

Abraham and Melchizedek; Abraham Refuses

The King of Sodom's Offer

Genesis 14:17-24

Genesis 14:17-24 - *“And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him.*

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tithe of all.

²¹ Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself.” ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’— ²⁴ except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.”

Background Notes

After his defeat of the four kings of the east and the dramatic rescue of Lot and the rest of the captives, Abram set out for return home. His small army had chased the enemy all the way north of Damascus - about 200 miles from Abram's home! On the way back Abram met the king of Sodom, who had escaped the big battle and was now coming north to congratulate Abram. They met in the Valley of Shaveh near Jerusalem. However, before the king of Sodom had time to make a tempting offer to Abram, Melchizedek, the king of Salem, came out of Jerusalem and communed with Abraham. As a result of his meeting with Melchizedek, Abram was not only able to resist the offer from the king of Sodom, but he was also able to give a great testimony for the Lord. This was something that Lot had never done while living in Sodom. This fact reminds us that we don't have to be part of this world in order to be a testimony to it! In **one day** Abram was more of a testimony of the one true God to the king and the people of Sodom than Lot had been in **years** of living there! This is a great lesson for us.

Who was Melchizedek? Verse 18 tells us that he was the king of Salem, which is an ancient name for Jerusalem. In Psalm 110, as well as the book of Hebrews, we learn that Melchizedek was also a priest.

So here we have the king of Jerusalem, which was inhabited by the pagan Canaanites at this time - and yet this man was a priest of the Most High God - the one and only true God! Some Jewish commentaries suggest that Melchizedek was Shem, the son of Noah. If there are no gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 11, Shem would still have been living at that time. Another view is that Melchizedek was not a real person, but he was a “theophany” or “Christophany” - that is, the Lord Himself taking on the visible form of a man. A pretty good case can be built for each of these views. I personally believe that Melchizedek was a real person, but he was a “type,” or picture, of Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal Points

1. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, is a picture of Christ, who encourages the believer.

Melchizedek was both a king and a priest. In the same way, our Lord Jesus is both our King and our High Priest. It's interesting that, in reference to our Lord's priesthood, Hebrews 6:20 says, *“Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

Jesus has become our high priest forever, **according to the order of Melchizedek**. What does this mean? This phrase refers to the fact that our Lord's priesthood is **eternal**. The Levitical priests of the Old Testament who came after Melchizedek were priests in the line or the order of Aaron, under the Mosaic Law. But the Mosaic Law ended with Christ. Our Lord was not descended from the line or order of Aaron - He was from the tribe of Judah. However, He is a priest - in fact, He is **our High Priest forever!** Like Melchizedek, who did not have a priestly lineage with a beginning or an end (as Aaron's lineage did), Jesus Christ's priesthood is an eternal priesthood.

Referring to Melchizedek, Hebrews 12:3 says he was *“without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.”* This doesn't mean that Melchizedek was not a real person. It means that he appeared on the pages of Scripture without a background or a priestly lineage. He is just there - without father or mother - without a genealogy. So in that sense he was a priest without a beginning or ending to his lineage, and thus our Lord is said to be a high priest “according to the order of Melchizedek.” His is **an eternal priesthood**. So Melchizedek, as both king and priest, is a picture of our Lord Jesus.

Notice how Melchizedek encouraged Abraham. He talked about the **Lord!** He emphasized that Abram's victory was from the **Lord**. It was not by Abram's military strategy or the enemy's mistakes, but by the hand of the Lord. This is the way the Lord Jesus, our High Priest, encourages us. He takes our focus of attention off “me” and “my” accomplishments, and centers our focus on the Lord.

Then Abram and Melchizedek communed together in a fellowship meal of bread and wine. This pictures how the Lord communes with us in a fellowship that brings encouragement. The bread and the wine can certainly picture the Lord's Supper, where we commune and fellowship with the Lord.

All of us have probably experienced the encouragement that comes from spending time in fellowship with the Lord around “His Table.” Our focus becomes God-centered, not self-centered. As a result we are able to go out and, like Abram, resist the temptations of this world. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, is a picture of Christ, who encourages the believer.

2. The king of Sodom is a picture of the prince of this world, who tempts the believer.

Several times in the gospel of John, the Lord Jesus referred to Satan as the prince of this world. At the present time, God is allowing Satan to control this world - to a limited extent. As a result, Satan is able to tempt the believer with the possessions and the power and the prestige of this world.

When our Lord was tempted, Satan offered Him the kingdoms of this world and their glory. In the same way, Satan comes to us with his worldly offers. This is pictured in the king of Sodom offering Abram a reward of the “riches of Sodom.” Think of how Abram could have been ensnared - and perhaps even become somewhat obligated to the king of Sodom - if he had taken any of that loot.

Look at Abram’s reply: *“But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’ (v22-23).* What a difference, compared to Abram’s time in Egypt, when he took all kinds of things from Pharaoh. It’s clear that he had learned a very important lesson.

I wonder what we would have said if the king of Sodom had offered all these things to us? Some of us might have said, “OK, I’ll take them and I’ll somehow use them for the glory of the Lord.” But not Abram! Abram saw the subtle attempts of the enemy, and the possibility of becoming ensnared. When Christians are not able to resist worldly temptations and offers, the “threads of Sodom” become strings that attach us to this world system. Watch out for the threads of Sodom! Remember Gideon’s downfall in Judges 8? It started when he requested “one gold earring” from the loot of each of the victorious men of Israel. In Gideon’s case, his downfall happened immediately after a great victory. The king of Sodom came to Abram right after a great victory. It’s important to remember that Abram’s communion with Melchizedek helped him to withstand the temptation offered by Sodom’s king.

We are most vulnerable to Satan’s temptations after a spiritual victory. This is an important teaching from Genesis 14. The king of Sodom is a picture of the prince of this world, who tempts the believer.

Practical Application

Let's not try to "get around" tithing!

When the question of tithing comes up, a lot of Christians try to get around it with various excuses. They want to serve the Lord, and they will give token amounts of their money to the Lord, but not ten percent!

One way Christians try to get around tithing is to say, "I don't give ten percent of my money because I serve the Lord in other ways." Let's not try to get around tithing that way! Even the Levites, who were God's full time servants in the Old Testament, were required to bring their tithes.

Another excuse is: "Tithing was required under the Old Testament Law, but that Law ended with Christ, so we are no longer expected to tithe." However, we learn from this chapter that Abram gave a "tithe" to Melchizedek - and Abram lived **before** the Law was given! He tithed, even though he was not under the regulations of the Law.

Tithing is a biblical principle. It's true that in the New Testament and the great "giving" chapters like 2 Corinthians 8-9, tithing is not mentioned. However, the implication is that we are stewards before the Lord of **everything** we have! So we would be closer to New Testament principles of giving if we gave **100%** to the Lord, not just **10%**! So I believe that if we're not **at least** tithing, something is wrong. Let's not try to get around tithing.

Young people - do you tithe? "But I'm only a young person. I'll start tithing when I get out of college and get a job." Where is that in the Bible? Tithing is a biblical principle. It is for **all** believers!

When I was about ten years old, our family went to visit an elderly great-aunt. She was very poor, and on the way home I overheard my parents discussing about giving her some money. Later I asked my Dad, "Would it be all right if I gave something too?" I expected he might say, "No, you're too small," but he said, "That would be wonderful!" Well, I had just cut a lawn for a neighbor and earned \$1.25. (How times have changed!) So I gave the quarter (big-hearted guy!) to my Dad for my great-aunt. But that event was a great lesson for me on giving.

Parents should encourage children to be "givers." And parents should teach their children to be **proportional givers**, because **tithing is a biblical principle**. As believers, we should at the very **least** be tithing! Let's not try to "get around" the biblical principle of tithing!