily outside Abraham's descendants.
- **The argument supports a reading without settling the identity.** The earthly setting and these comparisons make a human priest serving the true God understandable. A Christophany can occur in ordinary surroundings, however, and Hebrews 7:3 adds extraordinary language. The earthly reading understands that language through Genesis' presentation without a recorded genealogy or death; "made like unto the Son of God" then describes correspondence between distinct persons. Both readings deserve examination.

#### Shinar, Babel, And A Possible Significance Of The Blessing

- **Genesis establishes the geographical connection.** Amraphel rules Shinar (14:1), the land associated with Nimrod's kingdom and the tower of Babel (10:8–10; 11:2–9). Abraham's victory includes the defeat of a ruler from that land. Chedorlaomer of Elam remains the named overlord to whom the five kings had been subject (14:4).

- **The Talmud identifies Amraphel with Nimrod.** It connects this ruler with rebellion against God and the tradition that he ordered Abraham into a fiery furnace. The furnace account is a Jewish tradition rather than an episode narrated in Genesis. (Babylonian Talmud, *Eruvin* 53a:7.)
- **A possible synthesis:** if Melchisedec is Shem and Amraphel is Nimrod, the ancestral priest welcomes Abraham after victory over the rebel associated with Babel. His blessing could celebrate God's vindication of Abraham, while the tenth acknowledges God's supremacy. The identities come from recorded traditions; this proposed motive for the meeting is a hypothetical drawn from combining them.

#### A Heavenly Melchizedek At Qumran

- The Dead Sea Scroll called **11QMelchizedek (11Q13)** presents a heavenly figure associated with end-time deliverance and judgment in a jubilee setting. He delivers the righteous from Belial. This is a different portrait from the earthly host in Josephus or the ancestral Shem in later rabbinic interpretation.
- The scroll demonstrates the variety of Jewish interest in Melchizedek. It does not establish that Genesis' king was Jesus or that Hebrews borrowed its argument from this writing. Hebrews must be followed through the Scriptures it actually uses. (*Dictionary of Early Judaism*, discussion of Melchizedek and 11Q13, pp. 931–932.)

#### The Priestly Connection In Jewish Interpretation

- *Nedarim* 32b reasons that Melchisedec put Abraham's blessing before God's and consequently lost the transmission of priesthood to Abraham's line. It also reads Psalm 110 in connection with that transfer. Hebrews develops a different argument: Abraham's receipt of blessing and payment of the tenth establish Melchisedec's superiority, and Psalm 110 announces Jesus' enduring priesthood. (Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 32b:6–8; Hebrews 7:4–7, 17.)

## Hebrews 7:3 - A Priest Continually

*Without father; without mother; without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.*

#### Exegesis

- The subject is still **Melchisedec**. The writer describes his parentage, genealogy, days, life, resemblance to the Son, and continuing priesthood. The wording deserves attention before any explanation is supplied.
- The **Christophany reading**, given serious weight in this study, understands the description personally: Melchisedec is a manifestation of Christ before His incarnation. Having neither beginning of days nor end of life, together with continuing priesthood, provides the strongest support for this reading.
- The principal **typological reading** understands the descrip-

tion through Genesis' presentation: Melchisedec appears without a recorded genealogy, birth, death, or successor. His scriptural portrait corresponds to the Son's truly enduring priesthood. On this reading, the absence of those records serves the comparison.

- **"Made like unto the Son of God"** presents the Son as the standard of resemblance. This is the principal challenge to identifying the two directly. The Christophany reading takes the likeness as the form of His earlier manifestation; the typological reading sees a distinction between the historical figure and the Son.
- **"Abideth a priest continually"** brings the description to its conclusion. The writer directs attention to a priesthood characterized by continuance, preparing the contrast with the mortal priests who must be succeeded by others. The debate over identity should not obscure this central declaration.

### Closely Relevant Cross-References

- **Genesis 14:18–20** - Records the encounter without a genealogy or death notice for Melchizedek.
- **Psalms 110:4** - God's oath announces a priest for ever after Melchizedek's order.
- **Hebrews 1:10–12** - The Son's permanence is already established: creation changes, but He remains.
- **Luke 1:31–35** - Jesus' real birth from Mary must remain distinct from His manifestation before His incarnation.

### Text And Translation Notes

- **"Without descent"** translates *agenealogētos*, without genealogy. It does not mean without descendants.
- **"Made like"** translates *aphōmoiōmenos*, a perfect passive participle expressing an established resemblance: "having been made like." The grammar by itself does not settle the identity question. (Bible Hub, *Greek Text Analysis*, Hebrews 7:3; Strong's G871.)
- **"No record of"** is not an explicit expression in the Greek. The NLT introduces the idea of an absent record concerning parentage, making the typological interpretation explicit. The KJV leaves the interpretive question more visible. (Compare NLT and KJV, Hebrews 7:3.)

### Theological Insights: A Priesthood Outside Aaron's Line

- **Ezra 2:61–63** concerns qualification within the Aaronic

**order.** Claimants unable to establish their genealogy were excluded from the restored priesthood. Melchisedec lived before Aaron and was not applying for an exception to those later requirements. His recognized priesthood establishes that Aaronic descent is not the only basis on which God can authorize priestly service.

- **The precedent matters for Jesus.** Readers accepting Genesis already recognize a genuine priest outside Levi's line. Psalm 110 then provides God's oath for the other order. Jesus' descent from Judah does not invalidate His priesthood; His appointment rests upon the authority Scripture supplies (**Hebrews 7:11–17**).
- **Unrecorded ancestry is not the same as an identity unknown to every Jewish interpreter.** The Shem tradition supplies a definite ancestry and lifespan. It therefore requires reading verse 3 through the presentation of Melchisedec in Genesis 14. His priesthood still precedes Aaron under that interpretation.

### What The Passage Does Not Say

- It does not explicitly name Melchisedec as Jesus or identify him as Shem. Those conclusions require interpretation.
- It does not deny Jesus' human mother, Davidic descent, or actual incarnation.
- It does not make a man's unexplained ancestry sufficient to authorize priesthood. God's appointment remains decisive.

## From Melchisedec To The Sworn Priest

*The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

**Psalm 110:4** supplies the bridge between the Genesis encounter and Jesus' appointment. Genesis establishes that Melchizedek served as priest; the Psalm announces a priest for ever after his order. Hebrews does not leave the reader with an intriguing figure from Abraham's history. It shows why that history matters for the Messiah whom the hearers are called to trust.

- **A recognized precedent:** Abraham acknowledges Melchizedek, and Scripture calls him God's priest. Priesthood therefore cannot be defined as though Aaron's line were

its only possible expression in all history.

- **A divine promise:** the LORD's oath in Psalm 110 goes beyond the record of Abraham's meeting. It authorizes the enduring priesthood Hebrews identifies with Jesus. The basis for accepting Jesus is God's appointment, not an informal exception to a genealogical rule.
- **A continuing argument:** verses 4–10 will develop the greatness displayed by the tenth and blessing; verses 11–17 will explain the significance of another priest arising outside Levi. The first three verses introduce the person, titles, and continuance on which that explanation rests.

## Teaching Summary

**One-sentence summary:** Melchisedec's royal titles, blessing of Abraham, receipt of the tenth, and continuing priesthood pre-

pare the Hebrew hearers to understand Jesus' divinely appointed priesthood beyond Aaron's hereditary order.