

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 167

Melchizedek, Part 1b

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Melchizedek is one of the more enigmatic figures in the Bible. Mentioned in only two passages in the Old Testament (Gen 14:17-24; Psalm 110), he nevertheless drew a lot of attention during the Second Temple Period and the New Testament. Thousands of pages of scholarly research have been devoted to him. Nearly everything said about him produces interpretive problems, from the nature of his name, to its meaning, to his identity as a Canaanite (non-Israelite), to why Psalm 110 favors his priesthood about that of Aaron. This episode of the podcast finishes our discussion of the Old Testament material associated with Melchizedek. Later episodes will be devoted to how he was understood in Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 167: Melchizedek, Part 1b. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you?

MH: Pretty good. Looking forward to getting back into Melchizedek. Long way to go.

TS: Absolutely. Also, Mike, I want to remind everybody real quick that the voting starts now (by the time you're listening to this podcast). We're going to let the voting run through August 14 (I believe it is). It'll be up on the website, so you can go take a look at that information if you need it. Also, we're going to do something else about Melchizedek. We're going to have an entire episode dedicated to Q&A for it! So what we're going to do is ask our listeners out there to submit questions about Melchizedek specifically to me at treystricklin@gmail.com. Please include "Melchizedek" in the subject line of the email. You might want to hold on with your questions until you listen to all the episodes, because Mike will probably tackle most of people's issues or questions about Melchizedek, right?

MH: Yeah, because we've got a few more episodes. We decided to tack on the Q&A because you just can't get enough Melchizedek, can you? (laughing)

TS: We just figured there are always questions, right? For every answer you give, there's ten more questions. This is a good subject matter to probably have an entire show dedicated just for the people's specific questions. We're not going to be able to get to *everyone's* questions. Again, you probably want to wait until you get all the episodes of Melchizedek done. I think the last one (Part 3) of Melchizedek will air August 5. We're going to give y'all a week to come up with your questions if you want. So if you want to save your questions for August 7-14, we'll cut off submissions for the questions on August 14. That will give you about a week to come up with your questions and make sure Mike hasn't already covered your question in the previous episodes.

You want to remind everybody about your upcoming trip?

MH: The travel schedule, yeah. On July 22, I'll be in Northport, Washington. Go to www.drmsb.com and look at the Calendar and click on the link for that event to get the details. I can tell you right now that there will be limited seating, I would think. It's a very small town and we're using one of the churches there. We might get more people there than are actually in this town! Be advised that if you want to come, please do. But you might run into a situation where seating is limited.

TS: You're going to make an attempt to record the audio, and possibly the video, as well, so hopefully we'll get one or the other.

MH: Fern and Audrey are going to be there with me and they have assented to being at least audio recorded, but I think they'll be fine with video. We've chatted about that. The reason for my hesitation is not them. I just can't actually recall what we said in the last email. I think they'll be fine with it. But one way or the other, we'll make some sort of recording of what we do there.

TS: Sounds good. Well, I'm ready for the second half of Melchizedek in the Old Testament.

MH: Absolutely, let's get into that.

So in the world is *Tsedek*? It's time to focus on who this deity is. Why do we have this deity name here? Why do we have what looks like a foreign deity name associated with this guy whom Abraham is talking with—who is blessing Abraham in the name of the Most High God? Because that kind of suggests it's *Tsedek* as the Most High God, not Yahweh. That's the issue here for a number of scholars and readers, so that's where we have to focus.

I'm going to read extensively from Bernard Batto's article on *Tsedek* in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible. It's very good. This is going to be an extensive quotation. He goes through the material, and then I'll make some

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comments (as I typically do) as we go, and then afterwards. So here's Batto with a lengthy excerpt from DDD:

The West Semitic deity Zedek [Tsedek or Tsedeq], 'Righteousness', is found in the Bible only in the personal names →Melchizedek (Gen 14:18; cf. Ps 110:4; Heb 5:6; 6:20–7:17) and Adonizedek (Josh 10:1, 3), both Canaanite kings of pre-Israelite Jerusalem. Zedek is probably to be identified with the deity known as Išar among the Amorites and Kittu in Babylonia, and thus a hypostasis or personification of the sun god Shamash's function (→Shemesh) as divine overseer of justice.

That's two sentences there and we've already got things to unravel! Basically, you have a deity that went by different names among different people groups. Among those different people groups, the names that they used were indicative of the sun god's (Shamash—a Semitic word for "sun") role as divine overseer of justice. Think about what I just said: If you have the sun god for some Canaanites being the god of justice, isn't the Canaanite word for that *tsedek*? Yeah it is. So you could refer to the different role of the deity by different terms, and this is how you get this sort of Round Robin of terminology in ancient Near Eastern deities. This happens all the time where different people groups would refer to a deity by different names but assign to him the same properties. It creates confusion for us because of the different names. So that's what you have going on here. Back to Batto:

The cult of Zedek appears to have been well established in pre-Israelite (Jebusite) Jerusalem. Some aspects of this cult apparently were translated into Yahwism; in a number of texts Righteousness appears either as a member of Yahweh's court [his council] or as a personification of Yahweh's concern for justice...

Evidence for the West Semitic deity Zedek is mostly indirect but nonetheless compelling. Most decisive is a statement by Philo of Byblos that the Phoenicians had a god named Sydyk, i.e. Zedek. Philo, who claimed to get his information from the Phoenician writer Sanchuniaton, noted that the Phoenicians numbered among their gods "Misor and Sydyk . . . 'Misōr' and 'Sydyk' correspond to Heb *mîšôr*, 'justice', and *šedeq*, 'righteousness'. Zedek is not directly attested elsewhere as the name of a deity, but indirect evidence comes from two sources: the Amorite and Babylonian pantheons, and West Semitic personal names.

...The West Semitic god Zedek seemingly corresponds to the deity known as Kittu in the Babylonian pantheon and as Išar in the Amorite pantheon. In Mesopotamia the preservation of truth and justice was considered to be the particular domain of the sun god Shamash. Truth or Right was personified and deified as the god Kittu ('Truth', 'Right'; from Akk root *kānu*, cf. Heb root *κWN*). Kittu was often invoked together with the god Misharu ('Justice')... One or both of these deities

were described as ‘seated before Shamash’, i.e. Shamash’s attendant, or as ‘the minister of (Shamash’s) right hand’. . . it appears that the deity known as Kittu in Babylonia was known further to the West under the names Išar and *Šidqu/Zedek*—all three names having essentially the same meaning but operative in different linguistic communities... West Semitic personal names containing the root *SDQ* are attested at many sites, including El Amarna, Ugarit, Rimah, and Mari...

In the Bible the god Zedek appears only in the personal names of two Canaanite kings of Jerusalem, Melchizedek (Gen 14:18) and Adonizedek (Josh 10:1, 3), fueling speculation that Jerusalem was a cult centre for Zedek in pre-Israelite times. Melchizedek is identified not only as ‘king of Salem’ but also as ‘priest of God Most High’ (*’ēl ’elyôn*, Gen 14:18), today usually understood to mean that Melchizedek was a devotee of the god El, head of the Canaanite pantheon. Others argue, however, that Melchizedek was priest of the god Zedek...

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That's understandable because of what we've talked about before: his name might be "my king is Tsedek."

One hypothesis suggests that Zedek is to be identified with the god Shalem, whose name is embodied in Jerusalem... Support for this hypothesis may come from the Ugaritic personal name *šdqšlm*, should this name mean ‘Zedek-is-Shalem’ rather than the more probable ‘Shalem is righteous’. Shalem certainly has connections with a solar cult, aspects of which may have been incorporated into Israelite yahwistic religion. A long-standing cult of Zedek at Jerusalem could account at least partially for the fact that even during the Israelite period Jerusalem laid special claim to such titles as ‘the city of Righteousness’ (Isa 1:21, 26) [MH: This is much later that Jerusalem is called “city of Tsedek”] and ‘pasture of Righteousness’ (Jer 31:23; cf. 33:16). Although evidence of a solar cult in the temple in Jerusalem has been exaggerated in the past by some scholars, nevertheless some form of a solar cult was practiced in the temple in Jerusalem right up to the time when the temple was destroyed in the sixth century BCE (Ezek 8:16).

We talked about that one in our series on Ezekiel. We hit chapter 8 about people worshiping Yahweh as a sun deity, and you can see how they could do that. We talked about that then, but God wasn't real happy with it because you're not supposed to worship the celestial objects in the sky. That's familiar territory, at least to long-term podcast listeners here.

It is unclear that this solar cult is traceable back to Jebusite times, however; it may be that Manasseh introduced this ritual only a century earlier under Assyrian influence. Josiah's reforms ca. 620 BCE, during which "the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD" were removed and "the chariots of the sun" burned (2 Kgs 23:11; cf. Deut 4:19), were in part aimed at destroying the symbols of Assyrian hegemony over Judah.

This could indicate that these reforms of Josiah were, in part, aimed at destroying the symbols of the Syrian hegemony of Judah—namely, these sun-worship symbols.

Aspects of the West Semitic god Zedek were absorbed into Yahwism (see MAY 1937 and ROSENBERG 1965). Rather than remaining as an independent deity, *Ṣedeq*, 'Righteousness', was translated as a quality of Yahweh. Thus, at times *Ṣedeq* and Yahweh are found in synonymous parallelism...

That's an important thought because, for the biblical writers... Think of it this way. When Jerusalem is taken over by David... Just think about biblical history. Here you've got Abraham. Let's just go all the way back. Abraham worships Yahweh. It's just Abraham! He has some kids, he's got some servants. Those are the Yahweh worshipers around. They're living in Canaan because God told them to go there. Everybody else is a Canaanite. So of course, you're going to run into people who are Canaanites, and they're going to be people like this Melchizedek guy who is a priest of the Most High God. Just think about what we have to deal with here. Could we say that Melchizedek at the time considered the Most High God to be *Tsedek* (in other words, that was his name for the Most High God). If you walked up to Melchizedek and said, "Hey, who's the Most High God?" he would say "*Tsedek!*" All right?

So that doesn't mean that it's a different deity than Yahweh, necessarily. It means that we have a different name for the same deity. Again—it can go either way and scholars are divided. What we know for sure is that by the time you get David coming in there and taking control of the city, there's no ambiguity as to who David is worshiping. When the historical books get written, they're going to reflect a theological revolution that, "No, we're not going to come into this place called Jerusalem as Yahweh worshipers and you guys are doing your *Tsedek* thing over here..." No. "We're here to tell you that the Most High God is Yahweh." You have this sort of textual merging that reflects a theological statement (I don't want to say "theological takeover," but that might be a good way to put it). David goes in there and says, "We are claiming this turf because this was given to our ancestors by Yahweh, the Most High God. We're claiming this turf—this city. This is going to be my capital. I am the one chosen by God to be king. This is going to be his place, and we're not messing around with all these other deity names. If

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there's talk of the Most High going on here, we're not going to use the term *Tsedek*, we're going to use the term Yahweh, because he is the Most High."

It's difficult for us, looking at this, to think how this system worked. Maybe this is a poor analogy, but think about the way we refer to God. We refer to him as God, Yahweh, El, El Shaddai, Father. If we really sat down and thought about it, we've probably got ten or fifteen ways that we refer to God. We don't theologically have any other deity above him, yet we use all these different names. What if we were doing that in a historical context where some of the people who heard us use these names thought we were referring to other deities? That's the kind of thing you have going on in biblical times. It's really confusing to know who's thinking what about a single deity or more than one deity at any given time. So what the biblical writers try to do is they try to consolidate. They're making theological statements. They have to include some of these other names because they're just parts of history (they're historical events and deities, this is the way things were), but the biblical writers make an effort to make a theological statement and sort of merge all of these things into Yahweh. They take these other names and they align them with Yahweh as the Most High God.

When you do that and when you codify it (when you actually produce a written document—this thing we call the Old Testament), that's the thing that your people are going to read and be taught from, and so that act of codifying this theological thinking (this theological statement or corrective or point of clarification) about who it is we're worshiping... When you do that and you codify it in a written document (the Old Testament), that is sort of at the forefront of a transition of theological thinking. It's really hard to say, even with certain biblical characters what they were thinking at any given point theologically. All we have is a particular story about them. They might bear a name like Melchizedek. We don't really know who he was thinking about or what he was thinking, but we do know what the biblical writer is thinking. The biblical writer is going to make sure that names like *Tsedek* or El or El-this-and-that (Shaddai, whatever)... the biblical writers are going to make sure that their readers know that who we're talking about is the God who made a covenant with Israel. His covenantal name is Yahweh. He could go by these other names—and did. We have biblical evidence for that. They're trying to teach theology by this strategy of subsuming all this other deity stuff—this deity language and these deity names—into Yahweh of Israel, the covenant name of the God who brought us out of Egypt and all that sort of thing. The Bible itself and its creation is a theology lesson. It's putting forth a theology.

Let's go back to Batto and pick up where we left off. He says:

Rather than remaining as an independent deity, *Şedeq*, 'Righteousness', was translated as a quality of Yahweh.

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Biblical writers transform the name away from it possibly being understood as a separate deity and they make it a quality of Yahweh. They subsume it with Yahweh. They're going to do this with other deities like Dever and Ketev. The Canaanites would think these are big-time deities. In certain passages, Dever and Ketev are depicted as servants of Yahweh. That's a theological statement, like Habakkuk 3 where they follow in Yahweh's retinue (Dever, and Ketev is this kind of plague or disaster language. They serve Yahweh. They're subservient. They're lesser. They're part of his own heavenly entourage. They do his bidding for him. Both those terms have to do with natural disasters. It's a theological statement: other deities are reduced to servants of the Most High, who is Yahweh, or their attributes get absorbed into Yahweh as the Most High. The biblical writers do this all over the place because they are teaching theology. That's what they're doing. Back to Batto (I'll try to get through this section):

Rather than remaining as an independent deity, *Ṣedeq*, 'Righteousness', was translated as a quality of Yahweh. Thus, at times *Ṣedeq* and Yahweh are found in synonymous parallelism: "Harken to me, you who pursue Righteousness, you who seek Yahweh" (Isa 51:1); "They will be called the oaks of Righteousness, the planting of Yahweh" (Isa 61:3); "Sacrifice sacrifices of Righteousness and trust in Yahweh" (Ps 4:6). At other times Righteousness seems to be used as part of a compound name, "Yahweh-Righteousness" (Ps 17:1)...

The ESV has:

Hear a just cause, O LORD...

In Hebrew, you could actually translate that, "Hear, O *Tsedek*-Yahweh..." You could combine those names there.

...[sometimes it's used] as substitute for Yahweh ("For unto Righteousness [*Tsedek*] will judgment return"; Ps 94:15). In some instances Righteousness appears as a hypostasis of the divine sovereign's invincible right hand/arm by which he rules the world and protects his devotees: "Righteousness fills thy (Yahweh's) right hand" (Ps 48:11); "I (Yahweh) will support you with my right hand of Righteousness" Isa 41:10); "My (Yahweh's) Righteousness is near, my salvation has gone forth, and my arms will rule the peoples" (Isa 51:5). In Psalm 118 the two typologies are joined; after a reference to vindication through the "right hand of Yahweh" (vv 15–16), the psalmist prays (vv 19–20): "Open for me the gates of Righteousness; I will enter them, praising Yah." This is the gate to Yahweh, through which the righteous enter. Poetic parallelism here allows no

doubt that the “gates of Righteousness” is the semantic equivalent of “the gate to Yahweh”; Yahweh is Zedek, the defender of righteous persons. Jer 33:16 also played upon this theme, declaring that in the endtime Jerusalem will be known by the name ‘Yahweh-is-our-Righteousness’.

... Zedek and Mišor [righteousness and justice] as attendant deities of Shamash also have their reflexes in Yahwism as dual qualities of the God of Israel. Isa 11:4 says that the Spirit of Yahweh will possess the messianic king, with the result that “he will judge the weak with Righteousness, he will defend the poor of the earth with Justice” (cf. Ps 45:7–8). Other passages substitute the plural *mêšārîm* for *mîšôr* as the parallel word to *šedeq*, but the concept is the same: “He judges the world with Righteousness; he judges the peoples with Justice” (Ps 9:9). Ps 58:2 contrasts the righteous rule of Yahweh with the chaotic rule of the false gods: “Do you truly, O gods, speak Righteousness; do you judge humans (with) Justice?” In Ps 98:9 even the normally rebellious waters of chaos acknowledge the kingship of Yahweh: “He will judge the world with Righteousness, and the peoples with Justice.” In Isa 45:19 Yahweh derides the gods of other nations and proclaims that he alone is capable of salvation: “I am Yahweh who declares Righteousness, who announces Justice.”

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So you see what the biblical writers are doing? Where does all this leave us? Biblical writers polemically associated Yahweh and *Tsedek*. They merge them. They combine them. They're teaching theology. Consequently, Melchizedek could bear the name of Yahweh or *Tsedek* and not violate the theological proposition that Yahweh or *Tsedek*... In the final form of the biblical text, they're one and the same. He could bear the name *Tsedek* and refer to him as Most High because *Tsedek* was Yahweh. It's not a problem in its historical setting. Do we really know that Melchizedek comes out to meet Abraham and he says, "Hey, Hi! I'm Melchizedek. My name is 'my king is *Tsedek*' and I really know that's your Yahweh." Is Melchizedek thinking that? Well, we don't have any way of knowing that.

But again, let's stick with what we *do* know and what the biblical text shows us. What we do know (and what the biblical writers do) is they make it clear that, "Look, we've got this plurality of names going on here, but it's Yahweh who is the Most High. All of these other names are going to be subsumed into him because that is our theology. That is what we believe. That is the truth that we are putting forth—that Yahweh is King of kings and God of gods. At one time we may not have cared what name you used. At one time we wouldn't have batted an eye because it's kind of like “inside baseball.” We all know what we're talking about here. But now that we're codifying this—we're writing this down for posterity—we want to make a theological statement. And that's what the biblical writers do everywhere.

I'll add this one thought. This might be a little bit controversial, but that's what we do here on the podcast. This whole proposition—this whole way of understanding this, to take all these names and merge them to present a unified theology—that's good news. It's theologically consistent and I think it's completely understandable. But guess what? That doesn't work very well with Mosaic authorship. How would we assume that Moses knew any of this or that Moses strategically did this? Jerusalem hadn't been conquered. It's not conquered by Joshua's day! We still have the Canaanite *Adoni-zedek* in Joshua's day sitting as king over Jerusalem. If you're listening to the podcast you know my view. I'm what used to be called a "supplementarian"—I accept a Mosaic core of what we call the Pentateuch, and then I think there were a lot of things added to it and, of course, an editorial hand over all of it to produce the Torah in its final form. That makes a lot of sense and it helps us to understand things like all this name-merging and how different names plotted out at different points of biblical history is really talking about the same Most High God. That's easy for us to understand in hindsight, but it's tough to get there if you think Moses wrote every word of the Torah. There are just things going on in the text to produce this theology that Moses just didn't know and that Moses had no reason to even think about. I'm just throwing that out there.

Here we are again... This simplistic view of Mosaic authorship that I've talked about before on the blog or on the podcast... I understand it, but it gets in the way of clarity. It gets in the way of talking about what we actually find in the text in a coherent sort of way. I don't really care to parse out who wrote what when and all that kind of stuff. I'm just saying that to get there in a coherent presentation, you've got to think about Mosaic authorship. You've got to think about the authorship of the Torah a little bit differently than we typically do. In practical terms, I think this is kind of evident at this point in the podcast as we move along here. Israelite religion is messy. If you take a providential view of inspiration (which I have argued is the most defensible view and the most coherent view), then you have God prompting people all along the way to do good theology as they wrote and as they edited. The whole point of the enterprise was theological messaging. If we believe there was a God behind it all (the God of the Bible), then the mission was accomplished. They did the job.

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To summarize to this point, Melchizedek's name—"my king is *Tsedek*" or "my king is righteous" (allowing for that possibility)—and his title (king of Salem) associate him personally with kingship, Jerusalem, righteousness, peace, and priesthood. That's what we have in the Old Testament. It doesn't matter if we have *Tsedek* as a theophoric name because in the big picture of biblical theology, *Tsedek* is Yahweh. That's what the biblical writers are presenting in the bigger picture. So here we have this guy who's associated with the Most High God (*Tsedek*-Yahweh). He's the king of Salem (Jerusalem). We've got themes of righteousness and justice going on. He's also a priest. He's a king-priest. You see what I'm doing here. There's a profile now building that people in the Second Temple period are going to use. They're going to talk about what's the meaning

of this character. He gets picked up later in Psalm 110 (associated with messianic kingship). They begin to talk about messiah along the lines of these themes that derive from the name and from the historical setting in Jerusalem.

I'll say, secondly, at no point in all of this is there any sense that this man (Melchizedek) was a divine being. I know that's popular with a lot of Christians because of the New Testament phrase about Melchizedek in Hebrews "without beginning or end." We'll get to that. What I'm telling you is that you can't get a divine being out of any of this. My predilection is to view Melchizedek *not* as a divine being because I don't have anywhere to hang that hat on. Now, if Melchizedek is a type or prototype of Christ, okay. We get that. Christ, as the second person of the Trinity, is eternal—without beginning and end and all that kind of stuff—but that doesn't mean Melchizedek has to match the analogy at every point. A type is a prefigurement. It's not a one-to-one equivalent in all aspects. I'm just saying.

So let's turn now to the second Old Testament issue: Psalm 110. It's almost as gnarly, but we're not going to spend as much time on it because we'll pick up with it later when we get to messianic stuff. Put in the form of a question, why does Psalm 110 connect the dynastic line of David (and hence, the messiah) with the priestly order of Melchizedek? The answer is going to be David's association with Abraham, in terms of lineage (genealogy) and how the original Melchizedek material frames the account of Abraham eschatologically. Believe it or not, there's eschatology in the book of Genesis—in the Torah. The specific link is the rule of the son of David, the rule of a descendant Yahweh produces over all the nations. That's the eschatological part. So in Psalm 110, we read this:

The LORD says to my Lord:

**“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”**

**²The LORD sends forth from Zion
your mighty scepter.**

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

**³Your people will offer themselves freely
on the day of your power,
in holy garments;
from the womb of the morning,
the dew of your youth will be yours.**

**⁴The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”**

That's the first four verses. And now Psalm 110 turns eschatological.

- ⁵ **The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings [plural] on the day of his wrath [Day of the Lord].**
- ⁶ **He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter chiefs
over the wide earth.**
- ⁷ **He will drink from the brook by the way;
therefore he will lift up his head.**

There's lots of technical argumentation based on intertextuality throughout the Torah with Melchizedek and Abraham and this Psalm. There are all these points of linguistic connection. That's not going to translate well to a podcast, but I'm going to pick a few out. Think about it this way... We just read Psalm 110 and we have this statement about a messianic guy:

**The LORD says to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool."**

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So the messianic king is going to have a scepter. He's going to rule in the midst of his enemies. He's sent forth from Zion. He's a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. And then it turns to this Day of the Lord language about the conquest of the nations. Is it a coincidence that language about the Most High and the nations outside of Psalm 110 shows up in Genesis 14 with Melchizedek and Deuteronomy 32:8 (when the Most High divided the nations)? Here's that Deuteronomy 32 worldview again. Melchizedek and Abram/Abraham, the priest of the Most High... Melchizedek blesses Abraham. He is the priest of the Most High who blesses Abraham, the one whose seed will be the lynchpin to reclaiming and ruling over the disinherited nations. You can see there are obvious theological connections here. When you talk about Melchizedek and Abraham and if you're tuned into the theology... You have the whole Torah and let's say you've read Deuteronomy 32 and you think, "That's terrible... God disinherited the nations. How's he going to get them back?" And then, "Oh—Genesis 12! Right after the Babel event, he calls Abraham and he says to Abraham 'it's through you and your seed that all the nations of the world will be blessed,' So Abraham has something to do with getting the nations back. And then when Abraham meets Melchizedek, it turns out Melchizedek is priest of El

Elyon—the Most High God! And Melchizedek blesses Abraham. Well, that's kind of interesting." Again, these connections are deliberate, and there's a lot more.

If you go to Numbers, is it another coincidence that in the Balaam oracle... in Numbers 24:16-18, Balaam seeks "the knowledge of the Most High?" And then he launches into an eschatological prophecy in Numbers 24 of how the seed of Abraham (Israel, and the messiah by extension) will defeat its enemies and possess their lands! Look at what Balaam says in verse 17 of Numbers 24:

**¹⁷I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near...**

Who's the "him?" Who does Balaam see, "but not now?" Who does he behold, but "he's not yet near?"

**...a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;**

Ooh, that sounds like Psalm 110. Yeah, it does! Again, that's not a coincidence.

**...[this star] shall crush the forehead of Moab
and break down all the sons of Sheth.**

If you keep going in verse 18, guess who else gets conquered? Edom and Seir. Remember our episodes on Obadiah? Remember our podcast series on Obadiah and how Edom and Seir were emblematic of Babylon? Babylon, Babylon... where have I heard that before? Oh yeah—Deuteronomy 32! That Babel was the place where the nations were disinherited. Does "scepter rise out of Israel" sound familiar from Numbers 24:17? Of course, you get that language in Psalm 110:2.

**²The LORD sends forth from Zion
your mighty scepter.**

Where does the scepter rise out of Israel.. what's the other passage? It's Genesis 49:10.

**¹⁰The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.**

The nations. Did you ever look at the context of Genesis 49? If you go back to verse 1, the context is "in days to come." In Hebrew it's literally "the last days."

Now look at Numbers 24:14. Back to the Balaam oracle:

¹⁴“And now, behold, I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter [last] days.”

There's something going on here between Genesis 49, Numbers 24, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 110, Genesis 14, Abraham and his seed, and Melchizedek. (laughs) All of these things are tied together. The context for tying them together is reclaiming the nations that were disinherited (Deuteronomy 32 worldview). There's something going on here with this talk, and then of course, it's situated in the last days and the conquest of the nations, the defeat of Babel, and the children of Abraham. Melchizedek gets thrown in the mix because the name "Most High" is intertwined in several of these passages, and the fate of the nations coming back to Yahweh is tied to all of them. So in Psalm 110, the Davidic king is described this way:

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**“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”**

**⁵The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings [plural] on the day of his wrath.**

⁶He will execute judgment among the nations...

Last thing we want to talk about here is, why the “priest” language? Why does the king need to be a priest? What about the priesthood of Aaron? I'm sure you've asked that question. The short answer is that the evidence in the text that Melchizedek's kingship... Remember, he was king of Jerusalem, no less—and was that a coincidence, since it was David (remember, David, the one who would produce the messiah and the messianic line)... Was that a coincidence it was David who conquered the city and made that same place (the place where Melchizedek was king) his capital? Was that a coincidence? No. Melchizedek's kingship is connected to Abraham. It legitimizes the rule of Abraham's seed.

Think of it this way: Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem. David is going to be king of Jerusalem. Melchizedek was priest of the Most High. By connecting Melchizedek to David by means of Jerusalem, it also connects both of them to David because David is a descendant of Abraham. It legitimizes the rule of Abraham's seed. Who is David? And, of course, ultimately, you could say the same thing about the seed that David produces. He's also a descendant of Abraham. That's the messiah—it's Jesus. This is another one of the reasons why

we have Jesus' genealogy going back through both of these guys. It would seem reasonable to think that this original kingship... The original kingship of Jerusalem doesn't go back to David—it goes back to Melchizedek. The original kingship of Jerusalem also entailed a priestly role. The priestly role would not be inherited by the sons of Aaron, it would be inherited by these descendants of Abraham. It has chronological priority over the Aaronic priesthood. So the Aaronic priesthood split the role... it gave Israel two leaders. The political leader was Moses and the priestly leader was Aaron. The argument that Aaron's priesthood (catch this)... I've mentioned this before in Q&A about Melchizedek, but we have to bring it up again. Think about this, this is kind of a radical thought: There's a good argument to be made that Aaron's priesthood was a divine concession to the lack of faith on Moses' part. In other words, it was Plan B. The idea is that Plan A would have been to make Moses both political leader and the priestly leader, but Moses was weak and lacked faith so God allowed Aaron to enter the picture. If you read certain things in Exodus 3 and 4, it's kind of striking. Exodus 3:18... let's just start there. This is God speaking to Moses:

¹⁸ And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.'

In Exodus 4:1, you have the statement:

Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'"

God just told him in Exodus 3:18 and they're going to listen to his voice, and Moses says "No, they won't." There's a lot of this going on in Exodus 3 and 4. Moses literally takes what God says and just says, "Nope. I don't believe it. That's not going to happen." Again, you have a series of faithless statements on Moses' part. God, being patient, puts up with it to a certain point, but note the point at which God becomes angry and what he does. This is Exodus 4:

¹⁰ But Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." ¹¹ Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."

(Laughing) Then Moses comes back with verse 13:

¹³ But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

He just *can't believe!*

45:00

¹⁴ Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. ¹⁶ He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. ¹⁷ And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.”

So it's at this point that Aaron's status is elevated to co-leader. That'll be his status, and this is what will lead to him becoming the High Priest. Again, this is the proposal (and it's not new with me; scholars have talked about this a lot)... This would mean that the Aaron priesthood is, at best, a concession or an accommodation to Moses. At worst, it's a punishment. In other words, Moses is not allowed to approach the Most Holy place later on, but Aaron is. Moses apparently leaves for Egypt without Aaron (Exodus 4:24-27). In that whole funky episode with Zipporah, where God's going to kill Moses, he apparently left for Egypt without Aaron and incurs God's wrath—at least in part for that. There are other things going on there, as I've blogged about. The episode also has something to do with Moses failing to circumcise his son. But at the end of it, he links up with Aaron. It's like, "Okay, now we can go." Apparently, after all of this, Moses just disobeys or is just incompetent, and he leaves without Aaron. In Exodus 4:29, Moses and Aaron "gather the elders"—precisely what God had told Moses to do *alone* in Exodus 3:16. Aaron also repeats signs that God originally told Moses to perform. An example is Exodus 4:30:

³⁰ Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people.

Aaron did the signs. Aaron acts in the place of Moses at other times, frankly, in two chapters: Exodus 4 and 5 (and chapter 6). In Exodus 6:12, Moses again does not believe the people will listen to him. He says it again. He doesn't believe the people will listen to him if he speaks God's words to them, so Aaron is brought on the scene in verse 13 to get the job done. In the rest of Exodus 6, we get the genealogy of Moses and Aaron, and then the text adds what feels like an explanation for why both genealogies are there. Here's verse 26 with the

comment on the genealogies. So you have the genealogies and then you run into verse 26 (Exodus 6) and it says this:

²⁶These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said: “Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.” ²⁷It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron.

²⁸On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹the LORD said to Moses, “I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.” ³⁰But Moses said to the LORD, “Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?”

The writer here... is this Moses? Here we are back to the Mosaic authorship. Right after giving the genealogy of both, the writer basically has to explain why Aaron is there—and he does! Think about the flow of biblical history. The leadership up to this point (up to Moses) had been one guy: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and you could almost count Joseph, but we'll just stick with the major patriarchs. Then you hit Moses. They're single leaders and single mediators. They're the go-betweens between God and the rest of the people. Here with Moses, it splits. Aaron's priesthood is a result of Moses' unbelief from the very beginning. It's a concession. Incidentally, doesn't that make the Golden Calf incident all the more tragic? Because that's Aaron's fault. Moses will eventually step up, but by then the Aaronic priesthood is in place.

Presuming the Melchizedek priesthood is legitimate because it predates Aaron and it goes back to Jerusalem and it's linked to Abraham, whose seed will bring back the nations... Assuming all that and that the Melchizedek priesthood is legitimate, it was the ideal. It was political leader and priesthood combined, just as was God's original pattern.

Some very obvious connections to the apocalyptic Old Testament framework for Melchizedek spring from this. Look at the Psalms 110 passage again:

**¹The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”**

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He's already reigning and he's already seated at the right hand—but *not yet*. He's not yet triumphant over the nations. Verse 2:

**²The LORD sends forth from Zion
your mighty scepter.
Rule in the midst of your enemies!**

Zion is Shalom—it's Jerusalem.

**⁴The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek.”**

**⁵The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.**

⁶He will execute judgment among the nations...

**...he will shatter chiefs
over the wide earth.**

You have this sense even in Psalm 110 that a descendant of David blessed by Melchizedek is already reigning, but not yet. There's this sense that we have this already-but-not-yet thing going on.

To wrap this up, who is Melchizedek in Old Testament thought? We're just focused here on Old Testament. We've gone through a number of these things and there are lots of issues here. As long as we've taken, we've still only touched the basics. You could drill down further on any number of these points. But we've got a situation here where we have these passages connected. We have these two individuals: Melchizedek and Abraham. Abraham, again, is connected to the nations because it's his seed that will bring them back. Melchizedek is connected to the fate of the nations because he is the priest of the Most High God. It was the Most High God that divorced the nations in the first place back in the days of Babel. These themes are connected. There are these textual links in and among all of these different passages. You had the Balaam language about the scepter and the star that will rise. He's seeking the knowledge of the Most High... all this stuff we've been through.

Who is Melchizedek? He is the prototype. Other than being a person in history in the life of Abraham, he is the prototype for the human king-priest. He's a human leader, but he also has a mediatorial role to all other humans and back to the nations. Again, this is a post-Fall story, so we have the restoration of human priesthood and kingship ruling in God's stead. In other words, Melchizedek is a prototype for the king who will come, but he's also emblematic of what Adam

was, too—the original king, ruler, and steward in Eden, and he was the mediator between God and all the other humans that would be born from the union of Adam and his wife. So Melchizedek is part of that template. And that template was consistent—you have one ruler, one figure that God is using as a priest to the rest of his descendants, his family (the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).

That extends all the way up until Moses. When you hit Moses, it bites the dust. Let's just put it that way. It fails because of Moses. God has to make a concession. But Melchizedek, again, is the template, and that's why he is referenced as the ideal. If you're going to have the messiah and the messiah is going to be the Second Adam, and the messiah is going to be a king and a priest, the only touch-point back to Adam is this guy, Melchizedek. You have to go there. You have to validate the combination of king and priest in the messiah. You can't validate that with Moses and Aaron. You have to go back to the original template. You have to go back to Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham. There you have the connection to ruling the nations and bringing the nations back, because the messiah just happens to be one of the seed of Abraham. So it's a complex matrix of ideas. You get these Melchizedek prophecies in Psalm 110 and elsewhere, showing that God planned to return to the priest-king idea. He connected his rule to the reclaiming of the nations and that the priest-king would be the seed of Abraham and later the seed of David. The conquest of Jerusalem by David shows God's intention as the blessing of the priest king of the Most High in Abraham's own day showed God's intentions, as well. The descendant of Abraham would follow in the steps of Melchizedek.

Again, it's complicated. It's a matrix of thoughts. And we're only in the Old Testament! Second Temple Jews are going to see all of these things that we just overviewed. They're going to see it all and they're going to talk about it and write about it. They're going to think messianically with these data points. And they're going to say some amazing things in Second Temple texts. That's what we're going to cover next. Because what they say is going to bleed into the New Testament, just like the Old Testament is going to bleed into the New Testament. So when you get guys like the writer of the book of Hebrews, he's thinking about the Old Testament, but he's also thinking about the way his own ancestors and contemporaries thought about that Old Testament material. It's going to influence him. He's going to see things. They're going to help him think. They're going to help him make connections, and those connections are going to wind up in our New Testament.

55:00

TS: Mike, are there any new ideas that you're presenting here about Melchizedek, or are there other scholars out there who are connecting dots like you?

MH: Oh yeah. There's a pile of information on Melchizedek. I'll list a few things in the bibliography or on the episode page. A small portion of it is accessible to the

normal person, but most of it's in literature. There's a book called *Melchizedek and Melchi-resha'* (who's sort of the bad guy equivalent—he's going to be the Satan figure). It has a lot of this in it. I can put a few journal articles... The ones I list on the episode page, I'll try to put those in the protected folder. I might list some things on the episode page that aren't in the protected folder, but listeners will at least get some of that. There just isn't much popularly written that ever really is text-based. It really all springs from the book of Hebrews and then says, "Oh, by the way, this Melchizedek guy shows up in the Old Testament." You don't really get all the stuff we've talked about here in popular discussions of Melchizedek.

TS: Is there anyone off the top of your head that you can think of or recommend that's trying to pin down who wrote what and when in the Torah?

MH: As far as the Torah, it's a mess. It's kind of like... (laughs)... it's kind of like Hebrew and Greek teachers. Everybody wants to write their own grammar. It's kind of a joke. Everybody thinks they can do it better. This is what you've got here. There are *lots* of theories about Torah—almost as many as there are scholars (a bit of an exaggeration). There's really no one volume. I could think of something like *Who Wrote the Bible* by Friedman, but he takes the classic JEDP thing, which I think is based on circular reasoning. Again, you read something like that, and it sold over a million copies because it was written for the layperson. People were interested in it, but it's the standard view and it has some serious logical flaws to it. But it does point out interesting things that you have to deal with. To me, it's not a total loss. I think probably the best thing within the reach of a layperson would be like a dictionary entry, maybe in one of the Intervarsity Press dictionaries. But all that's going to do is give you an overview of what the problems are and what people have proposed. There's nothing that will be like, "Oh, that ends that debate. Thanks, we don't have to think about that anymore." There's nothing like that.

TS: Sounds good. Real briefly again, Mike... what can we expect in Part 2?

MH: Part 2 is going to be Intertestamental Second Temple Jewish literature. How did they think about this Old Testament stuff? What are some of the things they noticed and their speculations about Melchizedek?

TS: Sounds good. Well, we knew Melchizedek was going to be information overload, which I personally enjoy. These are my favorite episodes when you get into the nitty-gritty like this. I love it. I guess with that, we're going to be looking for Part 2, and I just want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.