

Melchizedek: King of Salem and a Priest of God Most High

14: 17-24

DIG: Why does Abram accept Melchizedek's blessing and tithes to him? Given the different way that Abram treats the king of Salem and the king of Sodom, what does that tell you about the character and faith of each? How does their contrast sharpen the contrast made between Abram and Lot?

REFLECT: Are your influential friends more like the king of Sodom or the king of Salem? Who is blessing you today? Who might you bless? What can we learn from Abram about giving the LORD credit for His goodness to us?

Abram had a stunning victory over the enemy kings. As he returned to his home near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron (13:18), a weary warrior, thankful that his pursuit of the enemy had been so successful, he could not have guessed what God had in store for him. Abram had an unexpected encounter with Melchizedek, king of Salem (later called Jerusalem) who was also the priest of El Elyon, or the God Most High. This title is very rare in the TANAKH, but it is found four times in this section. The idea underlying it is that of ADONAI as the Supreme Being who is above all local deities. Its Renewed Covenant equivalent is the Most High (Luke 1:32 and 35) and the Most High God (Acts 16:17).²⁵⁴ Abram may not have been acquainted with Melchizedek, but Melchizedek knew Abram.²⁵⁵

The true test of character comes when we have success. How we act at the moment of success often reveals our true character and spiritual maturity. This will be true in the case of Abram as we read about his interaction with the two kings. The two of them could not possibly have been more different.

The first king is the king of Sodom. Abram was a real hero. After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh, that is, the King's Valley (14:17). Today this is known as the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2 and 14) in the Kidron Valley. It was the main valley outside Jerusalem in that day. Later, it will be the exact place that Absalom would build a monument to himself (Second Samuel 18:18).

The second king is Melchizedek king of Salem, who brought out bread and wine for Abram. Chapters 12 to 22 are the only chapters where the LORD does not speak. But He is represented by Melchizedek, **who was a real human being that served as a type of Christ** (Psalm 110:4). To learn more about Melchizedek, see my commentary on Hebrews, Chapters 5-7. He was king of Salem, which is a shortened form of Jerusalem (Psalm 76:2). In addition, he was a priest of God Most High (Psalm 78:35) and his name means *king of righteousness* (14:18). This is the first biblical mention of a priest in the Scriptures. In the Jewish society, the priest was to represent the people to ADONAI, as the prophets were to represent ADONAI to the people. Melchizedek seems to be one of the faithful few; one of those who put his trust in the one true God. Thus, he was a believing link to the line of Shem, amidst the impurity of the line of Canaan. **The rabbis teach that Melchizedek was the same person as Shem, the son of Noah.** And he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by El Elyon, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" (14:19). Melchizedek recognized Abram as a fellow believer and a servant of the LORD.

There is none like You, O LORD, among the gods. There is nothing higher or greater than You in all the earth. May we confess with our mouths, and acknowledge before all people, that You alone are El Elyon, God Most High.

Melchizedek has the proper point of view. He knows that the true source of Abram's success was ADONAI, as stated: **And blessed be El Elyon, this was the work of God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand, and Abram was His servant. Then words gave way to action and Abram gave him a tenth of everything he possessed (14:20).** Progressive revelation gives us additional like on this subject in the B'rit Chadashah. See my commentary on **The Life of Christ Do - When You Give to the Needy, Do Not Do It to be Honored by Others: seven principles of scriptural giving.**

Now we go back to the first king who makes a tempting offer. According to the Code of Hammurabi of that day, Abram had a perfect right to the spoils of war, and even to the captives. But the king of Sodom was clever and said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself" (14:21). That was tempting to Abram. But if he had accepted the goods, from that time on people would say, "That man Abram is certainly a wealthy man. The LORD has blessed him." I think that the king of Sodom would have said, "Blessed him? No way! God didn't bless him; I gave it to him. I'm the one who made him rich." Abram knew that the king of Sodom would boast, so he refused.²⁵⁶

Abram said to the king of Sodom: "I have promised", or raised my hand to ADONAI, El Elyon, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath, "that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the string of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' (14:22-23)." All Abram was willing to accept was the food his 318 men had already eaten in their pursuit of Kedorlaomer and his army. If Abram was going to be rich, it would be from God and not from man.

But the Amorite men, Abner, Eschol and Mamre that went with him were under no such obligation, and Abram acknowledged that they had a right to their share in the spoils of war (14:24). But as for him, the King of Sodom could give him nothing because the LORD continued to bless those who blessed Abram, and curse those who cursed Abram (12:3).

This tremendous test of faith, courage, generosity, and love was passed with flying colors by Abram. Accordingly, it set the stage for the greatest revelation from ADONAI that the childless Abram, whose name means *exalted father*, had yet received.²⁵⁷