

## Melchizedek Background

### Commentary for November 17, 2010 – The Issues and Sources

I have been asked to resolve contradictions in Dr. Martin's writings regarding Melchizedek. While I will not resolve these issues in this Commentary, I will attempt to clarify and explain them in the January 2011 article. In this Commentary I will cover the scriptures that mention this very intriguing individual.

### **Biblical Sources about Melchizedek**

The primary biblical sources regarding Melchizedek are found in only three places in the Bible: in Genesis 14:17–24, Psalm 110, and in the Book of Hebrews, primarily in chapter 7, with passing mention of Melchizedek in Hebrews 5:5, 10, and 6:20. Starting in Genesis:

**“And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest [Hebrew: *cohen*] 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 has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him tithes of all.”**

• **Genesis 14:18–20**

Note that Melchizedek is named without identifying who he was, as if the audience (listeners and readers) of Moses' writings were already familiar with Melchizedek. Indeed, it is a general principal of biblical study that when a character is introduced without explanation and identification of who he or she is, it is likely that the original audience knew that information already. He was a priest of the Most High God. In fact, the very common Hebrew term, *cohen*, used more than 650 times in the Old Testament, is used for the first time in Genesis 14:18, referring to Melchizedek as a non-Levitical priest.<sup>1</sup> Then there is Psalm 110.

**“YHWH said unto my Lord [Adonay], ‘Sit you at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.**

**YHWH shall send the rod of your strength out of Zion: rule you in the midst of your enemies. Your people *shall be* willing in the day of your power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: you have the dew of your youth.**

**YHWH has sworn, and will not repent, You [Adonay] are a priest for ever [for *olam*, for the eon] after the order of Melchizedek.’**

**The Lord [Adonay] at your [YHWH's] right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his [YHWH's<sup>2</sup>] wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.”**

• **Psalm 110:1–7**

<sup>1</sup> Melchizedek is mentioned as a priest in the time of Abram (whose name was later changed to Abraham) 4 generations before Levi was born to Abram's grandson Jacob.

<sup>2</sup> This is likely referring to **“The day of YHWH's wrath”** (Zephaniah 1:18).

Psalm 110 clearly is referencing the passage in Genesis. Like Genesis 14:17–24, reading Psalm 110 and particularly verse 4, this Psalm of David does not explain who Melchizedek was or where he came from. However, it is clear (like in Genesis 14:17–24) that Melchizedek was a priest of God after whom an order of priests was named. Again, because this priesthood is not after the order of Levi but it is after the order of Melchizedek, he is not an Israelite, in other words he is not a Levitical priest. It is strange indeed to have this stated in a Davidic Psalm.

Hebrews chapter 7 makes it clear that the “Adonay” or Lord in Psalm 110 refers to Christ, but it does not identify who Melchizedek is — or does it? Read all the passages and you will be well versed when we consider the evidence in the January 2011 article.

### **Who Was Melchizedek?**

Here is a list of candidates from various scholars of who Melchizedek was, but there are two general classifications<sup>3</sup>

- (1) A supernatural, non-physical being
  - a. Jesus, before He came in the flesh
  - b. An unnamed Son of God (one of the *beni ha-Elohim*), the Logos
  - c. An angel, archangel, or a cherub
  - d. Specifically, the angel of the Lord
- (2) A man, a son of Adam
  - a. Usually Shem, the son of Noah<sup>4</sup> (or even Enoch)
  - b. Certainly a non-Hebrew (a Gentile) who was both king and priest<sup>5</sup>

Those are the only possibilities. Melchizedek was both the king of Salem and a priest (Genesis 14:18). It is generally accepted that Salem was an early name for Jerusalem.

### **Is a Solution Possible?**

With this background information we can better examine the biblical evidence to identify Melchizedek. Though there is a great deal of extrabiblical opinion on whom Melchizedek was, the scriptural evidence gives us the most important information. In the course of his decades of research Dr. Martin changed his mind several times on this subject, wherever the best information led him.

So, who was Melchizedek? This sometimes frustrating question might not be answered until our resurrection to spiritual life. In the meantime we should examine all data openly.

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<sup>3</sup> We westerners love to classify and catalogue and categorize things. Biblical classifications are frequently quite different than the way we might classify and group things as similar.

<sup>4</sup> This is the theory of the Jewish rabbis.

<sup>5</sup> A priest/king combination of offices was not uncommon in ancient times, even down to the Middle Ages. Remember also that Abram was the only Hebrew at the time of his encounter with Melchizedek.