



## Melchizedek

Melchizedek appears three times in the bible. As a historical figure, his story is told in Genesis 14, where he meets with Abraham (then known as Abram) shortly after the rescue of Lot. He is referred to in psalm 110, and reappears in Hebrews 5-7, where the writer is likening him to the role of Jesus as High Priest.

In Genesis, Melchizedek can be seen as a prefiguring of Jesus (that is, not Jesus himself, but someone whose life points us towards Jesus in a prophetic way). There are several reasons for this:

- Melchizedek's name means 'king of righteousness'
- He is the king of Salem (the city that would eventually become Jerusalem during the time of David). Salem is derived from the word for 'peace', so Melchizedek is also described as 'king of peace'.
- Melchizedek is presented with no genealogy. In Jewish tradition, this is taken to be an indicator of a prefiguring of Christ.
- Abraham offers Melchizedek a tenth of what he has – this was the offering made to a king, but also is the offering required by God.
- He was both king and priest. Within Israel, these positions were not filled by the same person, but in Christ, they are.

Psalms 110 has been regarded as a Messianic psalm by the Jews since before the time of Jesus. Whilst it has the nature of a coronation psalm (probably written for Solomon's coronation), it also points ahead to the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus. The creation of the Aaronic priesthood in Exodus marks a clear division between the leadership of the nation (Moses) and the priesthood (Aaron and the Levites). But Melchizedek pre-dates this division – he was both priest and king, and so of a greater significance than Aaron and the Aaronic line. The Messiah is no ordinary priest – like Melchizedek, he is the king-priest.

The writer of Hebrews summarises many of the points above in Hebrews 7:1-10, before going on to point out the deficiencies of the Aaronic priesthood (the need to obtain perfection through the law, the constant need for sacrifice) and the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood. He reminds us that Jesus was not a Levite (he was descended from Judah), and neither was Melchizedek (being around three generations earlier, before even the birth of Levi's grandfather Isaac). He finishes the comparison by stressing the virtues of this new priestly order, and its perfection in Jesus (v26-28).

Melchizedek reminds us that the priesthood is not limited to the legalistic institution established in the Torah. Nor is it intended to exist as a self-sufficient system, removed from the wider world. Instead, in Melchizedek, we see the proper union of authority and spirituality that will ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus, and echoed in us – 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...' (1 Peter 2:9)





## Zadok

The story of Zadok overlaps with the line of Eli. During David's reign, both Zadok and Abiathar held the role of priest. Abiathar, as we have seen, was a descendant of Ithamar, and Zadok was of the family of Eleazar. His name means 'righteousness', from the same root as Melchizedek.

Zadok is first mentioned in 2 Samuel 8:17, in the list of David's officials; we can also find his name listed in the descendants of Levi (through Eleazar) in 1 Chronicles 6:8. We then hear nothing about him during the key events of David's early reign, including the affair with Bathsheba and Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar. David's handling of the fall-out from this event leads to virtual civil war as Absalom rises to popular prominence, and David decides to flee Jerusalem. It is during this difficult time that Zadok reappears.

As David leaves the city, Zadok and Abiathar accompany him, bringing the ark of the covenant; but David sends both priests and the ark back to Jerusalem – as Eli's sons discovered, the presence of the ark doesn't equate to the presence of God, and David realises that this potent symbol should remain at the heart of the nation, no matter who the king is. However, this also allowed Zadok to act as an insider for David, and he was able to pass messages to the king via his son, Ahimaaz (17:15-16). Eventually, with some assistance from this miniature guerrilla army, David is returned to the throne, and things settle down until the end of his life.

As with Abiathar, Zadok has a key role to play during Adonijah's attempted coup. When David's fourth son attempts to take control of the kingdom towards the end of David's life, it is Zadok that David sends to lead the coronation of his chosen son, Solomon (possibly making use of David's psalm 110, which refers to Melchizedek).

Finally, we see Zadok's son (or possibly grandson) Azariah established as the high priest of Solomon's administration. Zadok's loyalty to David meant that he had remained as priest throughout David's reign, and through Azariah, his line would endure until the time of the Maccabean revolt in 167BC (during the gap between Malachi and the New Testament). From this point on, the priesthood became a political office.

There are two other interesting references to Zadok. His descendants appear in Ezekiel's vision of the temple (Ezekiel 40-48), where they are used as an example of the faithful priesthood. It is also possible that the Zadok listed in 1 Chronicles 12 as a 'brave young warrior' and officer within the tribe of Levi shortly before David takes on the kingdom. If so, he may well have given up a promising career in the army to become David's priest!

Zadok teaches us that loyalty is important. Throughout his life, Zadok serves David as a warrior, a priest, spy, advisor, and high priest. In so doing, he ensures that his line will continue for almost 1000 years, through the division of the kingdom, wars, exile and the restoration – Ezra traces his line back through Zadok. His commitment to God's anointed leaders, rather than the ascendant powers of the day (in Saul, Absalom and Adonijah) marks him out as an example of the faithful high priest.

