

The Book of Hebrews

Part 19: Principalities & Christophanies (Heb. 7:1-3)

I. Exposing and Disarming the Powers of Darkness

We will now draw a closer focus on the mystery of Melchizedek. Look again at the first three verses of Hebrews 7:

1-2 Melchizedek's name means "king of righteousness." He was the King of Peace, because the name of the city he ruled as king was Salem, which means "peace." And he was also a priest of the Most High God. Now when Abraham was returning from defeating many kings in battle, Melchizedek went out to meet him and blessed him. Then Abraham took a tenth of everything he had won in battle and gave it to Melchizedek. 3 This Melchizedek has no father or mother, and no record of any of his ancestors. He was never born and he never died, but his life is like a picture of the Son of God, a King-Priest forever!

(Hebrews 7:1-3 TPT)

The story of Melchizedek from Genesis 14 holds wonderful insights into the Gospel. It begins with an alliance of four oppressors who have banded together.

1 And it came about in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim...

(Genesis 14:1)

More like chiefs of large tribal communities, these four kings held power throughout the regions surrounding Canaan where Abraham was dwelling.

The story starts with Amraphel whose name means "Sayer of Darkness." He is king over the land of Shinar meaning "Two Rivers"—a symbol of division. Shinar is the origin of Babylon, a symbol of evil throughout all of scripture. Right away, we can see that this king points to the enemy of our souls and the kingdom of darkness itself.

Amraphel is aligned with three other rulers. The next king mentioned is Arioch of Ellasar. His name means "Fierce Lion" and he reigns over a nation called "God is a Punisher."

The next king is Chedorlaomer, meaning "Servant of the Goddess Lagamar." Lagamar was an ancient Mesopotamian deity whose name means "No Mercy." Lagamar is believed to be a deity who would accuse the dead as they entered the underworld. Interestingly, this king named after her reigns over a city called Elam, meaning "Eternity." He is called Servant of the Goddess of No Mercy who reigns over (or we could say throughout) Eternity.

The fourth and final king is Tidal of Goiim. His name translates as “Great Son” and he is king over Goiim, meaning “the nations.” This particular word for “Great Son” comes from the root word for “fear,” particularly an unhealthy, terrifying kind of fear. The word only shows up elsewhere in the book of Daniel to describe the wicked King Nebuchadnezzar and also the fourth beast in Daniel’s apocalyptic vision which is often associated with the antichrist.

This is interesting because he is called Great Son—but the root of his name (his identity) is fear. He is actually the opposite of the true Great Son whose love casts out fear (and in whose Spirit there is no fear). Ironically, the language of his name then makes him a kind of anti-Christ.

Each of these kings represent different aspects of the kingdom of darkness and how the enemy has taken a stronghold over humanity.

The biggest thing holding people captive is a false and distorted image of God, which is what Jesus came to heal and redeem (“If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father...”).

The “Goddess of No Mercy” is a distortion of the Father whose mercy endures forever (Psalm 136). Throughout eternity, God will be full of mercy. Yet this false god/goddess shows *no mercy* over the people in Eternity. This speaks to the corrupt view of God reigning in many people’s minds, including believers in Jesus who still see God the Father as a vengeful deity who casts people into eternal hell without any hope for mercy in the afterlife.

This king named Chedorlaomer of Elam is a picture of the Accuser, the one who speaks condemnation over humanity and who wants to establish a false understanding of our Creator, which is the essence of idolatry—the root problem of humanity (see Romans 1:20-25)

Which leads to the next king who is called the Fierce Lion reigning over a city named “God is a Punisher.”

The enemy is the one who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Meanwhile, Jesus is also called a Lion, but he is the Lion with the heart of a Lamb.

The devil *poses* as a lion but with a heart of accusation. In other words, he pretends to be the voice of God with a false “roar” of condemnation and thereby devours us through guilt and shame. One of the ways he does this is by getting us to believe God is a punishing Judge instead of a loving Father who judges us as worthy of love and proves it by shedding his own blood.

Distortions of God are obvious to see in other religious systems throughout the world, but this same enemy is alive and well in the world of Christianity with doctrines such as penal substitution where Christians all over are taught that God “punished” Jesus for our sins—instead of Jesus and the Father coming as One to reconcile us and take our own self-inflicted punishment of sin on his own Body.

All of this brings us back to the first king in Genesis 14, the one who rules over the others, the king of Babylon, which is the clearest picture of the enemy. Amraphol of Shinar is the Sayer of Darkness. As the king over “Two Rivers,” he is the one who seeks to divide and conquer humanity. He wants to divide our minds, divide our marriages, families, nations, entire people groups, and he wants to divide God and man.

He can’t divide God and man because we are forever united in the person of Christ, but he will do it by being a *sayer of darkness*—by lying. He speaks empty things about the Father and humanity. He speaks a false word—an anti-Word (like “antichrist”). He rules through deception, and so he is not only an Accuser but a Deceiver as well.

The fourth king in the list—the Great Son (of fear)—is the one who rules over Goiim, which is a fitting way to end this symbolic coalition of darkness because that word was used for the Gentiles. Goiim speaks to all the people groups and races of humanity.

Together these kings represent everything that holds the world in bondage. They speak to the powers and principalities set on our division and destruction. And these are more than just dark entities; they are powerful mindsets that rule over human beings to keep us in ingrained patterns of divisiveness, guilt, and wickedness (meaning the “distortion” of the true design).

All of this is why the New Testament teaches us that the cross has already disarmed these powers and principalities...

15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

(Colossians 2:15 NIV)

If the primary weapons of these spiritual forces are accusation toward humans and lies about God—then the cross has forever broken their power. The coming of Jesus, as the perfect image of God (Hebrews 1), has taken away their weaponry. We are set free from these ancient strongholds the moment our hearts find rest in the Good News.

Parallel to Daniel’s Vision:

An interesting note is that these four kings seem to parallel Daniel’s four dark beasts who overpower the nations. The first beast in Daniel’s vision symbolizes the nation of Babylon which descends from Amraphol’s kingdom. As we pointed out before, the fourth and final beast is described by the same root word for Tidal, the final king in this dark alliance from Genesis 14.

Thankfully, just as Abraham would come and crush these four kings, the promised Seed of Abraham crushed the beasts of Daniel by his finished work on the cross (see Daniel 7).

Before we look at how Melchizedek comes into play with Abraham and these four kings, there's something significant to note. The author of the book of Hebrews writes a revolutionary message to his Jewish readers who were full of Bible knowledge and had many assumptions about God.

Using the story of Melchizedek, he invites them to see something hidden in the Old Testament which they were having a very difficult time accepting. He does this first by drawing revelation from the symbolic meaning of Melchizedek's name as well as the meaning of the name of his city! This is exactly what we are doing with these four kings. We are standing on the shoulders of the apostolic writer to the Hebrews.

II. A Foreshadow of Gospel Light

In the story of Genesis 14, these four kings form an unholy alliance when the people of Sodom and Gomorrah rebel against one of them—the Servant of the Goddess of No Mercy. Chedorlaomer bands with these other kings to attack and take over Sodom, Gomorrah, and three other nations.

Abraham's nephew Lot lives in the area of Sodom and so he is one of the people taken captive by these enemy kings. Abraham (still called "Abram" at this point) goes to war with all four principalities and defeats them soundly.

Such is a picture of the promise of Abraham's Seed coming to rescue the people of the world from the clutches of darkness—from the Sayer of Darkness and false Babylonian/religious systems that distort the face of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Abraham's rescue of Lot, along with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, is also a beautiful foreshadow of the good news of God's grace over humanity. Lot is the originator of the Moabite people who were seen as despised idolaters throughout the Old Testament. Sodom and Gomorrah were cities filled with horrible sinful activity.

Nonetheless, these are the people included in Abraham's work of "salvation." This is all pointing to the work of salvation by grace through Abraham's Seed. In fact, the king of Sodom offers Abraham a reward for his work, but Abraham refuses, saying he doesn't want them thinking they contributed anything to his success (Genesis 17:22-23)—a picture of how we contribute nothing to Jesus's work of salvation on our behalf.

Furthermore, Abraham saves *five* nations in total, which is the biblical number of *grace*. This is truly pointing to the seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, who by his own power would rescue humanity from being kidnapped and oppressed by darkness.

This leads to another very important thing to glean from this story. The reason people are caught up in darkness in the first place (like those in Sodom and Gomorrah) is because we have been

held captive by lies. Thus, we need the light of the Gospel to set us free, which is the light of who God is and who we are as his children, prodigal though we may be.

Upon this breakthrough with Abraham and the battle of the four kings, a mysterious figure suddenly shows up in the story:

17 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). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all. (Genesis 14:17-20)

Out of nowhere, another king shows up to join the celebration who is also a priest. Nowhere else in scripture do we see someone who is both a king and a priest. This was not allowed in the Old Covenant (see 2 Chronicles 26:18). The only one who came close to this was King David when he wore a priestly garment during the inauguration of his tabernacle (2 Samuel 6:14).

Interestingly, David is the only other person in scripture who would bring up Melchizedek again. He is never mentioned after this incident except in a small prophecy hidden in David's book of songs:

**The Lord has sword and will not change His mind,
You are priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek.
(Psalm 110:4)**

As we well know by now, the entire book of Hebrews builds on this prophecy, saying that something very big was at work going all the way back to this strange story in Genesis. Everything was pointing to the coming of the true Messiah who would reflect this mysterious King-Priest.

The amazing part of this encounter in Genesis is that Melchizedek shows up in the aftermath of a victory over the king of darkness, the false lion and fearful son. The particular king mentioned in his appearance is Chedorlaomer, the servant of the Accuser, the ruler of the underworld who kept people in chains through guilt and condemnation.

Abram delivers people who were held captive by this king with this prophetic name and then this other king with another prophetic name—the King of Righteousness—shows up in the King's Valley. It's like we're seeing the revelation of the true King of kings . . . the Lord of lords . . . the Principality of Peace . . . the Most High.

But what's most astounding is that this true King shows up with bread and wine . . . the very things Jesus Christ used in inaugurating his covenant of grace and mercy. The very things that speak to his body and blood through which we overcome the Accuser.

Fittingly, the king of Sodom who was a benefactor of Abraham's victory and who was present when the King of Peace brought bread and wine—his name means Evil and his city means Burning. The king of Gomorrah, another city who was saved by Abraham, means Wicked and Ruined.

Those who are evil and wicked, who have experienced burning and ruin because they are held captive to the Accuser and the One Who Speaks Darkness—they are called to the table of grace where the King of Righteousness sits.

- *In beautiful fashion, this connects to a promise in Ezekiel 16 where God promises to redeem and resurrect the people of Sodom and her surrounding towns (vv. 53-63).*

III. The Christophany of Genesis 14

The book of Hebrews is written to people who were resistant to the message of grace. Whether it's grace for themselves or for the people groups around them, they needed a massive overhaul in their thinking.

A lot of their thinking was rooted in the Bible! What we call the Old Testament was *their scriptures* and they had a hard time reconciling the message of grace with everything else they saw in the Old Covenant.

As we've said many times, this is because the Old Testament is filled with shadows. We will see this concept of shadows more clearly in Hebrews 10. Jesus is there but he was hidden behind a lot of the darkness of fallen thinking. Every once in a while, the clouds break up and his light shines through. Melchizedek is an example of this.

Many believe Melchizedek is a moment of "Christophany," a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. So, the writer to the Hebrews is trying to help them see Jesus in the story, which is easier in moments where he actually shows up (although still in a shadowy, hidden way).

Hebrews is trying to teach the same thing Jesus tried to get the Jews to understand 40 years before the letter was written.

When Jesus was fully incarnate on earth there was a powerful moment where he made explicit the truth he is the Great "I Am." He is the One who was always there in the text. In this instance, he revealed himself as the One who spoke to Moses in the burning bush as the **I Am that I Am** (Exodus 3:14), from which we derive the unpronounceable name of God YHWH (or "Yahweh" with vowels added for pronunciation).

57 But many of the Jewish leaders doubted him and said, “What are you talking about? You’re not even fifty years old yet. You talk like you’ve seen Abraham!” **58** Jesus said to them, “*I give you this eternal truth: I have existed long before Abraham was born, for I AM!*” **59** When they heard this, they picked up rocks to stone him, but Jesus concealed himself as he passed through the crowd and went away from there.

(John 8:57-59 TPT)

The law of Moses commanded the community to stone someone who blasphemed God’s name. Jesus concealed himself just as they were using the written book of Moses to try and kill him. He hides himself in the midst of people seemingly following Moses’s law as rocks get hurled left and right.

In a similar fashion, Jesus is concealed in the midst of the Old Testament, especially in parts which seem to hurl rocks of accusation, punishment, and fear.

But those are the shadows. The book of Hebrews and the Holy Spirit are inviting us into the full light of grace, to find rest in the truth.

Because God wants us to have a Christophany in our own lives. God wants to show up with bread and wine and release the truth of peace and righteousness in your own heart.

He wants to reveal Jesus within you and around you . . . and he wants to reveal the smile of his heart beaming over your life.

Follow-up Encounter:

Find a chapter in one of the first five books of the Bible and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ within it. You may want to open “randomly” to a page between Genesis 1 and Deuteronomy 34 or look for a story you are already familiar with.

As you see something of Christ and the good news of grace, prepare to take communion. Thank God for whatever truth of the Gospel you are seeing reflected in the text. (And if you’re having a hard time with this, perhaps ask someone else for help in finding a story where Jesus is hidden.)