

# Genesis 14:17-20

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*After all the battles and wars, the king priest Melchizedek blessed Abram, and Abram gave to Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of the wars.*

It likely would have taken Abram and his troops several weeks to reach Damascus and beyond, fight the battle and then return. On his return, Abram stopped by *the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley)* near Salem (Jerusalem).

*The king of Sodom went out to meet him but apparently brought no gifts to Abram. Conversely, Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine and offered a blessing (14:18-20).*

It is perfectly natural that a returning hero, whose victory has also benefited the entire land, should be officially greeted by distinguished people. The king of Sodom represented a secular experience. Melchizedek symbolized the spiritual. Verses 17 and 18 are likely one occurrence, not two separate events, that both kings came out to see Abram at the same time. *Melchizedek king of Salem* was a Jebusite ([Joshua 15:8](#)) Priest-King of Salem (Jerusalem).

The name "Melchizedek" means *king of righteousness* ([Hebrews 7:2](#)) and Salem (Jerusalem) means "peace." So he was, as [Hebrews 7:2](#) points out, also the king of peace. Hebrews chapters 6 and 7 tells us that Melchizedek is a picture of Jesus, who is also both King and Priest, and who is also superior to Abraham. And like Melchizedek, Jesus' priestly office is superior to the priestly office of the Levites. Levites are descendants of Abraham, and Melchizedek is superior to Abraham.

Melchizedek blessed Abram, because he had a superior office. Abram also paid a tithe to Melchizedek for the same reason. Melchizedek is a picture of Jesus because he shows up in history suddenly, with great authority, as a king and priest, then we don't see him again for a long time. But he is the King of the Jews, and the Prince of Peace. [Hebrews 7](#) also makes the argument that Jesus' office as a king priest is the same as Melchizedek and superior to the Levitical priesthood. It argues that when Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek, in essence Levi was paying a tithe as well, since Levi would come from the loins of Abraham. This showed that the priestly office of Jesus

and Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood. Hebrews argues that Jesus is a better Priest, with a superior sacrifice (Himself) and a better King with a better Kingdom. Therefore we ought to follow Him above the leaders of human institutions.

Melchizedek *brought out bread and wine*, which was an ordinary custom offered as a show of friendship and hospitality, a token of goodwill ([Judges 19:19](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:19](#); [Lamentations 2:12](#)). It does not seem to be connected to the New Testament ordinance of communion ([1 Corinthians 11:26](#)). *He was a priest of God Most High*, this is the first occurrence of the word “priest” (Hebrew *Kohen*) in the Bible. The text tells us that Melchizedek was a *priest of the God Most High*. It is fascinating to see that God had an intimate relationship with Melchizedek. Just because the Bible focuses on the story of Abraham, and tells us he was declared righteous, does not preclude God from working in many ways with many people during that era. God does not tell us the story of most people. It seems unlikely for such a great king and priest not to have followers, who also would have served the one true God. It seems likely, therefore, that there were many others who also believed and were declared righteous.

It is possible that Melchizedek and his followers are part of the reason God delayed judgment on Canaan ([Genesis 15:16](#)). There is a Biblical principle that a righteous remnant will often preserve the rest of society from judgment, at least for a time. In this case, God deferred judgment for “four generations.” By the time of the Exodus (roughly 500 years later) the Jebusites are following false Gods rather than the one true God ([Exodus 23:23-24](#)). Israel failed to drive the Jebusites out of the land ([Judges 1:21](#)). However, King David conquered what appears to be their primary city of Jerusalem, the city of Melchizedek ([2 Sam 5:6-9](#); [1 Chron 11:4-9](#)). It was there David founded the “City of David.” Archeologists have discovered this city and its ruins can be visited today. This provides a connection between the king-priest Melchizedek and the King-Priest Jesus, who is the Son of David and rightful King of Jerusalem.

Melchizedek acknowledged God’s divine guidance over the earth, calling Him *possessor of heaven and earth* ([Psalm 115:15](#), [134:3](#)). Although God created the whole earth, His ownership of the earth is rejected by those who do not obey him. Melchizedek is declaring the sovereign God should be followed and obeyed. Abram, by offering a tithe to Melchizedek, also acknowledged that he is a servant of God and under God’s authority. Although Abram has been promised the land from God, he acknowledges that

he is still subordinate to God, who is the Great Suzerain, Sovereign Ruler of all. Abram shows his service to God through Melchizedek.

Melchizedek praised God for giving victory to Abram and delivering the enemy into his hands, saying *blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand*. The God Abram worshipped at his altar in Hebron ([Genesis 13:18](#)) is “*the Possessor of heaven and earth*,” who delivers the four kings of the east into Abram’s hands. Abram gave to the priest Melchizedek *a tenth of all* his captured prizes ([Genesis 28:22](#)). A tenth was the king’s share ([1 Samuel 8:15-17](#)). Abram was acknowledging Melchizedek as a spiritual superior ([Hebrews 7:2-6](#)). Although Abram had exerted substantial effort and shown great courage, he acknowledges that God had given him the victory.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>17</sup> Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). <sup>18</sup> And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. <sup>19</sup> He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; <sup>20</sup> And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” He gave him a tenth of all.**