

The Jews took great pride in the fact that they were God's chosen people. They did not realize that He had merely chosen them as the vehicle to bring the offer of salvation to the world. They felt special, even superior. They thought that their destiny was to conquer the world rather than to be a guiding light for God.

They were chosen through their ancestor Abraham because of his tremendous faith. God made a covenant with him that he would be the father of many nations, and that His relationship with them would last forever. Circumcision was established as a sign of the tremendous import of this agreement. The Jews took that as the mark of their exclusive status with God. The record of their lineage from Abraham proved to be a sacred trust for them that established their identity. Thus their genealogy became as important as the law God gave them on the mountain.

The first five books of the Old Testament, otherwise known as the Pentateuch, contain the history of the Jews' emergence as a nation. The Genealogy plays a very important part in all of this, showing that Abraham had a son named Isaac, who had a son named Jacob, who had twelve sons which became the twelve tribes of Israel. But in the same section of the Bible is a passage that totally blows apart the Jews' sense of uniqueness; they apparently never paid much attention to it.

In Genesis 13-14 the story is told about Abram and Melchizedek. If you remember, Abram had settled in Bethel, and his nephew Lot was with him. They both had many flocks, and the land could not support them. Abram gave Lot his choice; Lot chose the entire well-watered plain of the Jordan, which included Sodom and Gomorrah. War erupted in the area around Lot, and Lot was taken with all of his possessions into captivity. When Abram heard of this, he gathered his trained men and attacked Lot's captors, routing them. He recovered all of the goods and brought back Lot and his possessions. Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God, came out and did two things for Abram: He brought him bread and wine and he blessed him (and cursed his enemies).

This was a significant event no matter how you look at it. It is clear that there was someone outside the 'chosen' family of God who had an important relationship with Him. Not only that, but Abram was in subjection to him and showed it by giving him a tenth of the spoils of the victory. The writer of Hebrews explores this further in chapter 6:20-7:17:

*He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything... Without father or mother, **without genealogy**, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. **Just think how great he was:** Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people--that is, their brothers--even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And **without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater**... One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor... He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life."*

How did the Israelites deal with the story of Melchizedek? How could they ignore the fact that God obviously had personal relationships outside the twelve tribes; and such as were superior? The book of Hebrews emphasizes that the new priesthood is better and results in a better covenant, and better hope of life to come. It also shows the superiority of a priesthood based on personal qualifications rather than ancestry and physical appearance. This is in stark contrast to the landscape of the Jewish emphasis on genealogy. But the parallel extends to our entire religious experience. We must not ignore the truth when it doesn't fit our preconceptions.

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