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Genesis 14



Genesis - Steve Gregg

In Genesis 14, a war erupted between four kings and five kings in the region of the Dead Sea, including the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. During the war, Abram's nephew, Lot, was taken captive, prompting Abram to mobilize his own servants to pursue and defeat the captors. Through the use of the term "brother" to refer to relatives like Lot, the author delves into the significance of Melchizedek; recognized as a spiritual authority, he is introduced as the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High. By connecting Melchizedek to the Messianic line, the author establishes a connection between Melchizedek and Jesus, highlighting Jesus' unique contributions to the theology of Christianity.

Transcript

Okay, we come to a really neat chapter, Genesis chapter 14. It's really neat, especially because of the information at the end of it. This will be the first reference to war in the Bible, although it may not be the first war.

We know that before the flood, the earth was filled with violence, and that violence could have included war, but we have not read of any specific wars until now. It came to pass in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Ariak, king of Elessar, Ketelamer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of nations, that they made war with Bera, the king of Sodom, Irshad, the king of Gomorrah, Shinad, king of Adma, Shemegir, king of Zeboan, and the king of Bela, that is Zoar. All these joined together in the valley of Sidim, that is the salt city.

Now that's where the Dead Sea is today. There's a battle down there. In fact, by the way, the Dead Sea is larger than it used to be, and the region that this took place could easily be underwater now, because the southern... Well, you know, the Dead Sea is fed by the River Jordan, but there's no outlet, so it just depends on evaporation to lose its volume.

But water comes in faster than it evaporates, so the lake, the Dead Sea, grows, it spreads. And the southern half, as I understand it, the southern half of the Dead Sea is just a few feet deep, and the northern half is very deep. It's like the original lake is the northern half.

But it seems like the sea has crept out southward, so that there's a shallow end of it. And some people think that Sodom and Gomorrah were once where that is now. We are told that this region was the Salt Sea region, so we know that's the general area where they used to be.

It would be interesting if God, after he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire, actually just caused them to be totally covered over with a sea, like Atlantis or something. You know, they just disappeared forever, the memory of them except in Scripture. Anyway, we have these four kings mentioned in verse 1, making war against five kings in the south.

It says, all these joined together in the Valley of Sidim, that is the Salt Sea, twelve years they served Ketelamer. That is, the five kings of the south, including Sodom and Gomorrah and their confederates, had served Ketelamer for twelve years. And in the thirteenth year they had rebelled.

They got tired of paying tribute to him. So he had apparently conquered them at some earlier time, and they served him dutifully, maybe grudgingly, for twelve years. Then they finally staged a rebellion in the thirteenth year.

It took him a while to gather his troops together with his confederates. He had three fellow kings that decided to join with him. And in the fourteenth year, Ketelamer, with the kings that were with him, came and attacked the Rephaim in Asheroth, Carnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Sheba-Kiriathim, and the Horites in their mountains of Seir, as far as El-Paran, which is by the wilderness.

Now, most of these nations, of course, are not significant to us. They don't correspond to any modern nations. But they were ancient nations, probably between Ketelamer's home and the region of the Salt Sea, where he was coming down to put down her dying.

No doubt this is why it took him so long to get there, because they rebelled in the thirteenth year, and he came down in the fourteenth year. He had a lot of people he wanted to conquer or fight in between where he was and where he was going. Perhaps the most important people are the ones named in verse 6 of the Horites in their mountain of Seir.

These were the people that the Edomites, Esau's offspring, later conquered and captured Mount Seir. So the Horites were to Esau's descendants what the Canaanites were to Jacob's descendants. Jacob and Esau, their descendants were great nations, and the Edomites from Esau conquered the Horites.

The Israelites from Jacob conquered the Canaanites. But the Horites at this point in time were apparently conquered by Ketelamer also and his three confederates. Then they turned back and came to En Mishpat, that is Kedesh, and attacked all the country of the

Amalekites and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazon Tamar.

Now I'm not sure why Ketelamer was fighting all these people who do not seem to be the people who rebelled against him. But maybe there's more than is stated here. Maybe the five kings to the south had some kind of oversight over these other nations in the region under Ketelamer's administration.

And maybe the whole region rebelled at the same time. We're not really told specifically that this war is involving these other nations as well. But verse 8 says, So that was a big battle.

When we talk about kings, they may have been just the little chieftains of a tent village. We're talking about Arabs here, you know, out in the desert. But some of them had buildings, of course.

We know Sodom and Gomorrah were walled cities. But some of these areas that are said to have kings, they might just be sheiks of the rather extended clans. It's hard to say in these ancient times how big these groups were.

Now the valley of Sidim was full of asphalt pits, or tar pits. And the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled. Some fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains.

Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions and went their way. They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. And if verse 12 had not been there, then we would have never had this chapter in all likelihood.

There's not much reason why Abram would have gotten involved in this particular squirmish, if not for the fact that he had a relative who was taken as a captive. Lot was near Sodom at this time. And when Ketel Amor and his friends took Sodom, they took Lot as a captive as well, and his family, apparently.

So that's going to involve Abram. It says in verse 13, Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the Terebinth trees of Mamre, or the plains of Mamre, the Amorite, the brother of Eshgal, and the brother of Einar, and they were allies with Abram. Now, I mentioned this is the first time the word Hebrew is used.

Hebrew is thought to be etymologically related to the name Eber, which we read of in both Genesis chapter 10 and Genesis chapter 11. Eber was the great-grandson of Shem, and was an ancestor also of Terah and of Abram. So the people of Eber might have first been called Eberites, perhaps, and that word might have just evolved into Hebrew.

There are ancient records from that period of time in other parts of the region, not in Palestine so much, of people who are called the Heberu, H-A-B-I-R-U, the Heberu. The Egyptian hieroglyphics often make reference to the Heberu, and there have been some

Christians who thought, perhaps, the Heberu are the same as the Hebrew. It sounds very similar, though that is undecided, it's disputed.

It would be nice if they were, because then we would have confirmation specifically of the Hebrews in Egypt at the later time when the Bible says they were there. And they may be. Maybe the Heberu are the Hebrews.

It's hard to say whether the etymology is the same. Some scholars believe, perhaps most now, think that the term Heberu just means nomadic servants or something like that. So it might not be a racial designation at all.

So Abram is told about his nephew being kidnapped. Now, when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, verse 14, he armed his 318 trained servants who were born in his own house, and he went in pursuit as far as Dan. Now, Abram had received servants and camels and donkeys and so forth from Pharaoh as gifts when he went down there and when Pharaoh took Sarai into his harem.

And so Abram had lots of servants he'd received from Pharaoh, but these are servants that were born in his house. These are not those servants. He had these 318 earlier.

Probably he only armed them and not the others because it says they were trained servants. Trained for what? I don't know. Were they trained to watch sheep? That's what Abram mostly did.

Or had he trained them militarily? Because in those days it was kind of every man for himself. I mean, you've got wandering Bedouin tribes that might just want to sack your property and take your women and so forth. It may be that everyone who had enough money and servants had some servants who were trained in defense and had a cache of weapons on hand too.

It would seem they need weapons. We don't read of Abram going and getting weapons from somewhere else. It seems like they had weapons on hand, servants who were trained for this kind of thing.

And they were born in his household, so they'd be like loyal, lifetime servants. He didn't arm apparently the servants he had acquired other places. Maybe they were too new.

He couldn't count on their loyalty, but these home-born servants were like family members. So he had like a big family and he had his confederates. Which would be Mamre, Eshgal, and Einar.

And we don't know how many they had. So there could have been a few thousand folks here going off to battle. And it says he went in pursuit as far as Dan.

Now Dan is very far to the north of Israel. In fact, it's almost out of the country. In fact,

the expression from Dan to Beersheba became an expression later in scripture for basically just the whole land of Israel.

From Dan to Beersheba meant the whole land of Israel. Beersheba in the south, Dan in the north. One problem with the mention of Dan here is that it wasn't called Dan in Abram's day.

But that's not a problem in that Moses could have put that modern name for an older name that was there originally. But Moses, it wasn't called Dan in Moses' day either. This land was called Laish in the days of Moses and Abram.

That is town. And later in the book of Judges, chapter 18 and verse 29, we find that some people from the tribe of Dan renamed that city from Laish to Dan. Which means after Moses' lifetime.

And so the reference to Dan by that name suggests a time after Moses. And therefore it's been suggested that Moses couldn't have written this. Well, there are a couple of ways that could be resolved.

One is, of course, it could be a different Dan. There are other towns that have Dan in their name, hyphenated names. And it might be a different Dan that it has in mind.

But in all likelihood, it's probably Laish it's talking about. And that some later, you know, custodian of Moses' work updated Laish to Dan because that's what people then knew it as. In other words, it gave the corresponding name of a later generation.

To say that Moses wrote the book of Genesis doesn't mean that every word as it stands right now had to come from his pen. It means that he's the substantial authority behind it and the author who put it together. But later generations might have updated statements.

For example, later on when it talks about the kings of Edom, there's a parenthesis put in there that says, these all reigned before there were any kings in Israel. Well, if Moses wrote that, there weren't any kings in Israel on Moses' day either. But it sounds like somebody living after the kings of Israel had existed inserted the statement, these reigned in Edom before there were any kings in Israel.

So there are times when something can be added to the book of Genesis by a later hand without altering the fact that it's substantially the work of Moses. And so Dan, I take this to be the Dan that was later so called, which is the northern extremity of Israel. Now, Abram had a strategy against these kings.

Notice these kings were, there were four kings with their armies and they had just conquered five kings, so they're pretty powerful. On the other hand, they've lost some blood in the battle. I mean, they've had four kings fighting against five kings.

The battle's over now and probably they'd had some casualties. It might be a relatively ragtag group of victors who are on their way home and they're not expecting to be attacked. As far as they know, they've taken out everyone that's a threat to them.

They don't know about Abram and his friends. So Abram comes with fresh troops, servants and such, and he divides his forces against them by night. And he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Danascus.

So way up into Syria, Abram pursued them. He caught them by surprise at night. Now, we've got to figure that Ketel Amor and his guys, they thought the war was over.

They'd conquered their enemies. They now had captives in bonds. They're leading home into slavery.

They're taking it easy now. They're tired. They're off guard.

It's night. They're probably sleeping. And then they get pounced on by this group of probably a few thousand folks with Abram.

And they are taken by surprise and they flee and they get pursued and finally get defeated by Abram and his friends. It says, verse 16, So he brought back all the goods and brought back his brother Lot and his goods as well as the women and the people. Now, notice here Lot is called his brother again.

So also in chapter 13. This is just a reminder that in the Bible, the word brother, like the word father, is used considerably more loosely than we use it. A brother wasn't necessarily always a sibling.

A brother clearly could be a relative because Lot was Abram's relative, a nephew, but he's called his brother in chapter 13, in verse 8, and now again in chapter 14, verse 16. Now verse 17 says, And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Sheba, that is the king's valley, after his return from the defeat of Ketelamer and the kings who were with him. Then Melchizedek, the king of Salem, brought out bread and wine.

He was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him. He blessed Abram and said, Blessed be Abram, the God of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hands.

And he gave him a tithe of all. That is, Abram gave Melchizedek a tithe of everything, a tenth of the spoils. Now the king of Sodom, who had also showed up, came to Abram and said, Give me the persons and take the goods for yourself.

That is, just give me my citizens back and you can keep all the spoils as your reward for rescuing us. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to the Lord, Yahweh, God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing from

a thread to the sandal strap, and I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich, except only what the young men have eaten and the portion of the men who went with me, Einar, Eshgal, and Mamre. Let them take their portion.

So he's saying, I'm not going to take anything from you. Now my confederates, I'll let them, they can take some of the spoils. And as far as my young men, I just want, I'm not going to repay you for what they ate.

You know, in the course of the battle, they consumed some goods, and I'm not going to give you back those. But nothing else. I don't want you to give me even so much as a sandal strap, because I don't want you to ever be able to say that you're the one who made me rich.

And the king of Sodom could possibly have said such a thing if he had taken all the spoils of the battle. There must have been a lot. Abram would have probably been much wealthier than he already was.

And then Sodom, people of Sodom could say, well yeah, he's wealthy, no big deal. We made him rich. He's got all our stuff.

And then God wouldn't really get the credit for the blessings that Abram had. So he refused to take it from Sodom. By the way, the refusal to accept goods from pagans seems to also become the policy of early Christian ministers.

Because in the book of 3 John, a very short book at the end of the New Testament, John is talking about traveling ministers who come, and he's writing to his friend Gaius, who has been very hospitable to these ministers. And he said in verses 5 through 7, Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well.

Because they went forth for his namesake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. That is to say, the brethren, when they go out on the mission field, they don't take stuff from the non-Christians. And therefore, it's good that the Christians support them.

And so he's saying, Gaius, you've been doing well to support them and help them along because they have a policy. They won't take things from heathens. And so Abram seemed to have that same conviction here.

Because then the heathen could say they made them rich. Or that their success is not due to God, but to the money that they gave. I heard a story that I believe is true about Chuck Smith in the early days of the Jesus movement, that a very wealthy man had a son who was, his life was being destroyed on drugs, and that young man came to Calvary Chapel in the early days of the Jesus movement when lots of hippies and drug

addicts were getting saved.

And the son was delivered from drugs and became a Christian and didn't use drugs anymore. His life was redeemed. And from what I understand, the father of this boy was so grateful that he came to Chuck Smith and offered to make a million dollar donation to Calvary Chapel.

And I'm not sure this story is true, but I think it is. And Chuck turned it down. Because I think the man was not a Christian.

And he just didn't think that would be honoring to God to accept the money from a non-Christian source. And that would be a bit like Abram 2. He says, I don't want you to be able to say that our success is not from the Lord, but from you. We're going to keep this as a matter of... You can't explain my success by your own gifts to me.

Now, the more important part of this chapter, in fact, the very most important part of this chapter is, of course, the little segment about Melchizedek. And, you know, the great mystery is, who is Melchizedek? And a few things are said about him to answer that question. But even they have not solved the controversy that does exist even among Christians about who Melchizedek is.

It says in verse 18, Melchizedek was the king of Salem. And the name Salem is thought by many to be short for Jerusalem. Now, Salem is really the word shalom in Hebrew.

And the city of Jerusalem, Yerushalom, means the city of peace. Because shalom means peace. But there are times in the Old Testament, not very many, at least one or two, where Jerusalem's name is shortened to Salem.

And therefore, some people think that this man was the king of the city of Jerusalem. And it's just referred to as Salem here. There is a bit of a problem with that, because Jerusalem was a Jebusite city, and the Jebusites were pagan Canaanites.

And therefore, he would be a pagan Canaanite king if he was the king of Jerusalem. But we'll leave that to the side for the moment. We're also told he was a priest of the Most High God, or God Most High.

God Most High clearly is Yahweh. As Abram makes clear in verse 22, I've lifted my hand to Yahweh, God Most High. He's the same God.

But where did a priest of God come from? There were no priests. There was no religion. God didn't have a formal religion with ordained clergy and stuff.

He just had one man, Abram, wandering around the desert. There was no religious, there was no temple, there was no altar, except the ones that Abram built. There was no priesthood somewhere that was serving God.

How could this be? How could it be that a king of Jerusalem, a pagan city, would be said to be a priest of the true God? The mystery is deep. And then, Melchizedek blessed Abram and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High who has delivered you, your enemies, into your hands. Now, he gave a blessing to Abram and he blessed him in the name of God Most High.

In the Hebrew, that's El Elyon. It's only used in this story, this term. El Elyon.

And it literally means God, El. Elyon means Most High. So, God the Most High.

Or the King James says the Most High God. But, it's the same. What's interesting, though, is that Abram probably had never heard this term for God before.

In the book, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, Don Richardson brings this story up at the beginning. He was a veteran missionary. And his book is saying that God has revealed himself to heathens outside of the Biblical authors and things like that, but sometimes by other names.

And he believes that sometimes when missionaries go to a country, or to a tribe or something, and they find that these people already have in their religion the concept of a supreme God above all the other gods, one who made everything, that Christians should exploit that and just say, well, that's our God. And he may be right. We know that when Paul went to Athens, that he said, I saw a shrine in your city to an unknown God, and that's the God I came to tell you about.

The one that you are ignorantly worshipping. He says, the God you are ignorantly worshipping is the one I'm here to tell you about. In other words, he's saying, when you are worshipping at that shrine to the unknown God, you're worshipping the God that I'm talking to you about.

It's like Paul recognized that people who didn't even know Yahweh, didn't know the name of Jesus, might be worshipping a God who turns out to be the same God. This is why many people have raised the question, missionaries included, is Allah of Islam the same as Yahweh? And most Christians would certainly say no, because Allah has characteristics that are not the same as those of Yahweh. But we could say, well, is Allah perhaps a confused vision of Yahweh? I mean, if Allah is the one true God, according to Islam, the one who made everything, and the one who is sovereign, then in a sense he does, in their theology, stands in the place where Yahweh stands in Christian theology.

And so, some would say, I'm not sure about Don Richardson, I think he probably would say, you know, missionaries of Islam should recognize that. That Allah is simply the Arabic word for God. And we have, we know who God is.

And they may have a befuddled understanding of who he is. But, say, you know, the God you worship, that's the God we're here to tell you about. We know more about him than

you do.

We can correct you about some things from this too. That's what Paul did with the Athenians, this unknown God that you're worshiping. He's the God I'm here to preach to, Paul said.

Now, what's interesting here is that Abram heard this man, Melchizedek, use the term El Elyon as a reference to God. In all likelihood, Abram had never heard that term before. In the Bible, we haven't heard it before.

God had been known as Yahweh, been sometimes called Elohim, and sometimes Yahweh Elohim. But El Elyon? Is this the same God? Well, Abram recognized it as the same God and even adopted that name in his own words here in verse 22, where Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted my hand to Yahweh, El Elyon, the possessor of heaven and earth, which is exactly how Melchizedek had spoken of God. And what Don Richardson is saying is this, he calls this the Melchizedek factor, that when missionaries meet people who know the real God but by a different name, you know, recognize it's the same God.

That's what he's saying. And that's what he says Abram did here. But Don Richardson is assuming that Melchizedek is just a leader of some other religion, some king in Palestine.

And I have a different opinion about who Melchizedek is, although I'm not sure that I would disagree with his conclusion about recognizing that the real God might have revealed himself to other nations without much clarity, and they may actually be worshiping the real God without knowing enough about him. In any case, we also see that Abram gave Melchizedek a tithe of all. This is the first time that we read of a tithe.

The word tithe means a tenth. And twice in the Old Testament we read of patriarchs giving or offering a tithe of all they have to God. Here we have Abram giving a tithe to Melchizedek.

Later on, Jacob, when he sees the dream of Jacob's ladder, he says, God, if you bring me safely back to my father's house, I'll give a tenth of everything to you. So a tenth seemed to be a percentage that some of the patriarchs felt like was a decent amount to give to God. Now, whether there was some revelation from God that he wanted a tenth, specifically a tenth, or not, we don't know.

We have no evidence that God had ever revealed this to Abram. God has only given Abram a few encounters, and we don't know that he talked about how much money God wanted from him. But Abram might have intuitively known it.

That could have been kind of typical of the taxes a king would charge. Because at a later date, in 1 Samuel 8, when the people of Israel asked Samuel, give us a king, God said, will you tell them what the king's going to do? He's going to take 10% of their wages, and he's going to use it to support his administration. In other words, apparently 10%

was the normal taxation that a king would charge to his subjects.

And so Abram, simply acknowledging that God is his king, decided he'd give that amount to God, sort of like a man would give taxes to his king. And Jacob may have been guided by the same principle. We don't have any evidence that God had given any revelation of any duty about this.

Now, in the Law of Moses, much later, we find that God ordained that the Levites should be supported with a tithe. This was also an offering to the king. God was the king.

There was no king to support other than God, and the Levites were God's representatives who were doing his work, so a gift to God was given to the Levites for their support. And it was like the same amount that a king would get. So this is the tithing thing.

Now, by the way, there is no command prior to the law that people should tithe or give 10%. We find Abram and Jacob incidentally doing this, but we don't have any reason to believe they practiced it regularly. For example, we don't read of Abram on any other occasion taking a tenth of his harvest or his sheep or whatever, and we don't know that he ever met Melchizedek on another occasion.

On this occasion, what he gave was a tithe of the spoils of battle. This wasn't Abram's income. This was the spoils that he shared with Melchizedek.

And so we don't know that this really represents a habit that Abram had of tithing. We do see that on this occasion he gave an honorary tenth to Melchizedek in recognizing him as God's representative. Now, that's all we really hear about Melchizedek.

The scene shifts in verse 21 back to the king of Sodom, and the rest of the conversation is between Abram and Sodom, and Melchizedek is gone. I mean, he's just gone from the narrative. So we have three verses about Melchizedek, and no explanation of who he is except he's the king of Salem, but that's even obscure.

Priest of the Most High God is even more obscure. Now, the Jews have a tradition that Melchizedek was Shem, Shem the son of Noah, the middle son. If this is true, then Shem would have probably been the oldest living man.

Shem lived 600 years, I believe, and he was still alive at this time. And so Abram might have encountered him. Now, Abram was nine generations removed from Shem.

I mean, that's how long people sometimes live. You can live to see a great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather, Shem. But you see, Shem would not only be an old man, he would be the oldest man on earth.

Everyone older than him had been wiped out in the flood. Noah was dead by this time.

Japheth was the older brother.

He might have been dead by this time. I forget how long Japheth, I don't think we know how long Japheth lived. Ham, I don't know, Ham could have been alive.

But the point is, this is one of the patriarchs. This is one of the survivors of the flood if it is Shem. And Shem would then perhaps be recognized as a godly man, maybe a king, or at least somebody to reverence.

But I don't think it's Shem. Shem is just the best guess that the Jews make because they have to guess something. But the New Testament gives us information that goes beyond guessing.

And actually gives us the revelation from God about who Melchizedek is. But since the Jews have to make him out to be somebody and have to explain the strange phenomena of Abram's instant recognition of this man as his superior, even allowing this man to change the way he spoke of God, even borrowing a new name for God. Abram could have said, now listen Melchizedek, I'm the guy that God chose.

God is Yahweh. I don't know who this El Elyon is you're talking about here, but I'm God's man. I'm the real God.

Elohim is Yahweh, that's my God. You might call your little tribal deity El Elyon if you want to, but I'm going to use the name of my God. But instead Abram took the name El Elyon in his speech.

He said, I've looked at my hand, it means I've made an oath to El Elyon, Yahweh. He combined the names. So he recognized spiritual authority in this man, Melchizedek.

But like I say, he appears and he disappears and you never hear from him again. Now, you do hear about him again in the Bible a little later, like a thousand years later. Really, in Psalm 110, Abram lived 2,000 years before Christ.

David lived 1,000 years before Christ. So this was literally 1,000 years after the encounter between Abram and Melchizedek. We have another mention of him in Scripture.

And an amazing one, really, when you think about it, because of its content. In Psalm 110, the second reference to Melchizedek in the Bible is Psalm 110, verse 4. Where David said, According to the order of Melchizedek. Now, this is a Psalm about the Messiah.

The Jews understood that and Jesus acknowledged it when he quoted verse 1. Actually, Psalm 110 is the chapter of the Bible, of the Old Testament, that is quoted most often in the New Testament. No other chapter of the Old Testament is quoted as frequently in

the New Testament as Psalm 110. But the quotations are usually from verse 1. The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, Why did David call the Messiah his Lord? Which Jesus and the Pharisees both agreed that the second word Lord in the passage, verse 1, is the Messiah. David calls him my Lord. But more than that, with reference to the Lord, the Messiah, Yahweh has sworn and said to the Messiah, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Now, think of how strange this is. First of all, David lived in a time where there was already a priesthood that was not the order of Melchizedek. It was a priesthood that Moses had established.

God had established through Moses, through Moses' brother Aaron. There was the Aaronic Priesthood. This was the only priesthood God had ever authorized since the days of the Exodus.

David was a Jew of the Jewish religion. They had a tabernacle. They had priests.

They had the whole religious system. But David says, Messiah is going to be a priest of a different order. But there was no other order that David had ever known of.

I mean, this had to be by direct revelation. And then he would say, according to the order of Melchizedek is even stranger, because little is known about Melchizedek. What did David even know about Melchizedek? All he had was those three verses in Genesis, and what do we know? A guy meets Abram.

Abram gives him ten percent. That's about it. A blessing is exchanged.

Why did David think Melchizedek was so significant? Significant enough to make him, as it were, the founder of a new order of priests, of which the Messiah would be a part. Well, David doesn't explain that. I think that reference in Psalm 110, verse 4, is one of the best evidences of the inspiration of Scripture there is, because David would never have ever thought anything about Melchizedek or another priesthood unless God just gave it to him.

I mean, especially since he was right. If he was wrong, then it might just have been a harebrained idea. But in the book of Hebrews, we skip another thousand years over from David's time to the time of Christ or the apostles.

So we have three references to Melchizedek in the Bible at thousand-year intervals. And so a thousand years after David and two thousand years after Melchizedek's time, the writer of Hebrews writes a book where he is fascinated with this character. And he first mentions him.

He almost gets into talking about him in chapter 5. He said that of Jesus in Hebrews 5, 9, Speaking of Jesus, he says, Having been perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, called by God as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Actually, he's quoted Psalm 110 verse 4 a few verses earlier in verse 6, where it says, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. So now the writer of Hebrews says, That's Jesus that's talking about.

He's the one who's a priest after the order of Melchizedek. And then in verse 11, the writer of Hebrews says this. He says, Of whom, meaning Melchizedek, we have much to say and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

And then he goes off into a bit of a complaint about his readers being immature and dull. And he doesn't get back to Melchizedek for quite a while. All through chapter 6, he avoids them until the end.

Chapter 5 verse 12 through most of chapter 6 is a complaint about the readers being too dull to understand this kind of thing. He says, I'd like to tell you more about Melchizedek, but you know, it's deep stuff. You're babes.

You need milk and this is meat. This is solid food here we're talking about. And so he rags on a little bit there.

And then he comes back to the subject. And he says, in verse 20, at the end of chapter 6, Where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become high priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. Now, he's come full circle back to mention Jesus as the priest after the order of Melchizedek, after he's been off topic for a while.

But once he's come back, he decides he's going to go into it after all. Now, in chapter 5, he said, I'd like to say more about this, but I don't think I can trust you guys with the information. And after he's ragged on for a while, he says, well, now that I've got you all stirred up, maybe you'll grow up and I can give you this information.

Let me go ahead and tell you what I was going to say about it. And he says in verse 1 of chapter 7, For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, that's Elion of course, who met Abram returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abram gave a tenth part of all. Now, he has just summarized everything we know from Genesis about Melchizedek.

We know his name. We know he's the king of Salem. We know he's the priest of the Most High God.

He met Abram on that particular occasion. He blessed Abram and Abram gave him a tenth. That's the whole, everything.

And from that, the writer of Hebrews, the consummate Bible teacher, draws amazing things. He says, let's start with the definition of his name. What does Melchizedek mean? Melchizedek, the name means king of righteousness.

He says, so first of all, he's being translated king of righteousness. That's our first clue. Then also, king of Salem, meaning king of peace.

Now, the writer of Hebrews says, when it says he's king of Salem, it doesn't mean he's the king of the city of Jerusalem, the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. Genesis tells us he's the king of Shalom, the king of peace. His name itself means king of righteousness, so whoever this guy is, he's the king of righteousness and the king of peace.

What else do we know about him? Well, verse 3 says, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest continually. Now, he says that Melchizedek is without father, without mother, without genealogy. Now, when it says without father, without mother, without beginning of days or end of days, it almost sounds like he just kind of popped in and popped out.

He didn't grow up here. He wasn't born. He didn't die.

He didn't have ancestors. Now, I'll tell you right now, there's controversy among Christians about the interpretation of what Hebrews is saying. Many Christian scholars, perhaps most, seem to think Melchizedek was an ordinary man.

Could have been Shem, could have been some other king of Jerusalem, but he was an ordinary man, but he is an interesting type of Christ. And the writer of Hebrews is finding interesting ways to point out parallels between Melchizedek and Christ. The other view, of course, is that he is Christ.

In the Old Testament we find, and not least in Genesis, numerous theophanies. A theophany is an appearance of God or Christ before his incarnation in some form, often a human form. We'll find other theophanies in Genesis, including God appearing to Abraham as a human form in Genesis 18, or, much later, wrestling all night with Jacob and crippling him at the end of that time.

These are instances which are undisputable theophanies, where God appeared in a human form. Now, Melchizedek is apparently not undisputable because some scholars think he's not a theophany, they think he's just a man who lived, and he's a type of Christ, and there's some lessons to be learned from him. But the way the writer of Hebrews talks, he can't be a type of Christ, he's got to be Christ.

Now, those who say he's just an ordinary man, they say, well, you can't take this wording too literally, where it says he didn't have a father or mother, or a beginning of days or end of life. Because all that the writer is saying here is that the record of who his parents

were is not given to us. His genealogy is unknown to us.

We don't have a record of his birth or his death. And I say, well, I guess maybe it could mean that, but it doesn't say that. He could say that if he wanted to say that, but it wouldn't be that significant.

To say we don't know who his father and mother were, we don't know when he was born or died, there's a lot of people in the Bible we don't know when they were born or died, but that's hardly worth mentioning. I believe that this is saying that he has an eternal existence, and the end of the verse makes it very clear. He says, Made like the Son of God, he remains a priest continually.

That's present tense. The writer of Hebrews says, at this very moment, he was writing, of course, 2,000 years ago now, but he's writing about a 2,000 years earlier than his time, he says, this man still remains a priest today, continually. 2,000 years after he met with Abraham, he still is a priest, he's still in office.

Now some people say, but he can't refer to Christ because he says, that Melchizedek is made like the Son of God. But Jesus, in his pre-incarnate life, was not the Son of God. That term is used only in the New Testament of him.

He was God, he was the Word of God, we might even say he was God the Son. But the term Son of God is never used of Christ in the Old Testament. It refers to him with reference to his birth.

Look at Luke real quickly here, just so we can establish this, because this is a sticking point on this matter of Melchizedek for some people. In Luke chapter 1, when the angel told Mary that she was going to have a child, in Luke 1, verse 34, it says, Then Mary said to the angel, How can this be, since I do not know a man? The angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the highest will overshadow you. In other words, this is going to be a supernatural conception.

Therefore, meaning for this reason also, the Holy One who is to be born of you will be called the Son of God. Why is Jesus called the Son of God? Well, because of the supernatural conception that is described here. The angel says, You will conceive in this manner without a human father.

Therefore, your son will be called the Son of God. That is to say, he had no human father, only God was his father in his incarnation. So the term Son of God, according to Scripture, refers to Jesus in his post-incarnation time.

So the writer of Hebrews could be saying, Melchizedek is a priest forever, just like the man Jesus is. Now the man Jesus, however, had a previous existence as God and is a manifestation of God. In fact, in my opinion, the incarnation is almost like an elaborate theophany.

That is, is God appearing in a human form? But the difference is that in the theophanies in the Old Testament, he didn't become incarnate. He didn't actually take on human nature. He wasn't born of a woman in the theophanies as he was here.

He actually entered into the human family when he was incarnate. But apart from that, he was like any other theophany. He was an appearance of God in a human form.

He was like Melchizedek then. If Melchizedek was a theophany, then he was in that sense like Jesus, who is a human appearance of God. But even if we said he was not exactly Jesus, he must be supernatural, superhuman, because the writer says he remains a priest continually.

Then he says in verse 4, Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abram gave a tenth of his spoils. He's talking about Melchizedek. Now, have you read the book of Hebrews lately? Do you know what the writer of Hebrews is all about? He's about saying, this was a great man in the Old Testament, but Jesus is greater.

The angels were great, but Jesus is greater than the angels. Jesus is greater than the angels. He's greater than Moses.

He's greater than Joshua. He's greater than Aaron. He's greater than greater and greater.

All the early chapters of Hebrews are devoted to one thing, and that is Jesus is greater. Than what? Than everybody. There's not one time the author of Hebrews really wants to tell us how great anyone else is.

And now he says about Melchizedek, Now consider how great this man was. Why? We've talked about Moses. We've talked about Aaron.

We've talked about Joshua. We've even talked about the angels. And he didn't say, consider how great they were.

He says, consider how much greater than any of them Jesus is. And now he's going to talk about some more obscure Old Testament character who's a mere man and say, let's focus on how great this man is. That's totally out of character for the writer of Hebrews.

He doesn't want us to focus on how great any individual man is. He wants to know how great Jesus is. If Melchizedek was just a human being who was a type of Christ, well, so was Isaac.

So was possibly Joseph. There might have been any number. Adam was a type of Christ.

But the writer of Hebrews doesn't say, think how great Adam was. Think how great Isaac was. These were types of Christ.

Well, Melchizedek was not a type of Christ. He was the great one. He was the one that we need to consider how great he is.

And to the writer of Hebrews, that's got to be Jesus. That's all he's interested in. Now I point out that the greatness of Melchizedek is seen that Abram deferred him by, A, paying tithes to him, B, receiving a blessing from him.

And the writer of Hebrews says the blessing usually comes from the greater person to the lesser person. So Melchizedek in blessing Abram and his receiving that acknowledged that Melchizedek was greater than Abram. And so forth.

But look at verse 8. Hebrews 7, 8 says, Here, meaning, now this guy was a Jew writing to Jews. Here in the Jewish system, mortal men received tithes. Now he's referring to the Levites.

In the Jewish system of religion, current at the day when this was written, before the temple was destroyed, the Levites received tithes. And the writer says, Here, in our present system that we're familiar with, mortal men received tithes, Levites. But there, meaning in the story of Abram and Melchizedek, in Genesis 14, there he receives them of whom it is witnessed that he lives.

Now notice the contrast here. He said, Us Jews, we pay tithes to mortal men. But Abram gave tithes to Melchizedek.

What's the implication? Melchizedek's not a mortal man. The contrast is between Melchizedek and mortal men. Right? Here we pay tithes to mortals, not there.

There he paid them to somebody of whom it is testified that he lives. Now, what I want to know is where is it testified that Melchizedek lives? I mean, the writer of Hebrews speaks about that as if it's like a common knowledge. It is testified about Melchizedek that he lives, not like these Levites who die.

Where is that testimony found? Is it found in Psalm 110? Not necessarily. All it says in Psalm 110 is you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek might be a dead former priest and the Messiah would be a priest after the same order at a later time.

Does Genesis 14 tell us that Melchizedek lives? No. It just tells us a story about a man on an occasion that showed up and disappeared. We're not told there he lives.

Why does the writer of Hebrews say that it is testified that Melchizedek lives? Where is that testimony heard or seen? Well, there was a very common testimony among the early Christians that Jesus lives, that Jesus is alive. He is risen. He lives.

That was the basic testimony of the Christian church. If Melchizedek is being said to be

Jesus, then it is indeed testified that Melchizedek lives. It's testified by Christians all the time because Jesus lives and that's our testimony.

We know of no other place that it is testified of Melchizedek that he lives. And unless he is identified with Jesus here, that statement is rather strange. And what is very clear is that whatever it means it's testified that he lives, verse 8 of Hebrews 7 contrasts Melchizedek with mortal men.

And that is the cheap contrast to that verse. Then there's one other thing I'd like to point out and we're going to have to wind this up. In verse 23 and 24, the contrast is still being made between the priesthood of Melchizedek and the priesthood of Aaron.

And it says, And there were many priests, meaning in the Aaronic priesthood, because they were prevented by death from continuing. What he means is there were lots of priests throughout history because they didn't live forever. And therefore, they died.

They'd have to have a successor. The priesthood would have to pass down from father to son to grandson and so forth because they were prevented by the reality of death. By their own mortality, they were prevented from continuing forever in the priesthood.

Now that's in the Aaronic priesthood. But now the contrast. But he, because he continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

Now unchangeable priesthood apparently means one that does not pass down from one to another. Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, the office changes its inhabitants. A man dies, another man moves into the office.

It's a changeable priesthood. It's transferable from one to another. But Melchizedek's priesthood is not that kind.

It doesn't change from one man to another because one man holds it forever because he lives forever. Now think about this. If Melchizedek held this priesthood and if, as the writer of Hebrews says, Jesus holds that priesthood, but that priesthood doesn't change from one to another, then how did Jesus get it? If Melchizedek had it and it doesn't go from one man to another, but Jesus has it, what happened there? Melchizedek and Jesus must be the same guy.

And so what the writer of Hebrews is saying apparently is that Melchizedek was an appearance of Christ to Abraham and Abraham recognized him as essentially who he was and honored him, gave tithes to him, received a blessing from him, and so forth. And the writer of Hebrews says all those things are ways in which Abraham showed that he recognized Melchizedek as his superior. But it's totally unlike the writer of Hebrews to spend a whole chapter talking about some Old Testament character focusing not on the greatness of Christ but on the greatness of that Old Testament character.

It's just unheard of in the book of Hebrews to do that unless he means that Melchizedek is Christ. And the things he says in verse 3, that he remains a priest continually, or in verse 8 where he's contrasted with mortal men, or in verse 24 that his priesthood is not one that transfers from one to another, and yet it was held 2,000 years before Christ, and it's held 2,000 years later by Christ, but it doesn't transfer, it must be the same guy. And it says that's true because he lives forever.

The priesthood of the Old Testament, they couldn't hold, one man couldn't hold the priesthood forever because he didn't live forever. But this one does. So Jesus is the priest who intercedes for us forever.

Now, Hebrews is the only book of the New Testament that refers to Jesus as our high priest. That is the unique contribution that Hebrews makes to our theology that we wouldn't have if we didn't have Hebrews. There's no reference elsewhere to Jesus being the high priest.

But his work as an intercessor, which is related to being a priest, is mentioned one other place, and that is in Romans chapter 8. Now, there's no mention of Jesus being a priest, but there is mention of him making intercession for us, and that's Hebrews tells us that he makes intercession as a priest. But Romans 8, 34 says, Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died. Furthermore, is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

So Christ makes intercession for us. And the writer of Hebrews is saying that because he makes intercession for us and because he never dies, unlike the priest of the Old Testament who couldn't intercede forever for you because they died, they might die before you did. Well, Christ makes intercession for us and never dies, and therefore he will continue to intercede for us forever.

And that's what it says in Hebrews 7, 25. Right after it says, unlike the Aaronic priests who had to give up their post because of death, he doesn't. It says in verse 25, Therefore he is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him since he ever lives to make intercession for them.

His intercessory prayer for us is uninterrupted. And so that means he can save you to the uttermost. Now to the uttermost means to the utmost that he intends for you to be saved to.

What does he want you to be saved to? He wants you to be saved from your sin. He wants you to be saved from, he wants you to be glorified. He wants you to be like him.

That's the salvation that, the uttermost of the salvation that he's able to save to because he can keep interceding until you get there. And will. So Abram apparently met Jesus on that occasion.

Now interestingly, in John chapter 8, when the Pharisees were giving Jesus some trouble again, he said, Before Abraham was, I am. And they said, You're not even 50 years old. When did you ever see Abraham? Actually, that's the wrong order.

He said, Before Abraham was, I am. Before they asked him, he said, Your father, Abram, rejoiced to see my day and saw it. And then they said, You're not even 50 years old.

When did you ever see Abraham? He said, Before Abraham was, I am. But interestingly, he said, Your father, Abram, rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad. It says in John 8, 56.

And the Jews understood him to be saying that he and Abram had seen each other. And that was impossible. Because Jesus was under 50 years old and Abram had lived 2,000 years earlier.

But Jesus said, It's not impossible. And it did happen. And so, very possibly, Jesus is referring to this encounter that Abram had with him in Genesis 14.

Alright.