

DATE: September 21, 2008

TEXT: Genesis 14:17-24

TITLE: "Genesis XI: Melchizedek"



We are continuing our study of Abraham. Last week we saw the call of Abraham and the fact that we are the children of Abraham. The promise of God to Abraham is a promise to you and me as followers of Jesus Christ. Let me share with you the background of our text.

Abraham and his nephew Lot are now settled and have large farms. The families of Abraham and the families of Lot had a fight so Abraham gave Lot the choice of land. Lot chose the fertile valley while Abraham was in the hills and mountains. Lot joined an alliance of Kings to defend his land. This alliance was defeated and Lot was imprisoned. Uncle Abraham came to his rescue and freed him. On the way back from this victory Abraham met a King named Melchizedek. This encounter became a central lesson for the author of Hebrews. I will share 5 lessons on this encounter.

Lesson # 1 Who was Melchizedek? Let me give you some theories about who he was....

but let me stress...these are just theories.

The Ancient Rabbis believed Melchizedek was the oldest son of Shem, who was the son of Noah. This is very unlikely.

Some of the Early Church Fathers thought Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit. Again very unlikely.

Many historians believe He was just a great, great king who was also a worshiper of the one and only true God. He was an early priest. He was king of Salem... which is an early name for Jerusalem. Maybe.

Many others believe Melchizedek was a Christophony... that is an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. There are a number of appearances of Christ in the Old Testament... this may be one of them. This also is possible.

Let me say I'm not sure which one is correct.... I tend to lean toward the third one...but I'm not sure...but more important... it is not important. If it was important scripture would teach us. Since it is not important scripture is silent. There is an important lesson here...don't argue over things that scripture does not teach. If Scripture does not teach it... it must not be very important.

Lesson # 2 What is the importance of this encounter?

What is important is this fact...A priesthood exists and Jesus Christ is our eternal, pre-existent Priest.

Remember this fact, in order to be a priest in Judaism you had to prove that your lineage was from the tribe of Levi. Only descendants of Levi could be Priests. Jesus was a descendant from Judah. The line of kings not the priestly line. Every Jew would ask a simple question... "How could Jesus be a priest? We understand how he could be a king and a ruler of Israel... he was from the tribe of Judah...but not a priest." The author of Hebrews answered this question. He states....

14For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. 18The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 19(for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

The Priesthood of Melchizedek pre-dates the Priesthood of Levi. Jesus is a priest in the earlier priesthood. The Levitical priesthood was never meant to be the permanent solution to the

problem of sin. The Levitical priesthood was a stop-gap measure. It was not meant to be permanent. It was only created to fill the gap until the arrival of Jesus.

I can remember on one of my college years bike trips needing a stop-gap solution. We were riding across Canada. We were in the middle of no where, miles from even a small town. I rode over a piece of glass and had a major blow out. My tires had 120 pounds of pressure in them. When I hit this glass I blew a hole in the tube... but I also blew a hole in the tire about the size of a dime. We of course had spare tubes with us. I immediately put the tube on...but the problem was when I blew it up it bubbled out of the hole in the tire. We took the tire off the rim again and lined the inside of the tire with duct tape. But again, because of the pressure it bubbled out. We could put no more tape inside the tire because the tire would not seal. Here was our solution. We put the tire on...and then on the outside of the tire we wrapped duct tape around and around the tire and the rim. This worked. The tube held. But two problems arose. First...it was most annoying. Every time I went over the duct tape the bike bounced. And second...the tape did not fit around the brake pads. We had to totally remove the rear brake pads so the

wheel would turn. It was not safe.... but it worked. We rode about 60 miles to the next town and bought a new tire. A stop-gap measure to get to the next step.

The Levitical priesthood was a stop-gap measure. It did not work very well. It made nobody perfect. It saved nobody. The priests were not very good intermediaries.... but it was meant to be temporary. But it prepared the land for the coming of Jesus. It was a very imperfect reflection of the wonderful priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Lesson # 3 Why do we need a Priest? We need an intermediary between God and man.

Hebrews 7:23,24 teaches this amazing truth

23Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; 24but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

The author of Hebrews is saying we have a great High Priest...not a man... but Jesus Christ who is both man and God. No human High Priests are needed... only Jesus Christ.

Truthfully this is one of the great differences between Protestant and Catholic doctrine. In

Catholicism 3 levels of intermediaries have been established between God and man. Catholics often pray to God through these intermediaries. The three intermediaries in Catholicism are

Mary, the mother of Jesus....Saints, who have achieved special closeness to God.... and Priests.

In Catholicism, in the sacrament of Penance you receive Absolution, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, from the Priest. In the Mass the Priest is able to transubstantiate the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Martin Luther and John Calvin, the fathers of the Reformation rejected this idea of human intermediaries. They stated Jesus Christ is our priest and the only priest that we need. We as Christians have direct access to Jesus Christ. We pray only to God... only to God the Father or God the Son or God the Holy Spirit. Presbyterian ministers are called "Pastors". This literally means shepherds...or "one who guides." Sometimes we are called "preacher"... that is "one who shares God's Word"... but never Priest. I am not an intermediary between you and God. I can not give you absolution for your sins. I am not able to do anything magical or mysterious in a worship service. I am a shepherd...not an intermediary.

But the good news is this... we have a priest that can indeed bring us absolution for our sins.

Lesson # 4 Jesus is the interceding Priest. This is stated once again in *Hebrews*

7:25

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

A few weeks ago we saw the story of Stephen. We saw his vision. In his vision he sees Jesus standing up from the Judgment throne and taking the place of the defense attorney.

1 John 2:1 states.. **2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense (an advocate)--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.**

We have an advocate. A defense attorney. Can you imagine the arrogance of man when we say to God "I do not need a defense attorney... I do not need an advocate... I will stand as my own defense attorney... I will stand on my own life." Arrogance.... foolishness. And yet isn't that the attitude of most people we know. "I don't need to go to church.... I am O.K. without it".... arrogance, foolishness. "I'm a pretty good person... God will accept me just the way I am." Arrogance, foolishness. We have an interceding priest. To ignore the priest is arrogance, foolishness... but that is the wide path chosen by many, many people.

Finally Lesson # 5 Jesus Christ is the perfect high Priest because he is not only the priest he is also the sacrifice. We see this in *Hebrews 7:26-27*

26 Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

The Levitical priests sacrificed bulls and sheep and pigeons....Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself. On the cross Jesus paid the price for our sin. As our High Priest he is able to say to our heavenly Father..... “forgive my child based on my sacrifice and on my plea.”

What a perfect High Priest.... he is the Priest... he is the sacrifice.... he is the advocate... he is the Lord... he is God. I have Good News. A intercessor has stood up for us. I have good news... we will not stand before the judgment throne alone. I have good news Jesus Christ is our Advocate. Rejoice! Praise the Lord.

AMEN