

Focus on the Kingdom

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Melchizedek

by Jim Kunz

Perhaps one of the most mysterious figures in the Bible is Melchizedek. With no introduction he appears suddenly on the scene in Genesis 14:18: "And Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought out bread and wine; now he was priest of God most High." With this brief mention he disappears again. His title, description and briefly described activity leave no clear trail. He is said to be King of Salem, but we are not told where Salem is. Many scholars think it was Jerusalem. He is the first priest named in Scripture, "priest of God most High." But the setting and description of his priesthood are not detailed or enlarged on.

He meets Abram who is returning from a brief, decisive battle. A confederation of rulers had conquered and occupied a portion of Palestine for 12 years, following which the kings who had been subdued rebelled. The same federation of conquering rulers banded together again and put the rebellion down, taking much booty, spoil and many prisoners. These included Abram's nephew, Lot.

Abram quickly gathered his trained men, went in pursuit of the conquerors, and with his small contingent defeated the conquering, allied force. This is described in Genesis 14:1-16. In Genesis 12 Abram was told by God to leave his relatives and country and go to a land He would show him. God promised that He would make him a great nation and that He would bless him. This promise also included an assurance that God would bless those who blessed Abram and curse those who cursed him. Abram's success in putting to flight an army with an inferior force was probably the first

fulfillment of the promise that God would curse those who cursed him (Gen. 14:20).

It is noteworthy that Melchizedek met and blessed Abram on his return. Where this took place is not stated. Melchizedek brought out bread and wine (a royal banquet hosted by a king, Melchizedek, celebrating Abram's victory?). There is no indication, contrary to some, that this represented a Passover ceremony. (Not only did Melchizedek bless Abram, but Abram gave him a tenth of the war booty: Gen. 14:20; Heb. 7:1-2). The clear indication here is that Melchizedek was recognized by Abram as the greater of the two. Abram received Melchizedek's blessing and paid him a tenth of the spoils.

Who was this Melchizedek to whom Abram paid homage? Some commentaries suggest that it might have been Shem. A few religious groups think it was Christ. The Bible does not identify him. He was both a king and a priest. This does not fit the Levitical, Aaronic priesthood. The Levitical priests after the order of Aaron were not kings. The kings of Israel were not priests. Often God communicated with Israelite kings through prophets whose office actually exceeded that of the kings, but Melchizedek was not of this order either.

It was not God's intention to identify Melchizedek's person. This is made clear in Hebrews 7:3, referring to Melchizedek: "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made *like* the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually." Some say this

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Scripture refers to Christ, and assume he preexisted his birth. But Melchizedek was not the Son of God. He was like him. The passage appears to say that he was not born, and that he lives forever. However *The Word Biblical Commentary*, on Hebrews, by William L. Lane, indicates that this is not a proper understanding. Lane renders the passage as follows: “His father, mother, and line of descent are unknown, and there is no record of his birth or of his death, but having been made to resemble the Son of God, he remains a priest continuously” (Vol. 47a, p. 157).

The writer to the Hebrews merely says that the Bible does not give Melchizedek’s genealogy, nor is there a record of when he was born or when he died. The terms “without father, without mother” come from the Greek words *apator* and *amator*. *Apator* does not mean “fatherless,” but “father unknown.” By implication the term *amator* carries the same meaning. In fact Philo uses the term *amator* to refer to Sarah because her mother is not mentioned in the biblical text (p. 166). The Syriac Peshita translation renders Hebrews 7:3: “whose father and mother were not entered in genealogies.”

Our commentary also states, “There is no hint in the argument that unfolds in verses 4-10 that the writer regarded Melchizedek in mythological terms. He presents the royal priest of God Most High as a historical personage in primal history. The silence of Scripture concerning Melchizedek’s parents and family line is stressed by the writer to amplify the concept of the uniqueness of his priesthood...It implies that Melchizedek’s priesthood was not established upon the external circumstances of birth and descent. It was based on the call of God and not on the hereditary process by which the Levitical priesthood was sustained. Without a recorded priestly genealogy, Melchizedek could not have qualified for Levitical priesthood. Nevertheless, this man was priest of God Most High, and Abraham recognized his dignity.”

Now the story of Melchizedek becomes clear. Psalm 110:4 brings it into focus: “The Lord [God the Father] has sworn and will not change his mind, you [Christ] are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Melchizedek’s father, mother, time of birth and death were not important for God’s purpose. What was important was the fact that his priesthood was appointed by God and did not come by inheritance as the Levitical priesthood did. Melchizedek did not take up his priestly service from a predecessor and no successor is listed or indicated. In addition, he occupied the office of king and priest jointly. This is the precedent for Christ’s office in the future Kingdom as King of kings (Rev. 19:16; 17:14) and high priest of God (Heb. 5:5, 10). Christ’s office is not inherited as the kingly and priestly lines in Israel were, but appointed by God.

Why was it necessary to appoint Christ the high priest forever? Hebrews 7:11-14: “Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it people received the law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek and not be designated according to the order of an Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also [the priesthood and the law were only temporary until the seed, Christ, should come, Gal. 3:19, 24-26]. For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning the priests.”

It was necessary to show that there was a high priest of God, Melchizedek, to whom Abraham, the patriarch of the Israelites, gave respect and honor. This took place long before the Levitical priesthood was appointed, and provided a “type” and precedent for the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ. Melchizedek exercised a priestly role on the basis of divine appointment and innate worth. Christ, the fulfillment of that type, has been appointed high

priest, also based on divine appointment and on his incomparable, unparalleled qualification. Melchizedek is brought into the picture to make this important feature of God's plan clear. The Levitical priesthood and the law served only an interim function until Christ and his awesome priestly role could be established.

Melchizedek was a human person. Hebrews 7:6 implies that he did indeed have a genealogy, but it was not connected to the family of Levi. ✧

Did God Have to Die to Save Humanity?

by Charles Hunting

The widely held belief in Jesus as preexistent, eternal, coequal Son of God has carried with it the idea that a single human person, in this case Jesus, would not, if only human, have the value necessary to atone for the sins of the world. The reason offered is that a single person's sacrifice could only atone for the sins of one other man. Hence Jesus had to be God Himself to be the Savior of all mankind. No Scripture is cited for this fundamental proposition; nevertheless the logic is supposed to be unassailable. It has long satisfied its many advocates.

Can human reason legitimately determine the value of a sacrifice? Peter's inspired sermon on the day of Pentecost was quite explicit in its designation of Jesus the *man* as God's appointed offering for humanity. "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man accredited to you by God...just as you know — this man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death" (Acts 2:22, 23). Jude supports God's accreditation of the man Jesus, contrasting God and man, with these words: "to the only God our Savior [the One God of Jewish unitary monotheism], through Jesus Christ our Lord [the human lord *adoni* of Psalm 110:1], be glory,

majesty...before all time and to all the ages" (Jude 25).

"Before all time" he was the Lamb designated for sacrifice "from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8, NIV) in order to bring about the reconciliation of a rebellious creation. Adam, the son of God created from the dust of the ground (Luke 3:38), could have gained immortality but failed. Eve, a special creation from Adam's body, joined Satan in opposition to God.

Then followed the rest of human creation through Adam and Eve until God created through the Virgin Mary the prophesied seed who was to crush the serpent's head. Jesus, referred to as the second Adam by Paul, during his historical life, divested himself of all the royal prerogatives, and "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). This was after having lived a sinless existence entitling him to freedom from the death penalty and the reward of eternal life offered to the first Adam.

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus, though now exalted and sitting at the right hand of his Father, was still referred to as a "**man**" (Acts 2:22). Was it, as some allege, because of the disciples' strict monotheism that they were not ready to hear that *God* had died to save the world? Or is the "death of God" a completely unbiblical concept? God only has immortality: He cannot die.

Surely somewhere along the line the omission of the (contradictory!) notion that God Himself had died would have to be rectified. But we note Luke years later recording Paul's continued proclamation of the *human* Jesus: "God who made the world and all things in it... and made from one, every nation...He Himself gives to all life breath and...determined their appointed times...and set the boundaries of their habitation." This same God, "having overlooked the times of ignorance," now declares to men everywhere to repent, "because he has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a **Man** whom He

appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:24 ff.).

This same promised seed of Eve was to be a prophet of whom Moses said, “I will raise up a prophet from *among their brothers like you* [Moses], and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (see Deut. 18:15-18) These early statements attest to a being whose boundaries are existence within the human family. This precious identity of Jesus as the “Man Messiah” (I Tim. 2:5) was central to the first-century church’s understanding of the faith. Both Peter and Stephen quoted and applied to Jesus this passage from Deuteronomy 18:15 in Acts 3:22 and 7:37.

The stinging accusation of Israel and call to repentance sounded by Peter did strike home, with no record of a protest as to the inadequacy of a human savior, born of a human mother in an earthly location with the rather common Jewish name Jesus.

Hebrews states that Jesus shared in flesh and blood with the rest of us. “He had to be made like his brethren in all things” (Heb. 2:17) that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest, tempted in all things just as we are. Even in his rulership of all nations, as future judge and high priest of the earth, Jesus is kept inside the boundaries of the human family. After carefully detailing his human existence the writer to the Hebrews claims “Jesus Messiah is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever” (Heb. 13:8), sealing his status for all time as a member of the human family, the second Adam and the image of the invisible (One) God, the Father (I Cor. 8:4-6).

Where did the idea originate that Jesus was fully God in addition to being fully man? As others have observed, such a God/man would have little in common with the flesh and blood constitution of ordinary men, the status which the Scriptures claim for him. “He was tested in all points as we are.” It took over four hundred years to formalize the innovative doctrine of the “two natures.” It was not finally settled until the

Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Officially Jesus became God with “impersonal human nature.” Such a person is hardly a human being as so many distinguished scholars have complained.

Viewing Jesus’ final days on earth, would we see anything that would indicate more than the reactions of a completely overwhelmed human being? Facing a monumental battle, without the support of friends and family, bereft of angelic help, he pleaded with his Father to let this cup pass from him and allow a different means of atonement.

His reactions to the thought of the impending terror awaiting him on the cross were those of a very disturbed and distressed human person. He asked his Father to be relieved of the final agony. Where was the calm faith of one who knew he was the eternal God and who could easily handle the ordeal? Why the sweat like great drops of blood? Abandoned at the time of greatest need, without the protection of the cool mental assurance of his Divinity, he left his life in God’s hands. He asked that he be spared the bitter cup of those final moments of torment, moments when even his hope was gone and he paid the final price with the words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). He died as a hopeless sinner. He suffered the abyss of the blackness of doomed humanity that drives men to suicide and asked “Why?” This was a human reaction. Does this sound like the question of one who shared absolute Godhead with God the Father? Or was Jesus after all mortal man?

Other humans have faced equally cruel physical fates. Michael Servetus, slowly roasted over a fire of green sticks, cried out in screaming agony, “Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me!” But he had hope. Jesus, bereft of strength, physical or spiritual, as he carried the burden of the life and salvation of all mankind, was left hopelessly alone. And at the moment of his greatest need it appeared to him as if his Father had turned His back on him. “He became sin,”

and bore that penalty for all of us. Here was the drama of the ages.

The word “awesome” loses its triviality when it describes the deed this tortured human faced in horrifying agony. He accomplished where Adam had failed. His was a trust to the point of death after a perfect life in which all conditions for eternal life had been met. Why did it have to be this way? Jesus did not know *the why*, and we can only speculate as to why one man had to face this ordeal as payment for our sins.

We can know that our acceptance of his sacrifice, along with our belief in his Gospel of the Kingdom, provides the way to eternal life and rulership with him in the Kingdom of the future. It is this final human battle at the cross that demands our admiration, respect and love. It is through Jesus’ supreme deed that we find our peace and security with God even in death. Jesus was not given this option. He faced the abyss, as it seemed, without God, so that we would not have to. All debts were paid and the world was reconciled through the one man.

The New English Bible translation captures the humanity of Jesus as Paul relates the world drama in Romans 5: “Let us exalt in the hope of the divine splendor that is to be ours...For at the very time when we were still powerless, then Christ died for the wicked...Death held sway from Adam to Moses...and Adam foreshadows **the Man** who was to come. But God’s act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam’s wrongdoing. For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many, its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the gift that came to so many by the grace of **the one Man**, Jesus Christ. For if by the wrongdoing of that one man death established its reign, through a single sinner, much more shall those receive in far greater measure God’s grace and his gift of righteousness, live and reign **through the one Man**, Jesus Christ...For as through the disobedience of one man the many were made sinners, so through the obedience **of the one Man** the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:2ff.).

Surely in view of the complete absence of biblical evidence for a “God-Man” we should hesitate before we abandon the Hebrew Bible’s picture, confirmed by the New Testament, of the Messiah as the *human* descendant of David, qualified to be the Son of God not by some imagined “eternal begetting” but by God’s staggering creative event in the womb of Mary. The Father’s miraculous production of His unique Son provides, according to Gabriel, the basis and cause of Jesus’ title, Son of God (Luke 1:35). Gabriel and the inspired canon know nothing of the creedal definitions of Jesus which belong to later centuries and which so many today unconsciously canonize and believe, as though they existed in Bible times. Luke 1:35 defines, against traditional creeds, the reason why Jesus is entitled to be called Son of God. The begetting (coming into existence) of that Son was at a historical moment, not in eternity. ✧

Conversion and New Birth According to Jesus

by Anthony Buzzard

A systematic mistake plagues contemporary attempts to bring the saving Gospel to the public. It is all a question of which Bible texts are placed before the potential convert. You can make the Bible say almost anything if you select your verses in a way which produces only *some* of the evidence — particularly if you omit entirely the *primary* evidence.

Here is how it works. Pick a few verses from Romans (written not to unconverted people but to those who had already heard the Gospel) and you can give the impression that being saved means believing that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead. “Jesus came to do three days work: to die, be buried and rise again” declares a very widely circulated tract offering salvation.

But why would you begin with Paul and Romans? What about Jesus? Was he not the prototype preacher and teacher of salvation and how to obtain it? According to Hebrews 2:3 the “Gospel began to be preached by the Lord Jesus.” It did not begin to be preached by Paul or Peter. Rule number one in our quest for the faith is to begin with Jesus. How did *he* preach salvation? The answer is very clear. He did not come into Galilee and say “Repent and believe that I died for your sins and am going to rise from the dead.” Jesus did say: “Repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:14, 15), but the Gospel in question was positively not at that stage information about his sacrificial death or his resurrection. It was about believing in the Good News (Gospel) pertaining to *the Kingdom of God*.

“Kingdom of God” does not mean the death of a savior on a cross. Kingdom of God does not mean resurrection from the dead. Kingdom of God and resurrection are connected, certainly, in the New Testament’s theological system, but they are never synonyms. “Repent and believe in the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14, 15) is the first recorded imperative, the first commandment of the Lord and Savior. Yet curiously it never gets a mention in tracts offering salvation and almost never in today’s evangelistic campaigns.

Curiously and sadly the Gospel has been truncated, actually deprived of its principal element. Jesus laid the foundation of the Gospel, went about offering salvation, seeking sinners and urging them to be reconciled to God. And his saving tool, during his ministry on earth, was the Gospel/Word/Message about *the Kingdom of God* (Matt. 13:19).

Three independent and corroborative accounts of Jesus’ evangelistic technique are offered us by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Yet these are ignored. Have you ever read a tract which begins by asking “What did Jesus say you have to do to be saved? How did he conduct his mission? What did he say about conversion?”

It may be that there is one exception. Jesus’

encounter with Nicodemus in John 3 gets some mention. From this we gather that we must be “born again.” No one, Jesus asserted, can see or enter the Kingdom of God unless he is first “born again,” or “born from above.” Even this text suffers from popular mishandling when Kingdom of God is given a non-biblical meaning as “heaven.” Jesus did not offer “heaven” to anyone. He offered inheritance of the earth as the reward of the faithful (Matt. 5:5), and promised his followers that they would one day function as royal rulers “upon the earth” (Rev. 5:10). “Heaven” language (“when I get to heaven,” “he has gone home to heaven,” etc.) has a jamming effect on these precious and clear texts. The brain is confused when confronted with the contradictory propositions: “the meek will inherit the earth and rule on the earth” (Matt. 5:5 and Rev. 5:10) and “so and so is going/has gone to heaven.”

“Heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying.” So said the learned professor at Cambridge within recent years (Dr. J.A.T. Robinson, in *In the End God*). But has the church taken up the challenge to see if perhaps he was right? “If you meet some who deny the resurrection and say that when they die their souls go to heaven, do not consider them Christians.” Such was the protest of a Christian spokesman and martyr of the second century (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80).

In those days, it was abundantly clear that the Bible said nothing at all about souls enjoying a post-mortem existence in heaven at the moment of death. Rather it was known, because the Bible had been so clear on the subject, that all the dead went to the realm of death, *Sheol/Hades*, from which only the future collective resurrection of all the faithful dead of all the ages would rescue them and return them to life. It was from the sleep of the dead in the tomb that Jesus rescued Lazarus (John 11:11, 14 — “Lazarus is asleep, Lazarus is dead: I am going to wake him up out of his sleep”). Jesus was nourished on the words of Daniel 12:2 (and 12:13) where the dead are said to be sleeping in

the dust of the ground. That tells you what the dead are doing and where they are doing it. Jesus was instructed in the wise words of Ecclesiastes 9:5: “The dead do not know anything.”

The dead, according to Jesus, are still in the nether world of the dead awaiting their summons to life when the seventh trumpet, the resurrection trumpet at the return of Jesus, sounds its earth-shattering call for the return of dead persons to full-blooded life (I Cor. 15:23, 50-55; Rev. 11:15-18; Matt. 24:31; I Thess. 4:16). That is biblical resurrection. Biblical resurrection is positively not the re-attaching of departed “immortal souls” to a new body. That is not resurrection as the Bible knows it. Biblical resurrection means the return of the whole man who has died to life as a whole, recreated person, equipped at his resurrection with the spiritual body described by Paul in I Corinthians 15:50-55. No one in the Bible ever received an incorruptible, immortal body *at the moment of his death*. Immortalization of human beings will happen only at the return of Jesus to resurrect the dead. Until then the faithful are dead, as are also the unfaithful. Paul expected to gain his crown “at that day,” the day of Christ’s reappearance on earth (II Tim. 4:8).

Following that resurrection destined to happen at the future reappearance of Jesus (I Cor 15:23) the Kingdom of God will be reestablished in Jerusalem and the world will be under new management. Jesus will be the first successful world-governor (Messiah means exactly that — king of the world under God’s authority). In those wonderful days, the world will indeed be one people under One God (Zech. 14:9), though still differentiated by national groups (Isa. 19:18-25), and they will be truly “under God.” To say that any nation is now “under God” is a considerable hyperbole, not supported by actual fact. But the Gospel of the Kingdom, the first item on the agenda of Jesus’ and apostolic evangelism, sets before the convert a glorious future as immortal assistant in the sound management of world affairs in company

with the returned Jesus. Being a Christian is an invitation to training under test conditions in the “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) with a view to administrative office with Jesus in the “future inhabited earth about which we speak” (Heb. 2:5).

The germ of the Christian’s glorious future is the seed sown in the heart. And the seed is defined by Jesus as “the Gospel/Word about the Kingdom of God” (Matt. 13:19; see also I Pet. 1:23-25; James 1:18; I John 3:9; Gal. 4:28, 29). Satan works hard and long to prevent that seed Message from taking root in your heart. He well knows that it contains the spark of life forever! (Luke 8:12). God’s creative Gospel through Jesus initiates the saving process which will be complete in the future. We are now “nearer to salvation than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11).

The Gospel about the Kingdom sets before the believer a summons to wholehearted action, (including baptism for the remission of sins, Acts 8:12), a reorientation to the bright new future of the Kingdom of God coming *from* heaven when Jesus returns. Repentance means turning back to the Covenant by embracing God’s grand scheme for the immortalization of mortal man and the rescue of the world from Satan’s present domination. ☩

A list of our literature on biblical topics is available from Restoration Fellowship. Contact us, please, by e-mail at anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com, or by letter.

Your Comments

“The information on your website has really made reading the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) exciting and meaningful. I am doing my own research to verify if what you say about the relationship between the Abrahamic Covenant and the coming Kingdom is true. So far what I have discovered verifies that; however it is difficult to reject what I have been taught all my life.”

— Washington