

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM

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Edited by  
Daniel H. Ludlow

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Women, and so forth. Each of these presidencies typically also holds a planning meeting each week. Even though there are many meetings, leaders are encouraged to spend less time in meetings and more time in service.

Most Church meetings are formally organized with hymns, prayers, sermons, lessons, and/or instructions. To involve teenagers and children, many meetings use participative methods such as discussion groups, panels, case studies, and role playing.

In all conferences—ward, stake, regional, and general—Church leaders give presentations of counsel and inspiration. Special meetings are held during the year for the priesthood (e.g., stake and general priesthood meetings), and for the women of the Church (general meeting). There are likewise seminary meetings for participating teenagers attending high school, missionary meetings for those on MISSIONS, and meetings for temple workers, scout leaders, activity directors, nursery teachers, and Sunday School workers. The Latter-day Saint culture flourishes on the principle of meeting together often in order to “be prepared in all things” (D&C 88:80).

In business and planning meetings, there is an attempt to have everyone contribute, but those with official status usually conduct the proceedings and have the most decisive influence. These meeting patterns extend worldwide and are a major part of the cohesiveness that keeps Mormons in touch, involved, acquainted, and united in the common cause of building the KINGDOM OF GOD on earth.

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WILLIAM G. DYER

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## MELCHIZEDEK

[*This entry consists of two articles: LDS Sources, a discussion of what is known of Melchizedek from Church scripture and revelation, and Ancient Sources, a historical view of Melchizedek from ancient writings and traditions.*]

## LDS SOURCES

As a king and HIGH PRIEST of the Most High God (Gen. 14:18), Melchizedek holds a place of great honor and respect among Latter-day Saints. An example of righteousness and the namesake of the higher PRIESTHOOD, he represents the scriptural ideal of one who obtains the power of God through FAITH, REPENTANCE, and sacred ORDINANCES, for the purpose of inspiring and blessing his fellow beings.

Melchizedek was evidently a prince by birth, for he became king of Salem (later JERUSALEM—Gen. 14:18; Ps. 76:2), where he reigned “under his father” (Alma 13:18). “Melchizedek was a man of faith, who wrought righteousness; and when a child he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire” (JST Gen. 14:26). Yet the people among whom he lived “waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness” (Alma 13:17).

Though living among a wicked people, Melchizedek “exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God” (Alma 13:18). This priesthood was after the order of the COVENANT that God had made with Enoch (JST Gen. 14:27), and Melchizedek ruled both as king and priest over his people.

As high priest, some of his functions were keeping “the storehouse of God” where the “tithes for the poor” were held (JST Gen. 14:37–38), giving blessings to individuals such as ABRAHAM (JST Gen. 14:18, 25, 37), preaching repentance (Alma 13:18; cf. 5:49), and administering ordinances “after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God . . . for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord” (Alma 13:16; JST Gen. 14:17). With extraordinary goodness and power, Melchizedek diligently administered in the office of high priest and “did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days” (Alma 13:18). Consequently, Melchizedek became known as “the prince of peace” (JST Gen. 14:33; Heb. 7:1–2; Alma 13:18). “His people wrought righteousness, and obtained heaven” (JST Gen. 14:34). His Hebrew name means “King of Righteousness.”

For ALMA<sub>2</sub> and several biblical authors, the order of the priesthood to which Melchizedek was ordained was of prime importance. It was this



This mosaic shows Melchizedek standing behind an altar symbolically receiving the sacrifices of Abel and Abraham. Saint Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna, Italy (sixth century A.D.). Courtesy John W. Welch.

“order,” coupled with faith, that gave Melchizedek the power and knowledge that influenced his people to repent and become worthy to be with God. This order was “after the order of the Son of God; which order came, not by man, nor the will of man; neither by father nor mother; neither by beginning of days nor end of years; but of God” (JST Gen. 14:28; JST Heb. 7:3; Ps. 110:4). It was given to Melchizedek “through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah,” and from Melchizedek to Abraham (D&C 84:14). Those ordained to this order were to “have power, by faith,” and, according to “the will of the Son of God,” to work miracles. Ultimately, those in this order were “to stand in the presence of God” (JST Gen. 14:30–31). This was accomplished by participating in the ordinances of this order (Alma 13:16; D&C 84:20–22). The result was that “men having this faith, coming up unto this order of God, were translated and taken up into heaven” (JST Gen. 14:32). Accordingly, the Prophet Joseph SMITH taught that the priesthood held by Melchizedek had “the power of ‘endless lives’” (TPJS, p. 322; see also ETERNAL LIFE).

So righteous and faithful was Melchizedek in the execution of his high priestly duties that he became a prototype of Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:15). The Book of Mormon prophet Alma said of him, “Now, there were many [high priests] before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater” (Alma 13:19). The Doctrine and Covenants states that Melchizedek was “such a great high priest” that the higher priesthood was called after his name. “Before his day it was called *the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God*. But out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too-frequent repetition of his name, they, the church, in the ancient days, called that priesthood after Melchizedek, or the Melchizedek Priesthood” (D&C 107:2–4; italics in original).

It was asserted by some early LDS leaders that Melchizedek was Shem, son of Noah (see, e.g., T&S 5:746). Though Shem is also identified as a great high priest (D&C 138:41), it would appear from the Doctrine and Covenants 84:14 that the two might not be the same individual (MD, p. 475), and Jewish sources equating Melchizedek and Shem are late and tendentious.

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BRUCE SATTERFIELD

#### ANCIENT SOURCES

Genesis 14:17–24 reports that Abram (“the Hebrew,” 14:3), upon his victorious return from a battle, was met by the king of Sodom (“Bera,” 14:2), who was eager to reward Abram for coming to his and his allies’ aid. The narrative is interrupted by an enigmatic insertion (14:18–20) featuring “Melchizedek king of Salem,” “priest of God Most High” (RSV). Melchizedek “brought out bread and wine” and blessed Abram in the name of God Most High (Hebrew *’el ’elyôn*). Abram then gave Melchizedek a tithe of his booty. This priest-king of Salem has enjoyed a wide range of interpretation among Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic writings, some that brought him up to the heights of heaven,

and others—of developing Christian and Jewish orthodoxy—that brought him down to earth again.

The story of Genesis 14 has raised numerous questions. Most modern scholars entertain a possible connection of this Melchizedek with a pre-Israelite kingship and/or priesthood in the Jebusite city of Jerusalem (“Salem”) before its conquest by King David (2 Sam. 5:6–10). The incorporation of the story into Judean traditions reflects the interests of the Jerusalem royal ideology.

The only other Old Testament occurrence of the name Melchizedek is found in a royal Jerusalemite psalm, Psalm 110:4. There God (“the Lord”) addresses the king thus: “You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek occurs in the New Testament only in the Epistle to the Hebrews (5:6–10; 6:20; 7:1–17), where the Old Testament figure is interpreted as a type of the “high priest” of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ. The key passage is Hebrews 7:3, where it is said that Melchizedek “resembles the Son of God.” Melchizedek’s priesthood, superior to that of the “descendants of Levi” (Heb. 7:5), is a foreshadowing of the priesthood of the Son of God. Hebrews 7:3 becomes the basis for most Christian interpretation of the figure of Melchizedek (Horton, pp. 111, 152, 161–64).

An important witness to pre-Christian Jewish speculation on Melchizedek has surfaced among the Dead Sea Scrolls: 11QMelch. The fragmentary Hebrew text, usually dated to the first century B.C., features Melchizedek as a heavenly end-time redeemer, with attributes of the archangel Michael. He appears in the tenth and final jubilee of world history to rescue the elect, the “men of the lot of Melchizedek” (ii.8), doing battle with Belial and his fellow evil spirits. Melchizedek’s triumph is described as a high-priestly act of “expiation” (ii.8; cf. Kobelski, pp. 5–23).

Melchizedek is mentioned by Philo, a first-century Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, in three writings (*Legum Allegoriae* 3.79–82; *De Congressu* 89; *De Abrahamo* 235). Philo interprets the text of Genesis in a Platonic-allegorical fashion, seeing in Melchizedek a reference to the divine Logos, the thought of God in which the pattern of all existing things is conceived and the “image” of God according to which man was created.

Another important text, 2 Enoch, attests to early Jewish interest in the figure of Melchizedek. The date and place of this document are controversial, but recent scholarship places its original

Greek version in the first century A.D. in Alexandria (cf. F. I. Andersen’s introduction and translation in Charlesworth, Vol. 1, pp. 91–213). In this text (chaps. 71–72), a child is born miraculously to Noah’s recently deceased sister-in-law, and the child, marked on his chest with a priestly seal, speaks and praises God. The boy is named Melchizedek by Noah and his brother Nir, whose wife had been posthumously delivered. In a night vision Nir is told of the impending flood; he is also informed that the archangel Michael will bring Melchizedek to paradise, thus enabling him to escape the flood waters. Melchizedek will eventually become the chief of priests among the people, and in the end of days he will be revealed yet another time as the chief priest. In this text, Melchizedek has three different earthly manifestations: born before the Flood, serving in the postdiluvian age as a great priest, and functioning in the end-time as a messianic priest (cf. Gruenewald, pp. 90–92; Delcor, pp. 127–30).

Some of these Jewish interpretations were taken over by Gnostics and are now reflected in some Christian Gnostic texts preserved in Coptic manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries (Pearson, 1990). In one fragmentary manuscript, the disciple John asks Jesus to explain what is said about Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:3. Unfortunately, the text breaks off before Jesus’ interpretation is given.

A fragmentary text from Nag Hammadi (IX.1: *Melchizedek*; cf. Pearson, 1981, pp. 19–85) contains an apocalypse given by angels to Melchizedek, “priest of God Most High.” It is revealed to Melchizedek that he will ultimately reappear as Jesus Christ, Son of God, to do battle with the cosmic forces of darkness. Here one can see influence not only from the Epistle to the Hebrews but also from non-Christian lore.

In the *Second Book of Jeu*, “Zorokothora Melchizedek” is a heavenly priest who presides over a heavenly baptism. No trace of influence from Hebrews is found in this text.

The most developed levels of speculation on Melchizedek, also lacking any influence from Hebrews, are found in *Pistis Sophia*, Book 4, in which Melchizedek plays a key role in the process of purifying human souls for entry into the “Treasury of Light” and transferring them from the domain of the archons, or earthly rulers, to that heavenly region. The younger material in books 1–3 of *Pistis Sophia* develops these ideas further: Melchizedek

is a heavenly being who seals the saved souls upon their entry into the realm of light.

The church fathers attest to several heterodox ideas associated with Melchizedek. Hippolytus of Rome (*Refutatio* 7.35–36) and Epiphanius of Salamis (*Panarion* 55) are the most important witnesses to a group of heretics called Melchizedekians. They had a low Christology and exalted Melchizedek as a heavenly power superior to Christ. Others equated Melchizedek with the Holy Spirit (*Panarion* 67), and some “even in the true church” (i.e., not “heretics”) naively regarded Melchizedek as the Son of God (*Panarion* 55.7.3). The later view seems also to have been present among the monasteries of Egypt (*Apophthegmata Patrum*, in *Patrologia Graeca* 65.160) and was even defended in a treatise on Melchizedek by a fifth-century resident of the Judean desert, Mark the Hermit (*PG* 65.1117–40). Such views were eventually overcome by teacher-bishops such as Cyril of Alexandria (*PG* 65.160).

On the Jewish side, while early rabbis continued to speculate on Melchizedek’s role in scripture (e.g., equating him with Shem, son of Noah; cf. *b. Nedarim* 32b; *Midrash Gen. R.* 44.7; *Targum Ps.-J. Gen.* 14:18), a major stream of rabbinic tradition viewed Melchizedek negatively, a fact that indicates some Jewish sensitivity to the use of Melchizedek traditions by Christians (Gianotto, pp. 172–85).

[See also Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.]

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BIRGER A. PEARSON

## MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

[This entry consists of two articles: Powers and Offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood is a general discussion of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and Restoration is a historical treatment of the restoring of this priesthood in this dispensation.]

### POWERS AND OFFICES IN THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

The Melchizedek Priesthood is the AUTHORITY, responsibility, and power to act in the name of Jesus Christ and to organize and direct part of his work. Through the opportunities of this PRIESTHOOD, men and women in partnership with God can conduct the work of the family and the Church. “It is the duty of this vast body of men holding the holy Priesthood . . . to exert their influence and exercise their power for good among the people of Israel and the people of the world . . . to preach and to work righteousness, both at home and abroad” (Smith, p. 157).

In the words of the Prophet Joseph SMITH, “All Priesthood is Melchizedek, but there are different portions or degrees of it” (*TPJS*, p. 180). Most often, however, the name Melchizedek Priesthood is used in the Church to describe the higher priesthood and its offices. “There are, in the church, two priesthoods, namely, the Melchizedek and Aaronic. . . . The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church in all ages of the world, to administer in spiritual things” (D&C 107:1, 8). The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the keys to the kingdom, and “in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest” (D&C 84:20).

ORDINATION TO THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD. Every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the Melchizedek Priesthood. As with the AARONIC PRIESTHOOD, the Melchizedek Priesthood is conferred on those who have qualified themselves and have been called by those in authority.

Specific standards of worthiness to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood include personal integrity, chastity, obedience to the divine laws of health, and faithful contribution of tithes to the Church. Beyond these traits, it is expected that men will progress in developing attributes of godliness. Like all followers of Christ, they should be faithful, diligent, and amenable to righteous