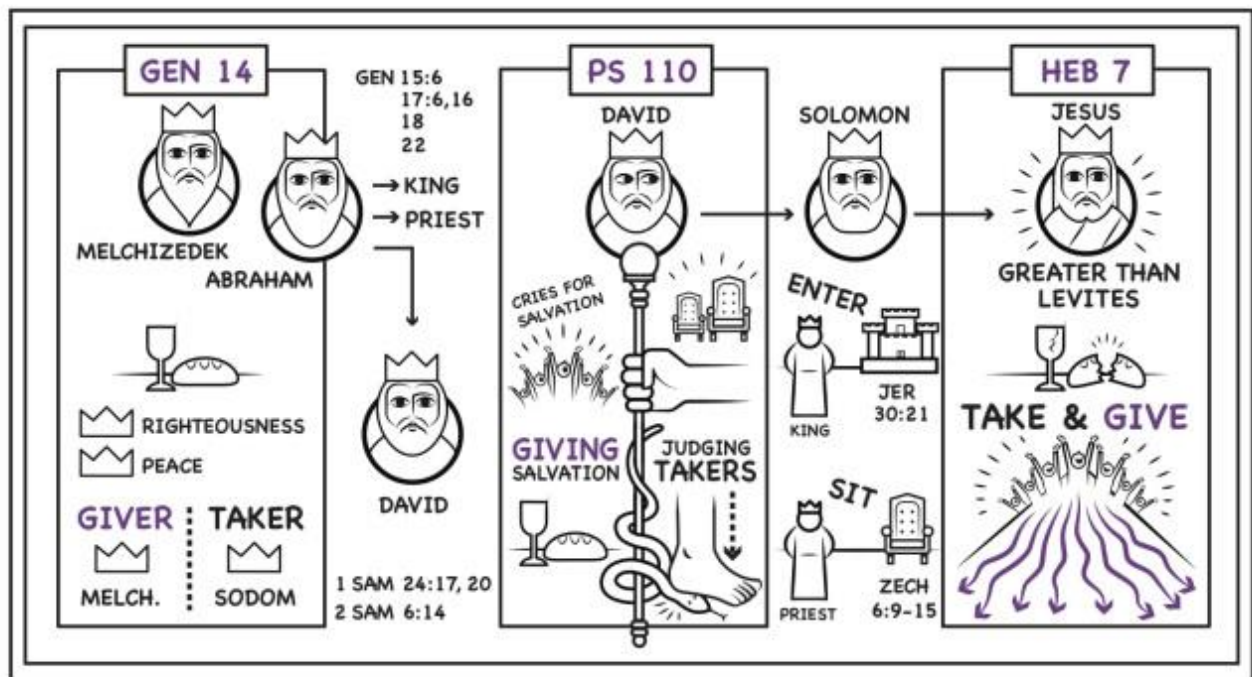


# Bread and Wine at the Table of a Righteous King (A Meditation on the Lord's Supper)

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by David Schrock

As we prepare to take the Lord's Supper this Sunday, our guest preacher, Dr. Irwyn Ince, will be bringing a word from Hebrews 7. As we looked at Psalm 110 a few weeks ago, this message will complement and complete our study on Jesus Christ, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. What follows is meditation on the Lord's Supper from Genesis 14 to Jesus Christ.



Dear Church,

You have been invited to covenant meal—a table set in the midst of hostile enemies. Bread and wine are the food and drink of choice. The host is a righteous king who lives in the holy city Jerusalem, and serves God Most High as a faithful priest.

When you look at your invitation, the RSVP calls you to renounce your idols and acknowledge the greatness of your host. This table, offered freely to you, is set for those who believe God's promises and refuse to partner with the kings of this world. Indeed, this table does not communicate righteousness. Rather, it is for those who have been justified by faith in the promises of God Most High.

What is this invitation describing?

If you said, the Lord's Supper, you'd be correct. And if you said Abram's meal with Melchizedek, you'd also be right. But how can this be? How can one description point to two events? The answer is that God ordained the Old Testament events of Genesis 14 to prepare the way for Jesus Christ and the covenant he sealed with his blood and celebrated on the night before his crucifixion.

Therefore, just as learning the history of Passover helps us appreciate and apply the Lord's Supper today, so does learning the story of Melchizedek and his covenant meal.

## Covenant Meals in the Bible

Throughout the Old Testament, covenants were celebrated and consecrated with meals. At Sinai, Moses, Aaron, his sons, and the 70 elders ate and drank on the mountain of God (Exodus 24:9–11), as Yahweh made covenant with them. Likewise, in Genesis when Jacob and Laban made a covenant, they two ate a meal together (31:44–46; cf. Gen. 26:28–30).

Picking up this pattern, Jesus inaugurated his covenant meal when he broke bread and drank wine with the disciples on the night before his crucifixion. Speaking of the cup and the bread, Luke 22:17–20 records,

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

While Jesus is doing something new—inaugurating a meal which would remember his death and resurrection—he is basing his new covenant meal on Israel's Passover and the pattern established throughout the Bible. Covenants include meals with bread and wine—the first of which we find in Genesis 14 between Melchizedek and Abraham.

## The First Covenant Meal

Genesis 14 records the hostility of the kings of Canaan. Verses 1–12 describe the battle of nine kings, but it is the tenth king who is greater than them all. In verses 13–16, we learn Abram, God's chosen friend, has defeated five kings with his 318 trained men and saved his nephew Lot. And now on his victorious return from the battle, he encounters the Melchizedek,

the King of Salem (i.e., the king of peace), who did not partake in the Canaanite warfare, but did serve as priest to the Most High God.

Indeed, as Genesis 14:20 records Abram gave this king a tenth of his spoils from the battle because he recognized the greatness of this priest-king (cf. Heb. 7). Significantly, the chapter portrays Abram as greater than all the other kings and yet Melchizedek greater than him. Importantly though, Melchizedek's greatness is seen not in his warfare or his army—Genesis doesn't even mention his family or his kingdom. Instead, his greatness is seen in his generosity and blessing. (Could Abram's redemption of Lot by the strength of his army even hint at a temptation to solve problems with the flesh? It's worth pondering. Cf. Genesis 16).

Genesis 14:18 says, "Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God most high." In historical context, bread and wine were often associated with covenant meals. And the mention of his priesthood in the next sentence, suggests that this meal was more than humanitarian aid. Abram had the spoils of war; he didn't lack for food. Rather, what he lacked was righteousness—the very thing Melchizedek inherently possessed.

Therefore, verses 19–20 record the priest's blessing upon Abraham:

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
 Possessor of heaven and earth;  
 and blessed be God Most High,  
 who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

In this twofold blessing, Abram stands between heaven and earth, blessing the man Abram and praising God Most High. In the position of a righteous mediator—the position Aaron and his sons would later adopt in Israel—Melchizedek communicates the blessings of God to the man who would in the next chapter receive the gift of righteousness by faith in God's promises.

Indeed, Genesis 14 is not a detour from the storyline of Abraham and redemptive history. Rather, it plays a key part in seeing Abraham as a mediator of blessing to the nations (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; 22:18). In fact, as the rest of the story unfolds, we see Abraham is declared righteous when he believes God's promises (15:6). Later, as God's covenant with Abraham unfolds, we see his heirs will be kings (17:6, 16) and his firstborn son Isaac will be redeemed by the Lord's provision at Mount Moriah, which is located in Salem—the very home of Melchizedek.

In other words, after meeting Melchizedek, dining at his table, and receiving his blessing, Abraham and his heirs become a nation of royal priests, who will inhabit Melchizedek's Salem, and proclaim a message of peace that invites all the families of the earth to come and eat at Melchizedek's table. In other words, in the storyline of redemption, Melchizedek plays a key role in communicating blessing to Abraham and the greater king of righteousness that will come from his line.

## **Psalm 110 and Hebrews, Jesus Christ and Abraham's Children**

In time, David—a son of Abraham, and the first true king of Israel—is given a vision of his son the Lord. And in Psalm 110 he describes this greater son as a royal priest like Melchizedek (v. 4). While we often chalk this connection up to the mysterious work of the Spirit, a closer look

at Genesis 14 (and David's own kingship) shows us how he understands his role and the greater role of his Son—Jesus Christ. Maintaining unity between the divine and human natures of Scripture, the inspired authors had a keen sense of how to read God's antecedent words and to serve the future generations with their own Spirit-led words (see 1 Pet. 1:10–12).

So, just as Melchizedek gave bread and wine to Abram with the wicked king of Sodom looking on, so David saw a greater son of David who would come and prepare a table in the midst of his enemies (cf. Psalm 23). Indeed, by handing himself over to his enemies, Jesus made a sacrifice that would not just provide blessing for this age only. Rather, as Psalm 118:22–26 foretells, the stone that the builders rejected would become the cornerstone. And this cornerstone would form the bedrock of God's new house (Ps 127), one that would usher in the nations and satisfy the poor with bread (Ps. 132:15).

Indeed, just as Melchizedek refreshed Abram with bread and wine, so Christ would offer his body to turn back the curse (cf. Gen. 3:19; Ps. 127:2) and provide a final sacrifice from which the nations would come and drink. As the book of Hebrews puts this altogether, Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Thus, Christ's righteousness is not based upon the weakness of the Law. It is based upon his perfect sonship, his intrinsic righteousness, his obedience unto death, and his indestructible (read: resurrected and glorious) life. In all these ways, he is a priest of God Most High and a true king of righteousness.

Accordingly, all those like Abraham who have been justified by faith (see Rom. 4; Gal. 3:26–29) are invited to come and partake of Christ's bread and wine. In truth, these elements do not communicate righteousness. Rather, Melchizedek's meal prepared for Abraham they are signs pointing to a greater reality.

That greater reality is the death of Jesus Christ, the son of God crucified on the hill called by Abraham "the LORD will provide" (Gen. 22:14). Indeed, as Jesus himself taught us, all the Scriptures speak of him (John 5:39). And as we come to take the Lord's Supper this Sunday, let us marvel at God's wisdom in preparing the way for his Son and more let us go to feed on the bread and cup which speak a word of grace to us, just like they did Abraham old. As Hebrews 13 puts it,

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. <sup>14</sup> For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. <sup>15</sup> Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. (vv. 10–15)

Soli Deo Gloria, ds