

THE MYSTERIOUS MELCHIZEDEK SOCIETY

GENESIS 14:17-24 DECEMBER 15, 2021

"...and all I got was this lousy t-shirt..." They've been around for decades. Whether it's from a trip to Florida or worn after graduation or turning a certain age, there's a "lousy t-shirt" for everything. The Dutch Government recently breathed new life into this old style. The *National Cyber Security Centre* invited hackers to try to find vulnerabilities in their websites or online governmental systems.¹ Anyone who successfully reports a vulnerability is rewarded with a black shirt which reads, "I hacked the Dutch government and all I got was this lousy t-shirt."²

After risking his life and traveling hundreds of miles roundtrip, Abraham returns from his rescue operation victorious. He retrieved all the people and plunder that was taken in Chedorlaomer's vicious conquest. But, when all is said and done, Abraham doesn't even get a lousy t-shirt - not a sandal strap or as much as a *thread*. In fact, he comes home with 10% *less* wealth than he had when he began. No matter, Abraham is not concerned. What he *does* get is an incredible interaction with a mysterious spiritual figure and a stronger testimony than ever.

Genesis 14:17 - ¹⁷After Abram returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the Shaveh Valley (that is, the King's Valley).

This aftermath that we're reading tonight is notable for what Abraham did *not* do. We'll see, in the end, he refuses to keep any of the plunder. But here we also note that he came back home. He didn't try to become the king of Elam.

If you stayed around for the stinger in the final episode of *The Mandalorian*, you saw that Boba Fett had finally clawed out of obscurity, fought his way into power and sat himself of the throne of Jabba the Hutt from which *he* will now rule. (*Coming soon to Disney+!*)

Our culture likes to talk about "leverage." How to keep getting *more* for yourself - greater position, greater wealth, greater influence. That stands in stark contrast to the #lifegoals given by Paul: "Seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business."³

The meeting place was called "the King's Valley." We're not certain where this is, we can't help but connect it with the king of Sodom. And here we have this image of the king in the *King's Valley* and we have to ask ourselves: "Is that *really* your valley?" He wasn't able to defend it or his people. One of the themes of this passage is that all the world belongs to the Lord. It did then and it does now.

Genesis 14:18 - ¹⁸Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was a priest to God Most High.

¹ <https://english.ncsc.nl/contact/reporting-a-vulnerability-cvd>

² <https://medium.com/pentesternepal/hacking-dutch-government-for-a-lousy-t-shirt-8e1fd1b56deb>

³ 1 Thessalonians 4:9

Read plainly, it seems that the meeting of Abram, Melchizedek and the king of Sodom happened all at the same time.⁴ As we read, imagine the wicked King Bera watching all of this unfold.

Who was Melchizedek? For thousands of years there have been *many* opinions. His name shows up again in one of the Psalms of David (Psalm 110), and of course there is a lengthy discussion of this incident in the book of Hebrews. He also appears in *many* extra-biblical writings, including some found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁵ From these sources come a wide range of theories.

Some say he was Noah's son, Shem. Some that he was Noah's nephew, miraculously born and taken to heaven to survive the flood. Others say he was a warrior angel or a member of the Divine Council. Some say he was Michael the Archangel. Some say he was Christ Himself. In early church history there was a heretical sect called the Melchizedekians who taught that he was *greater* than Christ and that Christ was made in *his* image. One theory is that he was the Holy Spirit.

There's really no reason to believe that he was anything other than what he plainly appears to be: the king of a city who also served as a priest to God Most High. As Hebrews shows us, his life story becomes a profound type of the Lord Jesus Christ and *His* non-Aaronic priesthood. But, beyond that, there's no evidence to identify him with Shem or an angel or Christ Himself. In fact, there's only Biblical evidence *disproving* those theories.

So, where was he king? We're told he was king of Salem, which most scholars agree later became *Jerusalem*. "Bread and wine" is better understood to be a full banquet.⁶ And so, as A.W. Pink beautifully points out, we have a foreshadowing of what our Lord will accomplish at *His* return to earth. There, after vanquishing the coalition of worldly kings, the King of Righteousness will feast with His people, those who have been about His business, and with the Jewish remnant, saved through that terrible Tribulation that nearly swept them away.⁷

Meanwhile, there are some devotional thoughts for us. The mention of bread and wine reminds us of communion - given to commemorate and celebrate the victory won for us and shared *with* us.

Melchizedek also demonstrates that God is *always* working in all sorts of ways, whether we know it or not. Abraham, perhaps, felt like the *only* believer in all the world, but it wasn't true. Even in the heart of Canaan, that bastion of evil, there was a man, who was not simply *good*, he was a *true* worshiper of Jehovah. Some try to suggest that Melchizedek didn't know who he was worshiping, but Abraham clearly accepts that they both worship the same God. The New Testament agrees. How did he know about Jehovah? Who was he ministering to? What other spiritual adventures did he have? We don't know. This is a book about *Abraham's* descendants. But, believers often fall victim to a "we're the only ones" mentality. It happened to Elijah. It happens to whole

⁴ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

⁵ *Lexham Bible Dictionary*

⁶ See Waltke, *Ellicotts*

⁷ A.W. Pink *Gleanings In Genesis*

denominations sometimes. But God is at work all around the world, every moment of every day. And, even though Abraham and Melchizedek were *strangers*, we also see they were instantly connected because of their love of God. They had instant communion and fellowship and camaraderie. What a great example these two are of Christian brotherhood.

Genesis 14:19 - ¹⁹He (Melchizedek) blessed him (Abraham) and said: Abram is blessed by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth,

We don't know much about Melchizedek, but we get a glimpse into his theology here, and we find it lines up with God said so far in Genesis. God's revelation is consistent in all times and in all places. When a person like Joseph Smith comes along and says he has a *new* revelation, it's not from God. Paul said it didn't matter if it was another man or an apostle or even an angel from heaven. There is *one* revelation from God and it remains consistent forever. Melchizedek affirms that there is *One* God and He is the Creator of this universe. On top of that, the message of Melchizedek toward Abraham is in line with what God had already said. He didn't say, "Thus saith the Lord" and then give some contradictory prophecy or statement.

Like Abraham, we have been blessed by God. Believers receive an everlasting blessing. The second death has *no* power over us and now we have been called into God's priesthood.⁸

A major part of Biblical priesthood is to do what Melchizedek does here: Bless people.⁹ We bless the family of faith in lots of ways - encouragement and support and assistance and kindly affection - but we're also to bless our enemies. Jesus, Peter, and Paul each command us to bless those who persecute us.¹⁰

Now, here's an important shade to all of this: Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God, but Abraham did not have to *go through him* in order to have a relationship with God. There is now *one* mediator between God and mankind, the Man Christ Jesus. The idea that you, as a Believer, have to go through a priest or through a pastor in order to gain access to God is not Biblical.

Genesis 14:20 - ²⁰and blessed be God Most High who has handed over your enemies to you. And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Though he had not been involved, Melchizedek knew all about the battle Abraham had fought. God is mindful of all your struggles and difficulties. He has not forgotten them or you.

Abraham gives a tenth - or a 'tithes' - of everything to God through Melchizedek. First off, what did he give? Some say it was 10% of the plunder. Some say it was 10% of his own goods and none of the plunder.¹¹ Others say it was 10% of his own stuff *and* the spoils of war.¹² We can't be sure, but

⁸ Revelation 20:6

⁹ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

¹⁰ Matthew 5:44, Romans 12:14, 1 Peter 3:9

¹¹ See *Calvin*

¹² Robert Candlish *Studies In Genesis*

given his attitude in this section, I find it hard to believe he was only giving to God what he only gained a few days before. Don't get me wrong - he was *entitled* to these spoils of war, but, I'm sure his mentality was like that of David: "I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing."

What about tithing? Is that something every Christian should be doing? Some point to this passage and say the tithe predates the Law, so it should apply to Believers of every age. Others point to the Law and say that Christians in the Dispensation of Grace are obligated to continue the tithe. If you base your view on the tithe from the Mosaic Law you've got a problem - when you add everything up it seems like the Israelites ended up giving about 23% of their income, not 10%.¹³

Before setting a number, we should ask: Does God *want* us to give charitably of our money and goods? The answer to that is a clear "yes." In fact, Jesus grouped giving in with prayer and fasting in His sermon on the mount. He also said that by giving of our earthly wealth we are able to store up treasures in heaven. In the New Testament giving is categorized with helping the needy and supporting ministers of the Gospel and the work of the church.¹⁴

So, *how much* should you give? *That is none of my business!* You need to be led by God in how to give. Not just in quantity, but in *where* to give. We live in such an incredible time where, from the comfort of our homes, we can pay to dig a well in India, feed a child in Haiti, send a Bible to a soldier, and provide relief for tornado victims in Kentucky *all in the same day*. We can give jackets to the cold in our own town or send money to the Crossroads Pregnancy Center which they put together to do things like teach people how to be Godly parents or minister to women after an abortion or provide pregnancy tests free of charge. You can give to this church which helps us do things like pay staff and keep the lights on and have events and buy Bibles and make podcasts and provide a place where the Gospel is preached week by week and year by year. *How* you give is between you and the Holy Spirit. As you seek that out, the Bible gives us some guiding principles.

Our giving is to be motivated by *love*, not begrudgingly. And, because of that we would say that the goal should not be how *little* can I get away with, but how *much* will God let me give? Next, we're told that our giving should be private, regular, sacrificial, and cheerfully done. You can study through 2 Corinthians 9 and Matthew 6 to learn more about this.

Genesis 14:21 - ²¹ Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people, but take the possessions for yourself."

The sacred meeting is broken up by the impatience of Bera, the king of Sodom. "If you holy rollers are done with your little get-together, let's get down to business." There's no thank you. There's no acknowledgement of the greatness of Abraham's God. There's no humility at all. Instead, he tries to command Abraham,¹⁵ setting the terms and suggesting that he is the one owns everything.

¹³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-commands-christians-to-tithe/>

¹⁴ Galatians 2:10, Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:16, Galatians 6:6, 1 Corinthians 9:4, Acts 4:32-36

¹⁵ *Walke*

This is what we should expect from the kings of this world. What arrogance and hard-heartedness! He had, after all, *abandoned* his people to enslavement and death. He had started a fight, then when the going got tough, he retreated back to his palace, only coming out when someone else had done his job for him. We see his sinful heart on display: Defiance in the face of God's mercy.

It's true that, customarily, the goods would rightfully belong to Abraham, but I wonder if it wasn't also a devilish plot in the king's mind. He needed to re-establish his dominance. If Abraham had kept the stuff, how long would it have been before Bera started saying, "Abraham stole all our goods. Let's go get it back!" He could use it as a pretense to attack this incredibly wealthy nomad who had, from one vantage point, very few defenses.

Genesis 14:22-23 - ²²But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand in an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, ²³that I will not take a thread or sandal strap or anything that belongs to you, so you can never say, 'I made Abram rich.'

It is often said that this was a great temptation for Abraham - a test of his faith. For sure, there is a devotional application for us to not be bought off by the world and the danger of greed. But, if it was a temptation, it wasn't a very good one. For one thing, Abraham already was fabulously wealthy. And, from his response it's clear he wasn't in the slightest bit interested in this offer. He recoils, pretty tactlessly, from Bera's offer. Imagine if you invited someone to dinner and they said, "I wouldn't take a used napkin or a grain of salt from you!" He's not entertaining this idea.

At the same time, think of the *great* compassion Abraham had shown to Bera! Godly compassion doesn't mean we celebrate or accept wickedness. Today, some say that being 'tolerant' means that we must affirm and respect anything anyone does. That's not what tolerance is and it's not what we're called to. We're *still* supposed to recoil from wickedness, while also living out sacrificial compassion even towards undeserving people. This interaction is a great example for us.

Abraham did not want his testimony tarnished by the world. "I want people to know it is *God* who is working through my life, and I won't allow anything in that would tamper with that witness. Not a thread or a sandal strap."

Genesis 14:24 - ²⁴I will take nothing except what the servants have eaten. But as for the share of the men who came with me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre—they can take their share."

The Bible does *not* teach that personal property doesn't exist. Abraham recognizes it, so did Peter when it came to the situation with Ananias and Sapphira. The Bible is *full* of theological principles about your ox and your neighbor's ox. The boundary markers of your property. The shirt on your back is yours. Now, our hearts are to be fueled by compassion and generosity, but one cannot be generous if he has nothing of his own. And we notice here that Abraham had a conviction about this particular pile of loot, but he did not force his allies to obey *his* personal conviction about it. He says, "These other guys have a rightful claim to a reward for their efforts."

So we see that Abraham felt a duty toward God when it came to this financial opportunity, and that duty was to sacrifice it all - to give it all back, and *then* some. But it was *his* duty, and everyone else had to decide on their own. And that's true for you as well. Serving God is meant to cost you something. Through this saga we've seen Abraham give of his love, his strength, his effort, his time, his money, his patience, in worship, in humility. He navigated all of this by being led by the Holy Spirit. That's our calling, too. Abraham said he had made an oath to the Lord. We, as Christians, have sworn ourselves in solemn devotion to *follow* God and serve Him and be about His business as His priestly representatives to this world. We get much more than a lousy t-shirt out of the deal. No need to be tight-fisted or greedy on this side of heaven. Instead, we should walk in the blessing of God, living as a blessing to others, ready to give and receive as God leads us on.