



Good day Worthy Knights,

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In this part 46, Melchisedek

Exegesis of literary works should include, where possible, an appreciation of the preceding oral traditions, the way that language was used at the time of writing; transliteration and translation considerations, possible transcription errors in the text, over time; the influence of socio-political and environmental factors, and the context, and intent, of the author (and subsequent editors). This is particularly important when trying to understand and critically interpret very old works, and in particular, the documents of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The writers of the Old Testament books are considered to have been influenced by an oral tradition of at least eight thousand years, and contain the narrative of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and how (this) God revealed himself to his people, through the Prophets (those who spoke authoritatively on behalf of God), the kings, the priests and the followers of God.

The books of the New Testament are considered to be writings containing the records of those who knew, and those who knew of, Jesus of Nazareth, and describe how he came to fulfill the "Law and the Prophets" of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These works are seen as a further revelation of God to his people.

"Nothing makes up for lack of familiarity with the text, especially in sacred scripture."  
Fr. Damian McGrath, OFM, 1973.

In Aramaic and Ancient Hebrew, a name is considered to be the thing described - not merely symbolic or a representation of the thing being described. Hence, in the Old Testament, particularly in the Pentateuch, and in the Tanakh (The Hebrew Bible), God is described by use of the Tetragrammaton, an unpronounceable name, containing no vowels - YHWH, written in English as Yahweh.

This synopsis is not an attempt to describe the nature of God, nor is it a philosophical approach to the existence of God, nor a justification of any religious beliefs. It is an attempt to understand the importance of the word "Melchisedek" in the Masonic and Military Order of the Red Cross of Constantine.

Melchisedek, (Malki-sedeq in Hebrew), is an old Canaanite name, and is variously transliterated. The word means "king of righteousness". He was the king of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of "the most high god" (Genesis 14:18-20). Melchisedek's religion would have been a part of the Canaanite tradition, and the god whom Melchisedek served as priest, "the most high god", probably designates the highest god of their pantheon.

Melchisedek is important because he was both king and priest, he was connected with Jerusalem, and he was deeply respected by Abraham, (who paid tithes to him). For Abraham to recognize the authority and authenticity of a Canaanite priest-king is significant: Abraham belonged to the Israelitic monotheistic religion, and was of the Aaronic priestly line. (Aaron, the elder brother of Moses, was a prophet and first high priest of the Israelites).

Melchisedek is the first individual to be given the title Kohen - priest, in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. The Rabbanim identified Melchisedek with Sem, son of Noah, rather for polemic than historic reasons: they wished to set themselves against what is said of him as a type of Christ "without father, without mother, without genealogy" (Hebrews 7:3).

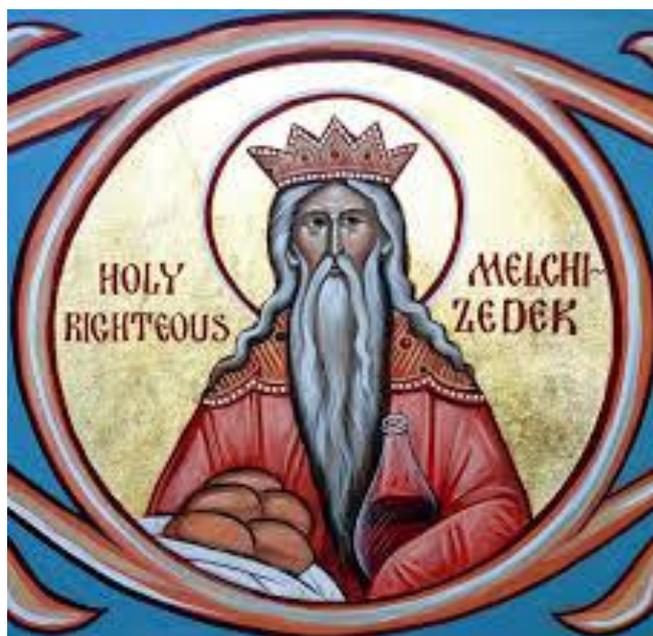
This biblical account of Melchisedek in Genesis poses textual challenges. Essentially, as biblical scholars point out, it is highly unusual for an author of Davidic times to construct a narrative with a Canaanite protagonist. In addition, it seems incongruous that Abraham would give a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchisedek and then refuse to take any of it for himself, (Genesis 14:18-20).

Abraham paying a tithe to Melchisedek should be seen as an interpretation, id est, it has the significance of explaining the meaning of something. In this instance, it marks the matter of Abraham's interaction with Melchisedek as purposefully ambiguous, and hence is to be taken as a portent of the new priesthood to be established with the coming of the future Messiah.

In Psalm 109 (110), in referring to a future Messiah of the Davidic line, the Psalmist alludes to the priest-king Melchisedek as a prototype of this Messiah. This allusion probably influenced the Apostle Paul, author of the Letter to the Hebrews, to translate the name Melchisedek as "king of righteousness" and to translate Salem as "peace," so that Melchisedek is seen to foreshadow the Messiah, who is described there as the "true king of righteousness and peace" (Hebrews 7:2). Drawing this allusion to its logical conclusion, then, just as Abraham, the ancestor of the Levites paid a tithe to Melchisedek and made himself to be the inferior one, so the Melchisedek-like priesthood of Christ is made to be superior to that of the Levites.

Christ is "a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedek" (Hebrews 7:6 and Psalm 109:4); "a high priest forever...", (Hebrews 6:20), id est, in order or manner, not after the manner of Aaron.

The Apostle Paul develops this teaching in Hebrews 7: Melchisedek was a type by reason of his twofold dignity as priest and king, by reason of his name, "king of justice", by reason of the city over which he ruled, "King of Salem, that is, king of peace" (Hebrews 7:2), and also because he is "without father without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but likened unto the Son of God, continues a priest forever." (Hebrews 7:3). By extension, then, as the Old Testament assigns no birth or death date to Melchisedek, so the priesthood of Christ is eternal.



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