

School of the Word
Hebrews
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HEBREWS 7:1-10

Sequence

- ▶ Hebrews 7:1-10
- ▶ Reading and reactions
- ▶ The place in the letter
- ▶ Melchizedek?
- ▶ Commentary
- ▶ Conversation

Reading and reactions

Heb 7:1 Now this ***Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him.*** 2 To him also ***Abraham apportioned a tithe of everything.*** His name first means king of righteousness, then ***king of Salem***, that is, king of peace. 3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, he has neither beginning of days nor end of life but is like the son of God, and he remains a priest for all time.

4 But see how great he must be, if Abraham the patriarch gave him a tithe of his plunder. 5 And those of the sons of Levi who receive the priestly office have authorisation according to the law to collect a tithe from the people, that is, from their fellow countrymen, although they too are descendants of Abraham.

6 But Melchizedek who does not share their ancestry collected a tithe from Abraham and blessed the one who possessed the promise. 7 Now without dispute the inferior is blessed by the superior, 8 and in one case tithes are received by mortal men, while in the other by him who is affirmed to be alive. 9 And it could be said that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid a tithe through Abraham. 10 For he was still in his ancestor ***Abraham's*** loins when ***Melchizedek met him.***

Place in the letter

- ▶ The priesthood of Melchizedek as the anchor of the soul (7:1–28)
- ▶ Melchizedek and Abraham (7:1–10)
 - He abides a priest forever (7:1–3)
 - The greatness of Melchizedek (7:4–10)
- ▶ A new order of priesthood (7:11–28)

Melchizedek in the Hebrew Bible

- ▶ In the Hebrew Bible: the name appears twice
- ▶ **Melchizedek** king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (Now he was the priest of the Most High God.) (Gen 14:18)
- ▶ The Lord makes this promise on oath and will not revoke it: “You are an eternal priest after the pattern of **Melchizedek.**” (Ps 110:4)

Gen 14:17 After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet Abram in the Valley of Shaveh (known as the King's Valley). 18 Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (Now he was the priest of the Most High God.) 19 He blessed Abram, saying,

“Blessed be Abram by the Most High God,
 Creator of heaven and earth.

20 Worthy of praise is the Most High God,

who delivered your enemies into your hand.”
Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything.

NB the author ignores the potential of the bread and wine!

Melchizedek in Jewish Tradition

Gen 14:18 Then Melchizedek, the king of Jerusalem, brought out bread and wine, and he was serving before God Most High. 19 Then he blessed him and said, “Blessed is Abram by God Most High, whose possession is the heavens and the earth, 20 and blessed is God Most High who has handed over your enemies into your hand.” Then he gave him a tenth of everything. (Targum Onqelos)

Melchizedek in Philo of Alexandria

Alleg 3:79 Moreover, God made Melchisedek, the king of peace, that is of Salem, for that is the interpretation of this name, “his own high priest,” without having previously mentioned any particular action of his, but merely because he had made him a king, and a lover of peace, and especially worthy of his priesthood. For he is called a just king, and a king is the opposite of a tyrant, because the one is the interpreter of law, and the other of lawlessness.

Melchizedek in the Dead Sea Scrolls

- ▶ The most significant mention is in 11QMelchizedek (= 11Q13) - on the next page.
 - Melchizedek is presented a divine being, with a significant role at the end of time.
- ▶ 1Q401 “The Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice”
 - This text is very fragmentary; it does describe Melchizedek has a priest in the assembly of God.

11Q13 2:1 [...] 2 [...] And concerning what Scripture says, “In [this] year of jubilee [you shall return, every one of you, to your property]” (Leviticus 25:13) and what is also written, “And this] 3 is the [ma]nner of [the remission:] every creditor shall remit the claim that is held [against a neighbour, not exacting it of a neighbour who is a member of the community, because God’s] remission [has been proclaimed]” (Deuteronomy 15:2):] 4 [the interpretation] is that it applies [to the L]ast Days and concerns the captives, just as [Isaiah said: “**To proclaim the jubilee to the captives**” (Isaiah 61:1)... .] and 5 whose teachers have been hidden and kept secr[et], even from the inheritance of **Melchizedek**, f[or ...] and they are the inherit[ance of Melchize]dek, **who 6 will return them to what is rightfully theirs. He will proclaim to them the jubilee, thereby releasing th[em from the debt of a]ll their sins.** This word [will thus co]me 7 in the first week of the jubilee period that follows ni[ne j]ubilee periods. Then the “D[ay of Aton]ement” shall follow at the e[nd of] the tenth [ju]bilee period, 8 when he shall atone for all the Sons of [Light] and the peopl[e who are pre]destined to **Mel[chi]zedek**. [...] upo[n the]m [...] For 9 this is the time decreed for “the year of **Melchiz[edek]’s favour**” (Isaiah 61:2, modified) and for [his] hos[ts, together] with the holy ones of God, for a kingdom of judgment, just as it is written 10 concerning him in the Songs of David, “A godlike being has taken his place in the coun[cil of God;] in the midst of the divine beings he holds judgment” (Psalm 82:1). Scripture also s[ays] about him, “Over [it] 11 take your seat in the highest heaven; a divine being will judge the peoples” (Psalm 7:7–8). Concerning what scripture s[ays], “How long will y[ou] judge unjustly, and sh[ow] partiality to the wick[e]d? [S]el[ah]” (Psalm 82:2),] 12 the interpretation applies to Belial and the spirits predestined to him, becau[se all of them have rebe]lled, turn[ing] from God’s precepts [and so becoming utterly wicked.]

13 Therefore Melchizedek will thoroughly prosecute the vengeance required by Go[d’s] statutes. [In that day he will de]liv[er them from the power] of Belial, and from the power of all the sp[irits predestined to him.] 14 Allied with him will be all the [“righteous] divine

beings” (Isaiah 61:3). [Th]is is that wh[ich ... al]l the divine beings. This vi[sitation] 15 is the Day of [Salvation] that He has decreed [... through Isai]ah the prophet [concerning all the captives,] inasmuch as Scripture sa[ys, “How] beautiful 16 upon the mountains are the fee[t of] the messeng[er] who [an]nounces peace, who brings [good] news, [who announces salvat]ion, who [sa]ys to Zion, ‘Your [di]vine being [reigns’ ” (Isaiah 52:7).] 17 This scripture’s interpretation: “the mountains” [are] the prophet[s,] they w[ho were sent to proclaim God’s truth and to] proph[esy] to all I[srael.] 18 And “the messenger” is the Anointed of the Spir[it,] of whom Dan[iel] spoke, [“After the sixty-two weeks, an Anointed One shall be cut off” (Dan. 9:26). The “messenger who brings] 19 good news, who announ[ces salvation”] is the one of whom it is wri[tt]en, [“to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, the day of vengeance of our God;] 20 to comfo[rt all who mourn” (Isaiah 61:2). This scripture’s interpretation:] he is to inst[r]uct them about all the periods of history for eter[nity ... and in the statutes of] 21 [the] truth. [...] 22 [... dominion] that passes from Belial and ret[urns to the Sons of Light ...] 23 [...] by the judgment of God, just as it is written concerning him, [“who says to Zi]on ‘Your divine being reigns’ ” (Isaiah 52:7). [“Zi]on” is 24 [the congregation of all the sons of righteousness, who] uphold the covenant and turn from walking [in the way] of the people. “Your di[vi]ne being” is 25 [**Melchizedek, who will deliv[er them from the po]wer of Belial. Concerning what Scripture says, “Then you shall have the trumpet [sounded loud in] all the land [of ...” (Leviticus 25:9, modified).]**

4Q401 f1_2:1 A text belonging to the Instructor. The so[ng accompanying the sacrifice on the fourth Sabbath, sung on] the twenty-[fifth] of [the first mo]nth. 2 Praise the Go[d of ...] 3 [...] who stand before [...] 4 the king[dom of ...] with all the ch[iefs of ...] 5 the King of the god[like beings ...] 6 [....]

4Q401 f11:1 [...] priest[s ...] 2 [... G]od of knowledge and [...] 3 [... **Melchi]zedek, priest in the assemb[ly of God]**

4Q401 f14i:2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 -- 6 --. 7 wonderfully to praise Your glory [among the wise divine beings, extolling] Your kingdom among the utterly holy. 8 They are honoured in all the camps of the godlike beings and fe[ared by those who dir]ect human affairs, wondrous.

4Q401 f22:1 [...] holy ones of [...] 2 [...] they filled their hands[...] 3 [...

Melc]hizedek[....]

Hebrews 7:1-3

- ▶ Goal: a likeness between Melchizedek and Jesus
- ▶ Vv. 1-3 = a selective paraphrase of Gen 14:7-10 from the Septuagint.
- ▶ Gezerah shawah: the occurrence of a word in one passage can be used to interpret it in another.
- ▶ In Genesis, Melchizedek gets no genealogical introduction — he simply appears.
- ▶ Melek = King
- ▶ Zedek = Righteousness
- ▶ In reality: an allegorical reading
- ▶ Salem: originally *Jerusalem*, hence a name for the city.
- ▶ Salem is read to mean shalom (peace).
- ▶ Righteousness and peace are marks of the Messianic era: Is 9:6-9; 32:17; Mic 5:5; Zech 9:10.
- ▶ No mention of his birth or death (**apatōr amētōr agenealogētos**)
- ▶ Beginning: (archē); end (telos)
- ▶ For all time: eis to diēnekes (very elegant Greek) - then used of Jesus’ priesthood (10:34; 12:27 and 13:14).

Hebrews 7:4-6

- ▶ Third comparison after the angels (1:4-2:9) and Moses (3:1-5).
- ▶ Abraham was also great, but Melchizedek is evidently greater.
- ▶ Technically: a *synkrisis*.
- ▶ While apparently about Melchizedek and Abraham, it is really about two kinds of priesthood.
- ▶ The author supposes the audience to know minimum about the OT priesthood.
- ▶ (i) Moses and Aaron belong to the tribe of Levi.
- ▶ (ii) The Levites may tithe the people
- ▶ Hebrews has simplified a complex, sometimes contradictory, tradition.
- ▶ Taking or being offered the tithe indicates Melchizedek is a priest.
- ▶ Of course, Melchizedek is not a descendant of Abraham (and even less so of Moses!).
- ▶ Melchizedek does a priestly act: he blesses.

Hebrews 7:7-10

- ▶ The one who gives the blessing is superior...but not always (!). See 2 Sam 14:22, 1 Kings 1:47 and Job 31:20.
- ▶ Mortal = Levites; by dying they lost their priesthood, which passed to the next generation.
- ▶ Because his death is not registered, Melchizedek is taken to be alive.
- ▶ Affirmed = lit. witnessed, a very important concept in Hebrews.
- ▶ Alive: *both* Melchizedek *and* Jesus.
- ▶ V. 10, the author knows he is stretching a point (he takes the harm out of it with “and it could be said”...).

Conversation