

The Long and Winding Road Abraham

If one picks up a Bible, the very first writings are five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The books of Genesis through Deuteronomy are five, yet they form a whole. They became five by virtue of needing to be put on scrolls, and scrolls could only be so long before they became unwieldy.

So, while there are five “books,” scholars are quick to assign them an appropriate name as a single entity. That name in Hebrew is “Torah” or “Law.” Another name scholars give the books is the “Pentateuch,” a word in Greek meaning “five books.”

The books center on Moses. Not surprisingly, they are often called, “the five books of Moses,” although Moses couldn’t have written them in their entirety. (For example, they contain the story of Moses’ death.) They relate the story of God using Moses to bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness, and to the cusp of the “Promised Land.” This storyline consumes four of the five books (Exodus through Deuteronomy).

The book of Genesis (from the Greek word denoting an “origin” or “beginning”) serves as the set up and prelude that makes sense of the rest of the Moses storyline. It is in Genesis that one learns who the Israelites were. They are the offspring of a man named Abraham through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. It is also in Genesis that one learns what the “Promised Land” is. It is land that God promised Abraham would be his and his descendants. Genesis also explains how the Israelites initially wound up in Egypt in need of freedom.

In the book of origins, the storyline of Abraham is seminal, and it flows through the story of Moses, through all of Israel’s history, straight into the pages of the New Testament. Consider a story about Jesus recounted in the eighth chapter of John’s gospel.

Jesus was explaining to certain Jews how important it was to abide “in Jesus,” and those Jews were perplexed at his meaning. Jesus explained that if they knew the truth (Jesus), then the truth would set them free.

Those Jews responded that they were automatically free, because they were children of Abraham. Evidently, it didn’t occur to them that the Israelites in bondage in Egypt during the days of Moses were also children of Abraham, yet they desperately needed freeing!

Jesus harkened back to that story with his reference to being a liberator, but the bondage from which Jesus would liberate was more than simply that of release from political tyranny. Jesus was going to release people from a bondage more severe. He was going to release people from the bondage set up by the original story in Genesis, the sinning of

Adam and Eve and the curses and results from that sin. Jesus was explaining that he was the promised Messiah would bring liberation from all that sin entailed. Jesus was the door into the true Promised Land that God had in place since the very beginning.

Those engaging Jesus didn't follow what he meant. Jesus emphasized his point by explaining that he was speaking of God the Father's deliverance through Jesus. The Jews then replied that Abraham was their father, but Jesus challenged that and went back to their genealogy before Abraham. Abraham was not the first human. He had ancestry too. Their real and ultimate father was found before Abraham.

Once Adam and Eve had followed the instructions of the serpent, their lives reflected that choice. In a true sense, those challenging Jesus were no longer the spirit-filled people God had made, but were a creation of Satan. Satan's work altered their state and they became, in that way, children of Satan, rebellious in nature and living in sin.

This incensed those Jews and they called Jesus names and accused Jesus of being under Satan's control ("you are a Samaritan and you have a demon!" Jn. 8:48). Jesus countered that he was nothing of the sort. Jesus was liberation from death, liberation from the sentence of Adam and Eve's rebellion.

The Jews replied that Jesus was clearly deluded, because everyone dies, even Abraham and the prophets. Jesus explained that he was something beyond even Abraham. Abraham had rejoiced at seeing the day of Jesus the Redeemer.

Your father Abraham exulted in seeing my day. He saw it and it gave him joy! (Jn. 8:56).

At this, the response was incredulous. In reply, the point was made that Jesus wasn't even fifty years old. It wasn't possible for him to have seen Abraham from thousands of years earlier. Jesus replied, "Before the genesis of Abraham, there was the 'I AM'" (Jn. 8:58).

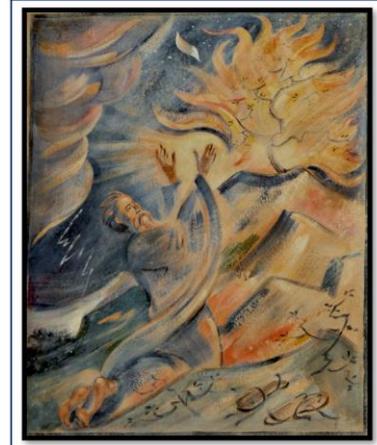
The Jews hearing this picked up stones to kill Jesus. They believed he had violated one of the most important commandments. For reasons I give below, they thought Jesus had taken the name of God in vain.

But Jesus did not take the name of God in vain. Rather Jesus was laying claim to the most important role spoken of in the Old Testament. Jesus was claiming to be the fulfillment of the long-awaited prophecy of Genesis and beyond. To best understand this and the storyline of Jesus and Abraham, one needs to go back through the pages of time, and unpack certain historical events in the books of Moses. A good place to start is with Moses, then the storyline can go back further to Abraham.

Moses and the Burning Bush

When Moses was on the run from pharaoh and the Egyptian powers, before he returned to Egypt on God's mission to lead the Hebrews out of slavery, Moses had a holy encounter with God on Mount Sinai in the wilderness.

The scene is dramatic. Moses sees a bush that is on fire, but isn't burning! Moses gets nearer to investigate and a voice comes from the bush calling him by name and telling him to come no further, but to take off his sandals because he is on holy ground. The voice then identifies himself. "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6).



God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am (Ex. 3:4)

During the dialogue, God makes it clear that he is charging Moses to be the point person in bringing the Hebrews out of their Egyptian slavery. Moses is reticent, and tries to get out of the assignment, but God is persistent. In the midst of the dialogue, Moses tells God that the Israelites will want to know God's name. Of course, living for four hundred years in Egypt, the Israelites for generations had heard of over a hundred Egyptians gods, all with expressive names. For example, the god of war "Anhur" had a name that indicated one who "leads back the distant one." The goddess of the sky, "Nut," had a name that referenced the sky. Egyptian gods had names that expressed their natures and their roles on earth.

God replies to Moses, but not by giving himself a limited name like just another Egyptian god. God tells Moses,

Say this to the people of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations (Ex. 3:15).

The Hebrew is very important here. The word our translators put as "LORD," using all capital letters, but in a smaller font for the last three, is a special Hebrew word/name. In Hebrew, it has the letters we would pronounce as yod, hey, vav, and hey (read from right to left - יהוה). We would transliterate that into the Roman/English letters YHWH.

This is the right "name" for the God of Abraham, for when God was explaining his promise to Abraham, God said,

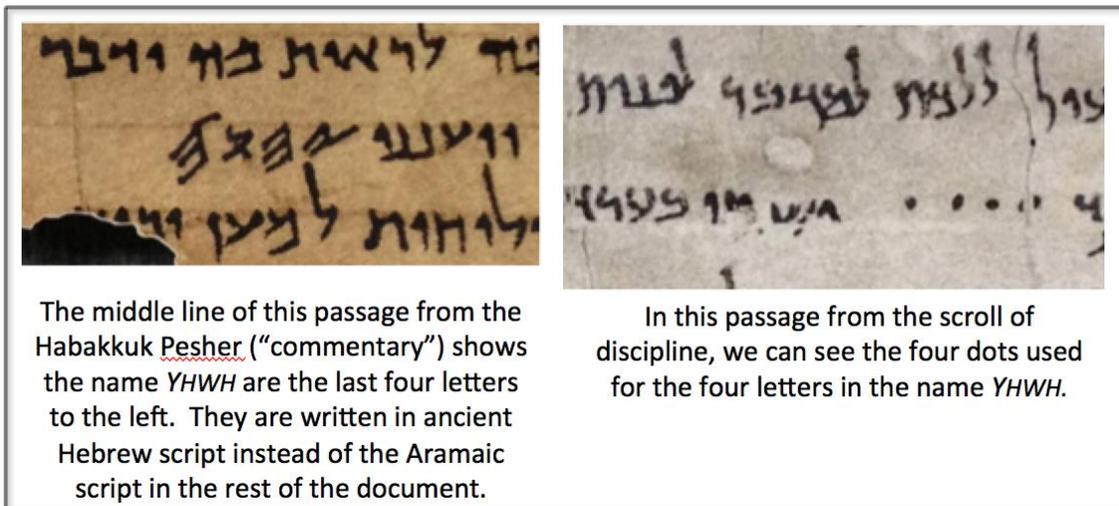
And he said to him, “I am the LORD [יהוה] or YHWH] who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess (Gen. 15:7).

God gives insight into the meaning of this name in the comment to Moses just preceding his instruction set out above. God explained in Exodus 3:14, “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” This is God. He isn’t limited to the sun, the moon, the sky, or any other element or idea like one of the well over 100 Egyptian gods. God simply is. Now and for all time.

God’s name was a holy name, just as God’s appearance in the burning bush was so holy that Moses could only get so close, and even then, had to take off his sandals. God would later give the commandment,

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain (Ex. 20:7).

As a result, Jews at the time of Jesus were very careful in how they handled God’s name. God’s name was not to be spoken or pronounced, lest one be taking it in vain. Even in writing the name, sometimes it was substituted by four dots. Other times an ancient Hebrew script would be used for the name of God, while the rest of the document was written in a contemporary script. One readily sees this inspecting Dead Sea scrolls that were written in the time of Christ.



Even today, many practicing Jews are scrupulous in avoiding saying God’s name. They will substitute words like “Lord” (*Adonai* in Hebrew) or “the name” (*ha-shem* in Hebrew) when reading passages that use God’s name.

Here we see why certain Jews in John 8 tried to stone Jesus. Unlike the religious conventions of the day, Jesus spoke the name of God. Moreover, he did it in a way where Jesus claimed that name for himself. The gospel of John was written in Greek, so we don't have Jesus' Hebrew or Aramaic words used. (Jesus most likely used one of those two languages in this encounter.) But we still know what Jesus said.

The Greek translation of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush used the phrase "*ego eimi*" to translate God's explanation of his name, "I AM" to Moses.

Jesus spoke and laid claim to God's name as he laid claim to Abraham seeing the day of Jesus and rejoicing. This sends one back to the pages of the book of origins (Genesis) to again see what transpired in Abraham's day, and how that gave Abraham insight into what God had planned in the future.

Father Abraham

The story of Abraham begins in Genesis 11:27, where he is still called by his birth name, Abram.

Following are the generations of Terah: Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. Haran died unusually early while his father was still alive in his homeland, Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:27-28).

Ur was a city in the southern part of Mesopotamia, between modern Bagdad (Iraq) and the Persian Gulf. The additional identifier "of the Chaldeans" was an additional insert by a later editor to specify the "Ur" referenced.¹

After the death of Haran, Terah moved the family to a city named "Haran." This is not some early typo. There was a significant town in the northern part of Mesopotamia named "Haran." The family went with Terah; Abram, his barren wife Sarai, Nahor, his wife and children, and Lot, Abram's nephew and the son of his deceased brother Haran.

The family settled in Haran and after living there some time, Terah dies. This left Abram as the patriarch or father figure of the clan, along with his wife Sarai, his brother Nahor and family, and his nephew Lot. The dating for this is around 2000BC.

Some might think these cultures were so old that they were extremely primitive. Archeology has shown the opposite to be true. These cultures irrigated and farmed, built from bricks, used bronze (this was the "Middle Bronze Age") made advanced forms of

¹ There were a number of cities named "Ur." The Chaldeans did not come to power in Abraham's Ur until over a thousand years after Abraham. By giving the reference here, the Bible clarifies to the reader which Ur was Abraham's.

pottery, jewelry, and lived in multiple level houses. Archaeologists have discovered complicated written legal codes. Excavated tombs of the royal families of Ur from the time period have uncovered games, musical instruments and an array of furniture, including beds, chairs, tables, and chests. The tombs also indicate both animal and human sacrifices.

Although inland now, Ur was a port city in the time with two-plus thousand years of history already. It was about 170 acres in size and was a ruling city of the area on and off for over a thousand years.

While the people of Mesopotamia worship thousands of gods, each town and city typically had one main patron god or goddess. In Ur, it was the moon god Nanna (also called “Sin”). Nanna was the god in charge of the calendar.

About the time of Abram, Ur, and other areas of southern Mesopotamia were infused by a large number of Amorites. The Amorite immigrants brought certain problems on the local city, including food shortages and resultant inflation. (Immigration issues have long concerned civilizations.) The Amorites were Semitic people, while the native Ur-ites were Sumerian. The Semitic peoples from the North spoke a different language that was the parent language of what would become Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, among others. The settling Amorites were typically animal herders, as was Abram’s family, rather than the agriculturalists native to Ur.²

This becomes important because the name Abram, and his family’s names (including his father Terah) are Semitic names.³ Some wonder if upon Haran’s death the decision was made to move “home” to the town Haran, a Semitic town. If the move occurred in the 20th century BC, then another possible reason for the move was the recent government change in Ur. Ur was overthrown in 2004BC and was no longer the ruling capital. Neighboring cities of Isin and Larsa were controlling the region. The Bible does not explain the reason for the move, but simply states it occurred.

Haran was not the same sized city as Ur; it was smaller. Still, it was an important town as a stopping point on the major trading route through that area of Mesopotamia. One thing the towns had in common was that out of the pantheon of gods, they both worshipped the

² Saggs, H. W. F., *Babylonians*, (U.C. Berkley Press 2000) at 93. Saggs’s book in general gives a good thorough history of Ur both before and after the time of Abram. Saggs is not writing a book about the Bible and mentions Abraham only once and then in passing. The thrust of his book is simply a dissertation on the people who occupied Babylon over the centuries.

³ Scholars differ over the terms used in classifying these names, some calling them Semitic; others calling them West Semitic. See the fuller description of naming labels in Huffman, Herbert, *Amorite personal names in the Mari Texts*, (Johns Hopkins 1965) at 2ff.

moon god Nanna. While in that pagan town, Abram received a call from the LORD (YHWH) to pack up and move to Canaan. Genesis 12 takes begins that part of the story.



Genesis 12 begins in sharp contrast to the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Since creation, God had repeatedly pronounced the curses of sin:

1. “Cursed are you [the serpent] above all livestock” (Gen. 3:14).
2. “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen. 3:17).
3. “And now you [Cain] are cursed from the ground (Gen. 4:11).
4. “Out of the ground the LORD has cursed...” (Gen. 5:29).
5. “Cursed be Canaan” (Gen. 9:25).

In contrast, chapter 12 begins with the LORD (YHWH) instructing Abram to:

Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land I will show you (Gen. 12:1).

As part of this instruction God, announces multiple blessings on Abram:

1. “I will make of you a great nation” (Gen. 12:2).

2. “I will bless you and make your name great” (Gen. 12:2).
3. “You will be a blessing” (Gen. 12:2).
4. “I will bless those who bless you” (Gen. 12:3).
5. “In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

The shift is not simply from curses to blessings. With Abram, there is a sharp distinction from the events in the preceding verses on the tower of Babel. In the tower story, the people arrogantly proclaimed, “let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4). In contrast the LORD (YHVW) tells Abram, “I will make your name great.”

With those promises pronounced, Abram leaves many of his kindred taking his wife and servants along with his nephew Lot and heading to Canaan at God’s direction. Abram moves through parts of Canaan receiving the LORD’s (YHVW) promise to give the land to Abram’s descendants, although he has none at that time.

Canaan is a land of city-states with a number of nomads circulating with their flocks as the weather and landscape dictated. Archeology has shown that in the cities the people lived in row houses. There was pagan religion with numerous gods who received regular sacrifices, there was incense burned for the gods, and idols were made to represent the gods.

Abram does not embrace any gods but only the LORD (YHVW) God. He goes as the LORD (YHVW) directs and builds altars to the LORD (YHVW) only. Abram calls on the name of LORD (YHVW) for his direction and life (Gen. 12:7, 8).

This is why God was able to identify himself to Moses as “The LORD (YHVW), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham” (Exodus 3:15). This is also why Jesus was able to affirm that, “Before the genesis of Abraham, there was the “I AM” [Which in Hebrew would have been “LORD (YHVW)] (Jn. 8:58).

Abraham and Melchizedek

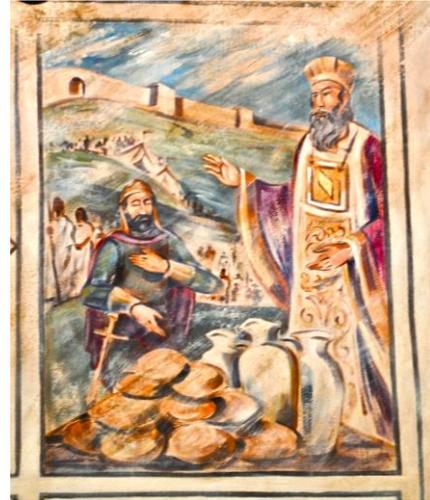
During a famine, Abram and his group left Canaan and went to Egypt. After the famine was over, they returned to Canaan, and the herdsmen of Lot and Abram began fighting over pasture land. Abram solved the problem by letting Lot choose his pastures while Abram went to other areas. Lot chose the premier land, which wasn’t necessarily a smart thing. Everyone wants the premier land, including nearby warlords.

Not surprisingly, Genesis 14 recounts a battle that set a dispute for the premier lands between the kings (in modern language, the “more powerful tribal leaders”) in Lot’s area and another group of kings (“more powerful tribal leaders”). Lot’s kings lost, and Lot was

captured, along with his family and possessions. One of Lot's entourage managed to escape, and found Abram, telling him about what had happened.

Abram gathered the 318 trained men in his household (meaning all those who worked for and with him, not simply his relatives) and went on a rescue mission. Abram was successful and brought back Lot and the others, along with their possessions:

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him [Abram] at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything (Gen. 14:17-20 ESV).



In these events, Abraham lived and experienced a special picture of what would come in the Messiah.

Here is one of the “many ways” the prophets in the Old Testament spoke of Jesus in the day of Abraham. It is also one of the ways Abraham “rejoiced” to see the day of Jesus, even though he was seeing it in the dim manner of future prophecy. Melchizedek was a representation of the Messiah in multiple ways

Consider the following:

1. “Melchizedek” as a name carries significance. The name is a composite of two Hebrew words, “*mlkh*” meaning “king” and “*zdqh*” meaning “righteousness.” In the form used in the name, it means, “My king is righteous.” This echoes heavily of the New Testament attributes and name of Jesus, the King of kings, who was called “the Righteous One” (Acts 3:14, 7:52). Not only is Jesus a righteous King, but as Paul emphasized, when one is found “in Jesus,” akin to what Jesus told the Jews in the interchange referenced earlier and found in John 8, one actually becomes the “righteousness of God” (see, e.g., 2 Cor. 5:21).
2. Melchizedek not only had a righteous king, but he himself was the “King of Salem.” The Hebrew uses *mlkh* again, this time tying it to the word “*Shlm* (“Salem”). The word *Salem* is better known in its modernized form of “*shalom*.” It is often

translated “peace.” Thus, in these events and in Melchizedek, one sees a merging of the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace. This again is prophetic and fulfilled in Jesus, who, as prophesied in Isaiah 9:6 was the, “Prince of Peace.”

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace* (ESV).

3. Further importance may be drawn from the fact that many scholars believe that “Salem” was an older name for the city of Jeru-salem.⁴ This is tied to Jesus who himself called Jerusalem, “the city of the great King” (Mt. 5:35). It was in Jerusalem that Jesus spoke of the Temple as his “Father’s house” (Lk 2:49). Over Jerusalem one reads of Jesus weeping and lamenting with a play on the meaning of the city as the “foundation of peace”

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for *peace*! But now they are hidden from your eyes (Lk 19:41ESV).

4. Melchizedek brought out bread and wine for Abram. These same elements form the communal supper for Jesus and his apostles (Mt. 26:26-29).
5. Melchizedek was a “priest,” a label that demands note because Jesus was also a Priest. In John 17, Jesus prayed for his followers in anticipation of the crucifixion. Scholars call this prayer “the High Priestly Prayer” recognizing that in it, Jesus was intervening as a High Priest for his followers. The title added to Jesus’ name is “Christ” (Hebrew “*Messiah*”) meaning “anointed.” In the Old Testament, three groups of people were anointed for service to God, prophets, priests, and kings. Jesus as Messiah/Christ was all three. He was prophet, priest and king of God Most High. Over and over the writer of Hebrews makes this point (Heb. 2:17, 3:1, 4:14-15, 5:5, etc.). Hebrews 5:6 makes it clear,

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (quoting Psalm 110:4) (ESV).

⁴ A number of scholars see “Jerusalem” as a composite of *Jeru* and *Salem* meaning the “foundation of peace.” Scripture seems to equate biblical Jerusalem with the city of Salem in passages like Psalm 76:1-2 “In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion.” See, Davidson, Benjamin, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, (Hendrikson 2007) at 346; Berlin and Brettler, ed’s, *The Jewish Study Bible*, (Oxford) 2004) at 34-35.

6. Melchizedek was a priest of “God Most High.” “Most High God” was a term used in both the Old and New Testaments to refer to LORD (YHVH). In Luke 8:26-33 when Jesus was casting out the Legion of demons from a man of the Gerasenes, the demons recognized Jesus as “Son of the Most High God.” Similarly, when Mary was hearing from the angel prior to the incarnation she was told,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the *Most High* will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Lk 1:35 ESV).

Paul and his missionary team were similarly called by one who had a spirit of divination, “servants of the Most High God” (Acts 16:17).

Melchizedek as priest of God Most High was clearly a foreshadowing of Jesus the Messiah.

7. Melchizedek blessed Abram by “God Most High.” This is carried forward to the relationship between Jesus and the church because it is in Jesus as Messiah, Paul taught, that the church has been blessed with “every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3, 6).
8. Abram tithed to Melchizedek. Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all he recovered. This is seen to reflect the charge of God’s people to tithe to God, recognizing that all things come from his hand. As Leviticus set out the law and principle,

Every **tithe** of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD’s; it is holy to the LORD (Lev. 27:30).

This altogether brief encounter is more magnified when one considers that Melchizedek is mentioned in only three places in Scripture: (1) in Genesis 14, (2) in Psalm 110, and (3) in Hebrews 5-7.

The writer of Hebrews understood these same ideas and used both the Genesis and Psalm passage to explain some of the implications of Melchizedek for the church (some of which we quoted earlier):

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "***You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.***" In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ***being***

designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:5-10).

Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become *a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek* (Heb. 6:20).

Then in Chapter seven, Hebrews goes into greater detail, even recounting the events between Abram and Melchizedek:

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible

life. For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." (Heb. 7:1-15).⁵

It follows immediately after this story where Melchizedek blessed Abram that God appeared to Abram promising his "reward shall be very great" (Gen. 15:1). God then promised Abram a son for an heir and offspring that are as innumerable as the stars in heaven. Abram believed the LORD and his faith was "counted to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

The Prophet's Message

In Abram/Abraham, the prophets showed that the Messiah, God's solution to the sin and death brought on by Adam and Eve would come through Abraham's seed. The coming one would bless not only Abraham's family, but the whole earth. This would be one who would be a high priest of God, would reign as a King of Peace and a righteous king, would properly receive the worship of Abraham and his offspring, and would impart his blessings to those bowing before him.

Still this story has a long way to go...

Points for Home

1. "*Cursed...blessed*" (Gen. 3-12).

Sin brings curse. There is a vicious cycle of sin and death; Paul calls it a law and a bondage. Sin is not simply a list of "no no's." It is the course of action that leads to bad consequences. Contrasted with sin is the faithfulness of obedience. Just as

⁵ In Edward Fudge's article, *Leaven: A Journal for Christian Ministry*, 17/4 (4th Qtr. 2009), p. 193, he drew the point of Hebrews further:

Both Jesus and Melchizedek occupy the dual role of king/priest, but our author focuses on their qualification to be appointed priest. Appointment to the Levitical priesthood required bloodline (Nehemiah 7:63-64), birth date (Numbers 4:46-47) and a flawless body (Leviticus 21:16-20). Melchizedek had no priestly father, mother or genealogy (Hebrews 7:3). His priesthood was not term limited by beginning or end but was rather perpetual (Hebrews 7:3). The only basis for Melchizedek's priesthood was his own character.

In the same way, Jesus' priesthood does not depend on family tree or legal term, but rather on his holy character and obedient life. His qualification for appointment as priest was not a perfect body ("a law of physical requirement") but a sinless life (Hebrews 7:16). Because Jesus was completely free of sin, death could not hold him. His priesthood is energized and sustained by the inherent dynamic of an indestructible life. For the same reason, God could swear that Jesus would be priest forever and know that he would never change his mind.

sin brings cursed unhappiness and pain/defeat, so faithfulness brings blessing and joy/victory.

We must ask ourselves in the quiet of our hearts, “Why do we sometimes choose the path of sin?” Lord, make us followers of you in constancy as we live daily before you.

2. *“Go from your country...to the land I will show you”* (Gen. 12:1).

God called Abram away from his parents’ home—away from the home of his kinsmen. This is the way of God. He calls his people, not simply to “be a Christian.” He calls with specific purposes in mind. God equips and sets out a journey for each one of his children. Paul makes this point: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that he prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Do not ever be satisfied with simply being a Christian. Seek out what God has planned for you. Ask him about it in prayer. Then step out in faith and know that as you acknowledge God in all your ways, “he will make straight your paths” (Pro. 3:6).

3. *“Melchizedek...was priest of God Most High”* (Gen. 14:18).

The book of Hebrews held a strong message for any Jew who thought it best to abandon faith in Christ and return to Judaism. Jesus eclipsed everything Judaism had to offer. The descendants of Abraham, including the Levitical priests, could not be deemed greater than Melchizedek, for Abraham himself bowed before Melchizedek. (And from a Jewish perspective, Abraham’s offspring were in his loins and participated in the bowing down!)

We have in Christ, a High Priest of God Most High who has straight access before the Father. What is more, we are assured he uses this access to the benefit of the believer. Take time this week to set your prayers and concerns before Christ as High Priest. Take your prayers to God through Jesus!