

# They Speak Of Me

*<sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,  
he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.  
(Luke 24:27. ESV)*

*<sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;  
and these are they which testify of Me.  
(John 5:39. NKJV)*

## **A Better Covenant**

**June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**Genesis 14:17-24**

**Psalm 110**

**Hebrews 7**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to Genesis 14:17-24. This is one of the most significant stories in Genesis for our understanding of Jesus Christ though it will not seem very important to you at first. This story contains one of those tiny little Gospel snowballs that once again, gains content and clarity as it rolls forward through the Scriptures before finally crashing and climaxing on Jesus Christ. Like last week we'll read this story in two ways. First of all we'll read it in terms of what it can teach us about the life of faith, that won't take very long this week because this little story only really adds one new detail. Then we'll take up this Gospel snowball and trace it forward through the Psalms and on to Hebrews where it is expounded at great length as a lens through which to appreciate the life and work of Jesus Christ.

Before we read this story that begins in verse 17, let me get you up to speed on some developments in the narrative since we left Abraham in chapter 13. Some time after Abraham and Lot separate because of their collective wealth, a war breaks out in the region as 4 city chiefs – that's really what a "king" was in those days, he was a mayor with an attitude; he would have been the Sovereign over a small town of 3000-5000 people with an army of a few hundred raiders. 4 of these kings start raiding all over the area and they are resisted by 5 other kings and the 4 kings win a victory over the 5 kings and they run away with all the booty. In that train of

booty is one man named Lot, the nephew of Abraham and so Abraham gets some guys together and they form a raiding party and they head off in pursuit of the 4 kings. They chase them for about 130 miles before attacking during the night and winning a great victory and recovering a great deal of spoil, including of course, the person of Lot and his family. They begin marching back home and they are met by two kings. Let me begin reading at verse 17:

**Genesis 14:17-24 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> 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. (He was priest of God Most High.)

<sup>19</sup> And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by 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!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

<sup>21</sup> And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself."

<sup>22</sup> But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth,

<sup>23</sup> that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'

<sup>24</sup> I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

This little story adds one new detail to our understanding of the life of faith. In this story we learn from Abraham that:

### **In The Life Of Faith:**

#### **1. We all must choose from whom we will seek our blessing**

The two kings are presented in the narrative as opposites. First there is the king of Sodom. We already know that Sodom is a wealthy city; that was the reason Lot chose to locate his business and his family there. You want to be close to the money and Sodom had the money. The king of Sodom offers Abraham a generous share of the spoil from the recently resolved military conflict. This is only fair, it was Abraham's intervention that tipped the scales and this is how it was done in the ancient world, this is why kings had raiding parties. You could add to your wealth by attacking other people and taking what they had stored up for themselves. To the victor goes the spoil and that is what the King of Sodom offers to Abraham. But there is another king in this story, his name is Melchizedek. His name means "King of Righteousness". He is king of Salem,

which means “peace”. Salem is Jerusalem. He is a king and a priest of God most High. He feeds Abraham and blesses him and Abraham gives him a tenth of everything. He receives his blessing and responds with gratitude and generosity.

The immediate point of this episode is to show us that Abraham has made his choice. He will seek blessing only from God, he will not seek blessing from Sodom. He refuses to take anything from the king of Sodom and instead enters into rich fellowship and worship alongside of Melchizedek the Priest of God Most High.

That is the contrast in the text and the point is fairly obvious. From whom will you seek your blessing? Lot sought blessing from Sodom. He cozied up to the culture and he got rich but he also almost got dead and he would have been dead if not for the intervention of Abraham. Are you going to be like Lot? Are you going to cozy up to the wicked in order to accumulate wealth? Well, if you do, you do so at your own risk. Sodom always, eventually falls into ruin and under wrath. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul? Abraham, however chose to seek his blessing from the Lord and so should we. Abraham is consecrated and dedicated; he has thrown in his lot with God and with God’s people. That is the immediate and most obvious lesson to be learned from this little story.

However, this story also contains a Gospel turn signal and it is to that turn signal that we now shift our attention. God is a very good teacher and a very considerate leader. Good leaders make effective use of turn signals so that they do not lose their followers in transition. Have you ever tried to travel through a foreign city in convoy? I have led a few such convoys back in the days before GPS. I’ve led youth trips in foreign cities where I was the one driving and I had the only navigator or the only map and I’ve got two or three cars behind me trying very hard not to get lost. In such situations what a good leader will do is make use of frequent and timely turn signals. He will provide a quick flash on the left well in advance to indicate to the car behind that we will be turning up ahead and you will want to move over into the left hand lane. Then when it is appropriate he will turn the left signal on and leave it on flashing until the turn is made. That’s how you do it and that’s exactly what we have here. Genesis 14 is the first early flash of God’s turn signal and you can see that if you pay attention to some of the details of the text. Let me try and draw your attention to those details. Look first at the way this story is organized. Put your thumb over verses 18-20 and what do you notice? The story could go on without any loss of

coherence by taking verses 18-20 right out. Abraham is met by the king of Sodom, he refuses the offer of the King of Sodom. That's a coherent story. Melchizedek is inserted almost unnecessarily. That gets our attention. Then there is the name. Melchizedek literally means "king of righteousness". That gets our attention. Then there is the place. Salem. Shalom. Peace. King of Peace. King of Jerusalem. Then there is the remarkable fact that Abraham acknowledges Melchizedek as a superior in every respect. He receives blessing from him – Abraham was supposed to be the one blessing others, now for the first and only time in the story Abraham is blessed by another – this must be some other! Who is superior to Abraham? In all of the Old Testament there is only one person presented as superior to Abraham and it is this person. So we have a King of Righteousness, a King of Peace, a King of Jerusalem who is superior to Abraham and Priest of God Most High. So interesting was this character that the early church almost universally taught that this could be no other than Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate appearance. Who else could be thought of as Superior to Abraham? The Bible doesn't say that this is Jesus, but I share that just to get you seeing how jarring this character is. This is a weird one. This is an eye catcher. This is a pretty obvious turn signal.

Fast forward now to Psalm 110. Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted chapter of the Old Testament in the New Testament. The prophesy you are about to read seems to be considered by Jesus and the Apostles, both of whom make frequent use of it, as the most important prophesy in the Old Testament, if we go by frequency of citation. I hope that gets your attention. Let me read it to you:

**Psalm 110:1-7 (ESV)**

A Psalm Of David

<sup>1</sup> The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

<sup>2</sup> The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!

<sup>3</sup> Your 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.

<sup>4</sup> The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

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

<sup>6</sup> He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth.

<sup>7</sup> He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

We don't have time for a full scale exegesis of this Psalm but I want you to notice a couple of things. First of all I want you to notice those little words under the numeric title: "A Psalm of David". Every single manuscript we have of this Psalm includes those words at the start: A Psalm of David. Why is that important? Its important because David says that His Lord said to

His Lord, meaning that David is recording a dialogue between two persons who are both considered his superior. Let that sink in. David is the King of Israel. David, furthermore, is the King in Jerusalem – the first every Israelite King to sit on Melchizedek’s throne. Who on earth could be superior to David? We have no problem imagining one person as superior to David – that would be God himself. But David records that “My Lord said to my Lord.” Two people superior to David. One is God, but who is the other? It must be the Messiah. David looks down the line of history and he sees that a Son will be born into his house who will be his superior. Now, in those days, sons were not superior to fathers, fathers were superior to sons. So this son must be something special if he is to be David’s superior. What is special about him? What is he that David is not? The answer is in verse 4:

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

One of David’s sons will also be “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”. That is big Gospel news. We already know that a Seed will come into the world who will defeat the devil, overturn the curse, take us back to God and to one another. We already know that the Seed will come through the people of Abraham. He will be a Jew. We already know that he will be not just any Jew, he will be a royal Son of David. He will be a king. What we just learned is that he will also be a Priest. That is a really big development. Think about it, who was king before David? Saul. Why is Saul no longer king? What did he do that caused him to fall under the wrath and curse of God? Do you remember? He tried to be a priest and a king. He sacrificed when he was supposed to wait for Samuel. The law said that a king could not be a priest. Priests have to be descended from Aaron and the tribe of Levi. Saul was not a Levite and David was not a Levite. David therefore knew very well that a king from his line – from the line of Judah – could never be a priest. But here he records a conversation in the heavenlies wherein God tells one of David’s future Sons that he will be a King and a Priest in the order of Melchizedek, forever. That’s big news.

That is a huge, flashing indicator that there will be major changes ahead. David doesn’t know everything about the coming Messiah but he just learned 5 big things:

1. The Messiah will be more than an earthly king.

2. The Messiah will embody righteousness and bring his people peace and he'll do it from Jerusalem.
3. The Messiah will bring together the offices of Prophet, Priest and Priest.

Think about it, if David is a prophet and this new character is superior to David, he will also be a prophet. He will be king and he will be a priest. Therefore this character will bring together all of the leadership offices in the Old Testament. All the streams of disclosure and revelation will come together in one glorious character. This person is going to be very important.

4. The Messiah will live forever.

You will be a priest FOREVER in the order of Melchizedek. Abraham lived and died, David lived and died. This new character will be prophet, priest and king FOREVER. This is an eternal character. And then lastly, David just learned that:

5. The law will have to be changed.

The present law in David's day emphatically said that kings could not be priests – the last king got killed and rejected for trying to be a king and priest and the law was brutally clear on this point and yet, someone is coming who will blur those lines, implying that the law will be changed. That is a very new and very significant insight. This Psalm warns the Bible reader that someday soon a lot of things are going to change. This text is a massive turn signal within redemptive history and it is treated as such by Jesus and the Apostles.

Flip forward now in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 7. Actually flip forward because you'll need your Bible open. The Apostle first begins talking about Melchizedek in chapter 5 in verse 5 where he says:

**Hebrews 5:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";

6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

Here the Apostle goes back to the turn signal in Psalm 110 and begins to teach about how the Melchizedek episode from Genesis 14, prophetically transposed in Psalm 110 provides us with an interpretive lens for understanding God's redemptive work in Christ. Then half way through chapter 5 he breaks off his argument in order to chastise his readers for being slow to understand such things. The Apostle wrote Hebrews, apparently, to chastise Jewish Christians for trying to go backwards in redemptive history, away from the newness of Christ and back into the oldness of Judaism. To continue on with our convoy and turn signal analogy, it is as though they made the initial turn to follow Christ but then because of how different things were, they began to feel like maybe they had made a wrong turn and they began to cut across the field in order to get back on the path of Judaism. The Apostle rebukes them for foolishly desiring the old when the new is much better and when the old itself prophesied and anticipated the new! This turn was not a deviation, he says, it is the destination prophesied and anticipated from of old! So smarten up and get back on the program! That's what he says basically for the rest of chapter 5 and 6. Then he picks his argument about Melchizedek back up in chapter 7. I'll just read you the first 3 verses from chapter 7:

**Hebrews 7:1-3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,

<sup>2</sup> and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

<sup>3</sup> He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, **but resembling the Son of God** he continues a priest forever.

The Apostle says in no uncertain terms that this character Melchizedek is given by God in Scripture as an early turn signal preparing us to see Jesus as the turning point and climax of redemptive history. This was not a wrong turn! This was THE TURN prophesied and specified long ago. This story told us what to anticipate in the coming of Messiah. Then he goes on to specify at least 3 things. First of all:

### **The Story Of Melchizedek Told Us To Anticipate:**

#### **1. A future unification of all the leadership offices**

David told you about this. He said the coming King would also be a Priest. He told you that he would be superior to David in every way. If David was a prophet, how much more the Messiah?

We were told to expect a prophet, priest and king who would bring together all the leadership offices of the Bible. Jesus was not a wrong turn in that respect, Jesus was everything he was supposed to be. The Apostle makes that point again and again in Hebrews, it is almost the outline of the book. Jesus is the better prophet – he says that in chapter 1 and chapter 3; Jesus is the better priest – he’s making that point right now in chapter 7 and he’ll make it again in chapters 8,9 and 10. And Jesus is the long awaited king, he made that point in chapter 5. Just like we teach our kids in our little catechism book: Christ has the offices of prophet, priest and king, just like David said he would 1000 years ago.

Secondly, the story of Melchizedek told us to anticipate:

## **2. A coming change to the law**

This is a very significant point within the New Testament and within the early history of the church. Within the New Testament the trickiest issue for the church to figure out apparently was the relationship between the old and new covenants and correspondingly between law and gospel. You can’t miss that if you read your Bible. Over the last several weeks we’ve had numerous occasions to read Galatians 3:16 where Paul says that the ultimate Seed is Christ, but look at what he says right next:

### **Galatians 3:17-21 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.

<sup>18</sup> For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

<sup>19</sup> Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.

<sup>20</sup> Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

<sup>21</sup> Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not!

Here Paul says that the promise of God to Abraham’s offspring – Christ – is what came first in the Bible and is therefore it is the most important thing. The law of Moses only came 430 years later and was never intended to last forever. It served a temporary purpose – to restrain sin until Jesus came. The relationship between the law and the Gospel is therefore not oppositional it is transitional. That teaching in Galatians 3 aligns very nicely with what we see in Hebrews 7.

Look at verse 12:



### **Hebrews 7:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> For when there is a change in the priesthood, **there is necessarily a change in the law** as well.

In Hebrews 7 the Apostle is saying that the Melchizedek episode, particularly how it is treated in David's prophesy, was intended to prepare us for a massive change in the role of the law. The law was temporary. The law was preparatory. Now, things are different. Now we have new hearts – do you remember in Psalm 110 it talked about saints made willing? That is part of what the new King will do! As priest he will give us new hearts and make us willing! The moral impulse of God will be internal in the New Covenant as opposed to external as in the Old Covenant. This is new, this is better and you were told it was coming.

Thirdly and lastly the story of Melchizedek tells us to anticipate:

### **3. A superior and eternal Mediator**

In the Book of Genesis the mediator of blessing is Abraham. If you were in right relationship with Abraham then you received the promised blessings. The story of Melchizedek however, introduces the idea that there is someone superior and apparently eternal who will reenter the story through the line of David at some point in the future. When he comes, everything will change. Look at Hebrews 7:17-19:

### **Hebrews 7:17-19 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

<sup>18</sup> For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness

<sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, **a better hope is introduced**, through which we draw near to God.

He then goes on to say in verse 22:

### **Hebrews 7:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> This makes Jesus **the guarantor of a better covenant**.

Jesus is Superior to Abraham and the whole Jewish system, Jesus is superior to David; Jesus is better! There is nothing better back there in Judaism for you. Stick to this road that God has set us on. This is the path of life, this is the path of promise and there is no other name in heaven or on the earth whereby men may be saved. Jesus is here now and Jesus is better.

## **Conclusion:**

We're out of time and this is a complicated Gospel thread as indeed the author of the Hebrews acknowledges. Let me just leave you with two exhortations in the spirit of these texts. The first one is by far the most important.

### **1. Embrace Jesus as your Teacher, Savior and Lord**

Do not be one of those who think they can claim Jesus as Saviour yet reject him as Lord. You cannot have him as your priest if you do not own him as your king. Christ is not divided. Decide today whether you will have him as your prophet – your ultimate source of truth and knowledge, your king – your ultimate source of strength and your ultimate ruler and Lord, and your Saviour. Your great high priest who ever lives before the father to make intercession for you. Its all or nothing. You cannot divide his benefits anymore than you can divide his person. Take him and own him as your all.

Then lastly:

### **2. Don't turn back in search of former things**

There has always been an off-ramp called "Judaism". Ever since the earliest days of the church there have been some who want to drink the new wine out of the old wineskins. They talk of Midrash and Talmidim and rebuilt temples and on and on and on. This has been around forever. Do you know that one of the most persistent attacks against the church in the Roman Empire was that Christianity was nothing more than a rebellious apostasy from Judaism? Roman critics said: "You Christians claim to be the offspring of Abraham and yet you do not keep the Jewish law. You do not observe the Sabbath or the feasts. How can you be the people of the Hebrew God when you have obviously left the Hebrew religion?" That was the thrust of the attack made by the Emperor Julian in the 4<sup>th</sup> century against Christianity. Do you know that in order to expose Christianity as a new and rebellious sect, he actually proposed to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem? He knew that if the temple were rebuilt then the Christian claim to be the new direction in God's saving economy would be proven false. Like how the Spanish explorers

burned their boats when they arrived in the new world, Christians had taught that when God led his people around this turn we've been talking about, he burned the boats – that is he destroyed the temple and the Jewish priesthood – so that we could never go back. Julian knew that so he proposed to rebuild the temple. Listen to how that attempt is recorded in history. Robert Wilken says:

“The pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus said that balls of fire burst from underneath the foundations and Christian historians reported that fire came down from heaven to burn the site and the workers. The project was abandoned.”<sup>1</sup>

I would think so. There is no going back, then or now. God burned the boats. Therefore, let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, The Christians As The Romans Saw Them (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 194.