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**MELCHIZEDEK AS PRIEST OF THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE
IN TALMUD, MIDRASH, AND TARGUM**

[Please note that this paper is work in progress]

No serious account of ancient Jewish thinking about the Jerusalem temple and its service can ignore the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, whose two brief appearances in the records of the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 14:18-20; Ps. 110: 4) are recounted in language so terse, enigmatic, obscure and even guarded that they seem almost deliberately designed to arouse instant curiosity on the reader's part.¹ The final editors of Genesis and the Psalms need not have been anxious: Melchizedek has been the subject of a vast body of literature from ancient times to the present.² Not so frequently examined in their own right are the classical Rabbinic texts which refer to Melchizedek.³ These have an interest all their own; they contain a vast reservoir of information; and given the constraints of this essay, it will not be possible to discuss in detail all they have to tell. Here, we shall attempt to bring to light and explicate some of the basic information which they share among themselves, as they seek to expound Melchizedek and his place in respect of the Temple, its institutions, and its worship.

A proper appreciation of what the classical Rabbinic sources have to say requires that we are sensitive to the numerous idiosyncrasies of the two key biblical texts which the Rabbis and their predecessors would find significant. Most obviously, a glance at Genesis 14 in the Masoretic Text reveals a section of text deeply concerned with kings: forms of the word for "king" appear some 27 times in the space of 24 Hebrew verses. The chapter also narrates the account of a battle: the language of conflict is pervasive from Gen. 14:2 onwards, where we are told that four kings, Amraphel, Arioch, Chedarlaomer, and Tidal "king of nations" made

¹ For a useful discussion of Melchizedek in the Hebrew Bible, see N. J. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary Genesis ty>arb* (Philadelphia-New York-Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 5749/1989), pp. 109-110, 380-382; J. A. Fitzmyer, "Melchizedek in the MT, LXX, and the NT", *Biblica* 81 (2000), pp. 63-69; and for Melchizedek's place in Psalm 110 in particular, see P. J. Nel, "Psalm 110 and the Melchizedek Tradition", *JNSL* 22 (1996), pp. 1-14.

² Fitzmyer, "Melchizedek in the MT" offers some idea of the extent of the discussion in recent times; see further literature cited by G. J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), pp. 301-302.

³ The standard critical treatment of Melchizedek in post-biblical Jewish tradition remains the monograph of F. L. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, SNTSMS 30 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

war against five other kings. Abraham himself would likewise arm his 318 retainers, and engage in a skirmish to rescue his kinsman Lot who had become involved in the war and taken captive. The matter of appropriate division of the spoils of war occupies Gen. 14:21-24. In all this, the single occurrence of the Hebrew stem *šlm* with its overtones of “peace” and “perfection” is striking and dramatic: when Gen. 14:18 describes Melchizedek as *šlm* (Gen. 14:18), the temptation to relate this ambiguous designation, which may refer to a “prefect king” or a “king of peace”, to peace over against conflict might not seem unreasonable. Indeed this king Melchizedek, is also a priest who, by virtue of his office has access to the altar which Scripture declares (Deut. 27:6) shall be built of stones described as *šlm*, meaning here “unhewn”, but implying also peace and wholeness.⁴

Turning to the Melchizedek episode itself, we encounter other information which ancient exegetes would deem important. Melchizedek is described as *šlm* in Gen. 14:18, the first time that the priest, essential for the worship of the Temple, is spoken of in the Hebrew Bible. That this Melchizedek had been priest of the God worshipped in Israel’s Temple service, and not the servant of some foreign cult, would be confirmed for the ancient Jewish exegete by two important pieces of information. First, Melchizedek is described as priest of God Most High, *’El ’Elyon*. This divine title finds its first biblical mention here. It had long been linked by the Psalmist to the God whose dwelling is on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, as reference to Ps. 78:35, 68-69 in particular would prove.⁵ Second, Gen. 14:20 takes for granted the Israelite institution of the tithe; once more, we find in this section of text the first biblical reference to this tithe, which was a characteristic feature of Israel’s temple worship. Ancient interpreters would also be aware that the next mention of the tithe was to be found in the account of Jacob’s dream at Beth-el, “the house of God” (Gen. 28:22 ff.).⁶

⁴ See *Tanhuma vrtv* 17 (Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai) and *Pesiqta Rabbati* 50:6 for the association of “peace” with the altar and its offerings. The command (Exod. 20:22; Deut. 27:5) prohibiting the use of iron tools in respect of the altar stones is explained by the Rabbinic declaration that the altar and its offerings are intended to prolong life, whereas iron, used for weapons, shortens life: see *Mekhilta de R. Ishmael Bahodesh* 11:80-92.

⁵ For the association of God Most High with Mount Zion in Jerusalem, see Ps. 9:3, 12; 87:5; 97:8-9, a link which in Second Temple times was taken for granted by writers like Jesus ben Sira: see Ben Sira’s account of the Temple Service in Jerusalem, where the title Most High occurs in the Hebrew text at 50:14, 16, 17.

⁶ Post-biblical exegetes commonly located Jacob’s dream of the ladder uniting heaven and earth (Gen. 28:11-22) at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem: see *Gen. Rabb.* 68:8; 69:7; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of Gen. 28:11; *Pirqe de R. Eliezer* 35:2. For other sources and further analysis, see C. C. Rowland, “John 1.51, Jewish Apocalyptic and Targumic Tradition”, *NTS* 30 (1984), pp. 498-507. For the relationship of tithes to Jerusalem and its Temple in post-biblical times, see Tobit 1:6-7.

To these biblical “firsts” - the first biblical usage of the Hebrew word for “priest”; the first designation of the Almighty as God Most High; the first reference to tithe – others may be added. Gen. 14:18 is the first biblical verse to speak of “bread and wine”; Gen. 14:19 records the first blessing of a human being by a priest; and Gen.14:19 also is the first verse to speak of God as “possessor/acquirer of heaven and earth”, a title which Abraham invokes at verse 22 in an oath which he swears to “the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth”.⁷ These scriptural data would serve to underline the unusual qualities of this chapter to which the exegete would need to pay attention; and they would be strengthened when the interpreter looked to Psalm 110. For this is a royal Psalm, headed “for David” (Ps. 110:1); and it speaks of conflict involving enemies and kings (vv. 2, 3, and 5); the humbling of nations (v. 6); and an oath sworn to “my lord” by YHWH that he is a priest for ever “according to order of Melchizedek”.⁸ Both Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 leave the ancient exegete, and ourselves, with two crucial questions: who is Melchizedek, and why should he feature in these particular biblical passages? In looking to classical Rabbinic sources for guidance in these matters, let us begin with the most authoritative text, the Babylonian Talmud.

1. *Melchizedek in the Babylonian Talmud*

Only one Talmudic passage treats of Melchizedek, and in this section both Genesis 14 and Psalm 110 are utilized in the argument. The passage, from *b. Nedarim* 32b, comes at the conclusion of an analysis of *m. Ned.* 3:11, which offers a well-known, extended exposition of the greatness of circumcision. In this mishnah, Rabbi (Judah ha-Nasi) remarks that Abraham had not been called ,|>, “perfect” or “whole”, until he had fulfilled the commandment of circumcision, despite his fulfilment of all the other commandments; Abraham is thus the most significant exemplar of the greatness of this commandment (see *b.Ned.* 32a); and the Talmudic discussion ends with these words:

R. Zechariah in the name of R. Ishmael said: The Holy One, blessed be He, sought to bring forth the priesthood from Shem, as it is said: ‘And he was the priest of God Most High’ (Gen. 14:18). When he placed the blessing of Abraham before the blessing of the Omnipresent, He brought

⁷ The difficulties involved in translating this title are conveniently summarized by

⁸ The text of this Psalm, and scholarly attempts to offer an historical-critical account of it, are fraught with difficulties, one of the best accounts of which remains H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 2 vols., BKAT (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), vol. 2, pp. 752-764.

it (the priesthood) forth from Abraham as it is said: ‘And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High (Gen. 14:19-20).’ Abraham said to him: ‘Now is it the case that the blessing of a servant should take precedence over the blessing of his master?’ Immediately He gave it (the priesthood) to Abraham, as it is said: The Lord said to my lord....your feet’ (Ps. 110:1); and after it is written (Ps. 110:4), ‘ The Lord has sworn and will not repent: You are a priest for ever *ytrbd li Melchizedek*’ – that is, because of the word of Melchizedek. And this corresponds to what is written (Gen. 14:18), ‘And *he, avhv*, was priest of God Most High.’ *He* was priest, but his seed was not a priest.

At first sight, this passage might reasonably be construed as a Rabbinic refutation of Christian interpretations of the Scriptural verses quoted in the discussion. In the New Testament writing styled the Epistle to the Hebrews, both Gen. 14 and Ps. 110 figure prominently, and much is made of Melchizedek’s lack of a biblical genealogy: he has neither father nor mother, says the Epistle (Heb. 7:3), and thus is an everlasting priest.⁹ Noteworthy, therefore, is the Talmud’s identification of Melchizedek with Shem the son of Noah which opens the discussion noted here. The identification is not explained, nor is the reader given prior notice that the identification is about to be made: anyone who reads or hears this passage is expected to know it already. As we shall see presently, it is common in other Rabbinic documents. It cannot be denied that this Talmudic passage contains material which might prove useful for Jewish scholars in debate with Christians; but there are solid reasons for doubting whether the hermeneutical problems which the Talmud highlights originated in such debates. From the outset, ancient readers could not fail to have been struck by the Scriptural evidence in front of them: the first person explicitly styled priest, in uttering a formal *b^erakhah*, blesses in the first instance not his master, the Most High God, whose exalted status is emphasized by the repeated use of the title ‘El ‘Elyon, but a human being, Abraham.

⁹ For presentations of Melchizedek in Rabbinic texts as either motivated or influenced by a need to refute Christian claims about him, see M. Simon, “Melchisédech dans la polémique entre juifs et chrétiens et dans la Légende”, *RHPR* 27 (1947), pp. 93-113; J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 196-199;

It is well to pause here for a moment, for this Scriptural datum is open to an explanation which not only the Rabbis of the Talmudic period, but also Jews of much earlier generations might have wished to exclude. It is this. Reading Gen. 14:18-20, a reader might reasonably conclude that the mysterious Melchizedek was a character of such exalted status, so close to the Almighty and with such detailed knowledge of His ways, that he could *with perfect propriety dispense with liturgical protocol*. Why so? Because God himself had earlier proclaimed that He would bless Abraham, and that those who blessed Abraham would in turn themselves be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3). In those verses, the matter of blessing is heavily emphasised and repeated¹⁰; and an ancient interpreter might, in light of this, understand the sequence of Melchizedek's blessings either as showing that Melchizedek had direct knowledge of God's decree about Abraham, or even that in some mysterious way he was party to it. And if Melchizedek knew so much about God's proclamation concerning Abraham, it would follow that he was no ordinary person.

Now it so happens that, from the pre-Christian period, we possess a Jewish document which speaks of Melchizedek as a figure with heavenly significance: the famous scroll 11Q13 allocates to Melchizedek a vital role in the redemption to be accomplished in the final jubilee year.¹¹ In this scroll, we hear also of "teachers who have been hidden and kept secret", and the final judgment of Melchizedek's demonic opponent Melchiresha 'at the end of days is also described.¹² The Qumran Melchizedek scroll offers no explanation of Melchizedek's heavenly status, but rather takes it for granted. If Scriptural foundation for its claims about Melchizedek were needed, they might be found in Melchizedek's bold suspension of priestly liturgical protocol as indicating his exalted status, as well as in the Bible's failure to provide him with a genealogy.

The matter of Melchizedek's genealogy will need to be addressed more fully; but for the moment we may note just two things about it. First, the identification of Melchizedek as

¹⁰ In Gen. 12:2-3, words deriving from the Hebrew stem ;rb are used no fewer than five times; and it is noticeable that verse 2 ends with a divine command to Abraham: "Be thou a blessing!"

¹¹ The manuscript is designated 11Q13 (11QMelch): for the Hebrew text, see (eds) F. García Martínez, E. J. C. Tigchelaar and A. S. van der Woude, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XXIII. Qumran Cave 11.II 11Q2-18, 11Q20-31* (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 221-241. The editors date the manuscript palaeographically (see p. 223) to around the middle of the first century BCE. For the relationship of this text to Jewish and Christian writings, see particularly J. T. Milik, "Milkî-sedeq et Milkî-reša` dans les anciens écrits juifs et chrétiens", *JJS* 23 (1972), pp. 95-122, 124-126.

¹² For the teachers, see 11Q13 line 5: the reference is interesting, given the Rabbinic identification of Melchizedek with Shem, who is a great Torah teacher: see below, pp. The notion of judgment is already present in Scripture at Gen. 14:7 with the place-name Ein-mishpat, meaning literally "Spring of Judgment".

Shem is unlikely to have originated as an anti-Christian device, given the stance of the pre-Christian Jewish writer Philo, whose treatment of Melchizedek and Shem is designed to bring out the affinities between the two characters. Both Shem and Melchizedek Philo depicts as exalted priestly figures, and the evidence for this I have assembled elsewhere.¹³ Second, the notion that Melchizedek was Shem signifies that he was born before the catastrophe Noah's flood which destroyed the world peopled with Adam's children (see Gen. 5:32; 6:18); and this has important implications for the kind of priesthood he possesses. We shall have to explore this later; but at this point it will be important to recall that Rabbinic interpretation of Gen. 14:13 brings yet another antediluvian to our attention. This is Og the King of Bashan, traditionally understood to have been one of the wicked giants who had helped to cause the Flood, but who had survived by clinging onto the side of Noah's ark.¹⁴ This Og many Rabbinic sources identify with the escapee who brings news of Lot's capture to Abraham.¹⁵ The presence of two pre-Flood characters in Rabbinic interpretations of Genesis 14 is not accidental, and we must reckon with the distinct possibility that Melchizedek who is Shem and the escapee who is Og represent transitional bonds between the vanished world from before the Flood and the world re-constituted through God's covenant with Noah, who himself functioned as a priest and offered sacrifice at a crucial moment in world history. In other words, both Og-the escapee and Shem-Melchizedek have a more than passing significance for the Rabbis. Melchizedek-Shem is a testimony to God's goodness and justice which binds together the ages, years and seasons under his control: the world is never without priestly representatives who witness to perfection and God's goodness. Evil, however, persists: it too has its representatives from age to age; but like Og, it is destined to be destroyed. The Qumran document 11QMelchizedek pits Melchizedek against an evil counterpart, Melchiresha': the opposition of Melchizedek-Shem and the wicked Og in Rabbinic sources may, perhaps, display a family resemblance to the Qumran characters.

¹³ See Robert Hayward, "Shem, Melchizedek and Concer with Christianity in the Pentateuchal Targumim", in (eds) M. J. Cathcart and M. Maher, *Targumic and Cognate Studies*, JSOT Supp. Series 230 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 67-80; and the important observations of James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible. A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 284-285, 289-291, who is likewise unhappy with attempts to discover the identification of Melchizedek with Shem in Jewish-Christian disputes. Note also that Jerome, *Hebrew Question on Genesis 14:18-19*, is fully aware of the Jewish identification of Melchizedek as Shem, and seems not unduly disturbed by it: see C. T. R. Hayward, *Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis Translated with an Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 47, 156-159. The same tradition is known to Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis 11:2*.

¹⁴ See *b. Zeb.* 113b; *Niddah* 61a; Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of Gen. 14:13; *Pirqe de R. Eliezer* 23:2. Og was thought to have survived the Flood because Deut. 3:11 speaks of him as the last one remaining of the Rephaim, the giants whose wicked deeds were instrumental in corrupting humanity.

¹⁵ The identification is widely attested: see *b. Nidd.* 61a; *Zeb* 113b; *Ber. Rab.* 42:7-8; *Numb. Rab.* 19:32PRE 23:2; PJ of Gen. 14:13; Deut. 3:11.

We cannot leave this Talmudic passage until another matter has been investigated. The force of the passage is that, although a priest himself, Shem-Melchizedek was not permitted to pass this privilege to his descendants: his failure to bless God first is noted by Abraham, whose words make the Almighty transfer the priestly office from Melchizedek-Shem to Abraham. Again, this transfer of priestly status to Abraham, and the exegesis of Ps. 110 which supports it, could certainly serve to undermine Christian teaching about Melchizedek. Its setting in the Talmud, as the climax of a discussion which emphasises the crucial importance of circumcision, might indeed be intended to answer the Christian claim sometimes advanced that Melchizedek functioned as priest in an uncircumcised state, since the commandment to circumcise had not been given when he met Abraham.¹⁶ Other Jewish sources, however, responded to Christian argument of this sort with the assertion that Melchizedek had been born already circumcised: one notable example of such a declaration is found on the lips of a Babylonian authority, R. Isaac the Babylonian, at *Ber. Rab.* 43:7. The line of reasoning is as follows. Melchizedek is described as ,l> ;lm, and ,l> should be construed as an adjective such that he is king “perfect, entire, whole”: it is the very adjective used by Rabbi in *m.Ned.* 3:11, presupposed throughout the Talmudic discussion based upon it, to describe the *effect* of circumcision on the pious Jew. Why, then, is the Talmudic discussion silent on this matter? Why does it emphasise instead the transfer of priesthood to Abraham?

An explanation of this difficulty may, once more, originate in pre-Rabbinic attitudes to Melchizedek. Again, evidence from Qumran, this time in the shape of the Genesis Apocryphon from cave 1 (1QapGen) provides assistance.¹⁷ This Aramaic ‘re-writing’ of episodes from Genesis certainly pre-dates the Christian era, and is intent on presenting Abraham as a sacrificing priest. It is well known that the Bible records how Abraham builds altars; but it does not state that he offered sacrifice upon them.¹⁸ The only exception to this general rule is found at the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:9-14), when he sacrifices a lamb in place of his son; otherwise, the function of these altars is not explained. But the Genesis

¹⁶ This argument was adduced as early as the time of Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 19. See M. Simon, *Verus Israel. A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire AD 135-425* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996), pp. 84-85, 164-165, 170-171; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, pp. 281-283.

¹⁷ See D. A. Machiela, *The Genesis Apocryphon (1Q20): A Reevaluation of its Text, Interpretive Character, and Relationship to the Book of Jubilees* (PhD Thesis: University of Notre Dame, 2007); J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1: A Commentary* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1971).

¹⁸ See Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:4, 18; 26:25.

Apocryphon tells in some detail what Abraham offered up. In col. 21:2, paraphrasing Gen. 13:3-4, we are told that he offered “whole burnt offerings and cereal offering”; and the Apocryphon notes in another place (col 21:20) that he built an altar and offered on it “whole burnt offering and cereal offering”. In both these instances, Abraham offered his sacrifices to “God Most High”, the divine title which Melchizedek employs. For this Aramaic document, Abraham is most certainly a priest, and his status as such is taken for granted.

Furthermore, in re-telling the Melchizedek episode, the Apocryphon elaborates the original Hebrew narrative with small, but highly significant additional details. First, the ambiguous phrase $\text{ל} > \text{ל} \text{מ}$ of Gen. 14:18 is interpreted as “the king of Salem” (1QapGen 22:14): the author has already (1QapGen 22:13) indicated explicitly that Salem is Jerusalem. Any explanation of this phrase as “perfect king” or “king of peace” is quietly left to one side.¹⁹ The mention of place, however, is important, and will recur on other documents. Second, the Apocryphon paraphrases Gen. 14:18’s statement that Melchizedek brought out “bread and wine”. 1QapGen 22:14-15 tells how “he brought out food and drink for Abraham and all the men who were with him”.²⁰ The effect of this paraphrase is to remove any links that Melchizedek may have with the Temple service at this point: he appears, rather, as the provider of a banquet on a large scale for Abraham and his soldiers.²¹ To anticipate a little, we may here record the comment given in *Gen. Rab.* 43:7 by R. Samuel bar Nahman about the bread and wine: this Sage notes that the *halakhot* of the high priesthood had been revealed to Melchizedek, and that the “bread” refers to the Bread of the Presence, while the “wine” refers to the drink-offerings. The Apocryphon shows no interest in any such Temple discourse. Thirdly, Gen. 14:21 is famous for its ambiguity, recording that “he gave to him a tithe of everything”. Who gave the tithe, and to whom? The Apocryphon seemingly retains the ambiguity, but specifies that the tithe was “a tithe of all the property (or: possessions) of

¹⁹ Place is central to the overall concerns of the author of the Genesis Apocryphon, and the explicit naming of Jerusalem indicates the degree of importance attached to importance the Melchizedek episode by this text. As king of Jerusalem, Melchizedek might be perceived as granting a royal welcome to Abraham: one monarch greets another and, if the author of the Apocryphon envisaged Melchizedek as giving tithes to Abraham, then the event may be understood as a proleptic handing over of the city’s ownership to Abraham’s descendants. For a discussion of place in this text, see D. A. Machiela, “ ‘Each to His Own Inheritance’ . Geography as an Evaluative Tool in the Genesis Apocryphon”, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 15 (2008), pp. 50-66.

²⁰ The manuscript is quite clear on this matter: the Aramaic reads $\text{ht} > \text{mv} \text{ lkam}$.

²¹ LXX of Gen. 14:18 rendered the Hebrew singular “bread” as a plural form $\alpha \rho \tau \omicron \upsilon \varsigma$, probably meaning “loaves”; this may have suggested the idea of a meal, which later generations developed. Certainly the notion that Melchizedek had provided a substantial feast for Abraham and his men was known to Josephus, *Ant.* I. 181. See further L. H. Feldman in (ed.) Steve Mason, *Flavius Josephus Translation and Commentary. Vol. 3, Judean Antiquities 1-4* (Brill: Leiden, 2000), p. 68. Significantly, *Genesis Rabbah* 47:8 describes how Abraham would set out food and drink for travellers, and would then instruct them to utter an blessing of the Almighty: this is said with reference to the title “possessor of heaven and earth”. See further below, pp.

the king of Elam and his companions”. Two things are of note. First, this tithe is unlike anything which Israelites would set aside. While it is described as “tithe”, any connection it might have with the Jewish system of tithing, and the object of that tithing, remain obscure. The obscurity is heightened by the source of the tithe: it comes from Elam. According to Gen. 10:22; 1 Chr. 1:17, Elam was the first-born son of Shem. The extant text of the Apocryphon does not identify Melchizedek with Shem; but this identification is a commonplace among the Rabbis. The report of the Apocryphon is tantalizing; for if its writer knew that Melchizedek was Shem, the property of Elam, Shem’s son, might have been easily available for Melchizedek to pay to Abraham, along with the banquet which that same Melchizedek provided for Abraham and his retainers. These are deep waters, and speculation is best avoided.

In short, the discussion of Melchizedek in *b.Ned.32b*, while useful as an argument against Christian appropriation of Melchizedek, is unlikely to find its origins in Jewish-Christian disputes. Its roots lie much further back in time, in the Second Temple period, where we have indisputable evidence that Jews could hold widely differing opinions about Melchizedek. In the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek, some Jews discerned the greatness of Abraham: he is a mighty man with royal qualities and a priest; and Melchizedek honoured him as such. This seems to be the view of 1QapGen; and it lays down an exegetical trajectory which could be followed by others. On the other hand, an exalted, heavenly status for Melchizedek is also in evidence, and we have seen how it might very easily have been derived from Scripture. Were there other possible explanations of Melchizedek’s person and activity? It is here that the classical *Misrashim* may have valuable information.

2. *Melchizedek and the Midrashim*

On any estimate, *Genesis Rabbah* is a central, classical Rabbinic composition, whose comments on Melchizedek deserve careful attention.²² A complex picture results from a close reading of *Gen. Rab.* 43:7-11, the section which is most concerned with Gen. 14:18-20.

²² See A. Shinan, “Midrashic, Paytanic and Targumic Literature”, in (ed.) S. T. Katz, *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Volume 4 The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 687-688, who dates the final form of the midrash to around 425 CE (p. 687); J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis. A New American Translation*, 3 vols (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) offers a brief commentary on the text.

It begins by portraying both Melchizedek and Abraham as royal figures. The opening words of Gen. 14:18, “And Melchizedek, *melekh shalem*, etc.” are expounded with reference to Ps. 45:13, “And the daughter of Tyre is present with tribute: the rich ones of the people shall mollify your countenance”: the midrash interprets the daughter of Tyre in this instance as a reference to Abraham, while the rich ones refer to Melchizedek, who mollifies Abraham with a gift of bread and wine. The royal status of Abraham is here apparent; and the tenor of the comment as a whole is not unlike elements of the Genesis Apocryphon paraphrases already examined. Melchizedek seems to take a subordinate position here, although his royal status remains as a biblical datum. In this sense, Abraham stands out as the important character in this opening section dealing with Melchizedek.

In this same comment, *shalem* is understood as a place-name, which the midrash goes on to expound: “And Melchizedek, the King of Salem: This place makes its inhabitants *zedek*, righteous – Melchizedek, Adonizedek. Jerusalem is called *zedek*, as it is said (Is. 1:21), Righteousness lodges in her”.²³ That *shalem* might be a place rather than an adjective qualifying “king” we have discovered already at 1QapGen 22:14; but it is attested much earlier, in the LXX version of Gen. 14:18. In all this, Ps. 76:3 will have played its part by setting Zion as the site of the Lord’s tabernacle in poetic parallelism with *shalem*.²⁴ For the midrash, Jerusalem is significant: it is explicitly named, and we are left in no doubt that Melchizedek operated there, and that his meeting with Abraham took place there. Yet this interpretation of *shalem* as a place is immediately juxtaposed to another explanation which we have already noted: “*Melekh Shalem*: R. Isaac the Babylonian says, Because he was born circumcised”. The import of this comment we have discussed; but here it is introduced quite suddenly and without explanation. The exegesis clearly presupposes prior knowledge on the part of the reader; and the effect of the comment is to underscore Melchizedek’s status as a Patriarch, and to activate in the reader or hearer a recollection of what R. Judah the Patriarch had said in the Mishnah about circumcision as the acme of perfection, making a person *shalem*.

The commentary moves next to the matter of bread and wine: here R. Samuel b. Nahman and the Rabbis offer differing expositions. R. Samuel’s view we have already encountered: it is clearly focused on Melchizedek, to whom high priestly *halakhot* were revealed and who

²³ Adonizedek was king of Jerusalem in the time of Joshua (Jos. 10:1).

²⁴ See Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon*, p. 173.

was thus by implication a high priest. The bread, it will be remembered, R. Samuel referred to the Bread of the Presence, the wine to the Temple libations. At once, however, we hear the view of the Rabbis juxtaposed: "Torah was revealed to him, as it is said (Prov. 9:5), 'Come, eat of my bread, and drink of my wine which I have mingled' ". The text gives no indication whether these views are complementary or in opposition to one another: as they stand, they serve to depict Melchizedek as either high priest, or as one proffering Torah, and thus a Torah scholar, or as combining both these great offices in his own person. The exegesis of the Rabbis, however, implies that the reader of the midrash knows that Melchizedek can be identified as Shem, who in Rabbinic tradition is Shem Rabbah (see *b.Sanh.* 108b), a great scholar learned in Torah who presides over a famous Beth Ha-Midrash. Indeed, *Gen. Rab.* 26:3 records that Shem was born circumcised, and we learn from *Gen. Rab.* 30:6 that he had oversight of the sacrifices offered when Noah emerged from the ark. Within this same midrashic work, therefore, Shem is both priest and Torah scholar, just as Melchizedek is presented in this section. Thus a strong impression is created that Melchizedek is both high priest and Torah scholar, and that the two offices complement each other.

The introduction of Torah at this juncture, however, will eventually lead the midrash in another direction. The quotation of Prov. 9:5 gives us the words of lady Wisdom as she invites the uninstructed to her house with its seven pillars (Prov. 9:1-4). Jewish exegetes routinely identified lady Wisdom with Torah;²⁵ and Wisdom herself, in Prov. 8:22, famously declared that the Lord had possessed or acquired her (the Hebrew verb *hmq* is used) as the beginning of His way. Thus it was no accident that the midrash should introduce Wisdom-Torah in discussion of verses where God is entitled *hmq*, acquirer or possessor of heaven and earth. In its turn, this allows the midrash to turn aside from Melchizedek, and to focus once more on Abraham: *Gen. Rab.* 47:8 then leaves Melchizedek behind, to tell how Abraham had received travellers, given them food and drink, and had insisted that they utter a blessing to God for his bounty. God's response to this generous action is to praise Abraham for having made Him recognized by His creatures, because of which God attributes it to Abraham as if he had been a partaker with Him in the creation of the world. It is with reference to this, says

²⁵ This identification is implicit in Scripture at Deut. 4:6, where the divine commandments are described as "your wisdom", and explicit from at least as early as the time of Ben Sira 24:23. See P. W. Skehan and A. A. di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, Anchor Bible 39 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 336; J. Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel. Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), pp. 58-93.

the midrash, that the words “possessor/acquirer of heaven and earth”, which are put into the mouth of Melchizedek, are written in Scripture.²⁶

With this return of attention to Abraham, the midrash has nothing more to say directly about Melchizedek himself. The section which discusses the tithe, *Gen. Rab.* 47:10, indicates that Abraham had paid tithe to Melchizedek without, however, naming the priest; and the exegesis makes it clear that blessings which accrued to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the future had been granted by virtue of that original tithe. With *Gen. Rab.* 47:11, Melchizedek seems finally to have disappeared. A question is posed: from where did Israel merit the priestly blessing ordered by Numb. 6:24-27? Three different answers are set forth, all of them based on God’s instruction to Aaron and the priests in Numb. 6:23, “*Thus* you shall bless the sons of Israel”. R. Judah explains that Abraham had merited this priestly blessing, since God had said to him (Gen. 15:5) “*Thus* shall your seed be”. R. Nehemiah selected Isaac as the source of the privilege, since Abraham at the Akedah had said of him (Gen. 22:5) “I and the lad will go as far as ‘*thus*’”.²⁷ The rabbis attribute the privilege to Jacob, because God had ordered Moses before the giving of the Torah at Sinai (Exod. 19:3) “*Thus* you shall say to the house of Jacob”. The priestly blessing, therefore was merited for Israel by one of the three Patriarchs: Melchizedek plays no part in it. It is therefore striking that the section ends with an implied “flashback” to Melchizedek which has darker connotations, tinged with hints of suffering. It is worth quoting in full.

When “shall I make your children as great as the stars” (Gen. 22:17)?

R. Eliezer and R. Jose b. R. Hananiah: R. Eliezer said, When I am revealed over them by means of “thus” - “*Thus* you shall say to the sons of Jacob” (Exod. 19:3). R. Jose b. R. Hananiah said: When I am revealed against their leaders by means of “thus”, as it is said (Exod. 4:22), “Thus says the Lord: Israel is my son, my first-born”.

²⁶ The blessing formula which Abraham requires his guests to utter runs: “Blessed be the God of the Universe, from whose own things we have eaten!” An anonymous statement in *m.Hagigah* 2:1 should be recalled here, to the effect that “everyone who has no regard for the honour of his creator, ונִוְקָ, it would have been better for him if he had not come into the world”.

²⁷ For Rabbinic interpretation of this somewhat obscure verse elsewhere, see Bowker, *The Targums*, p. 213; and M. Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis. Translated, with Introduction and Notes* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), pp. 78-79.

R. Jose alludes, of course, to the time of the redemption from Egypt: God will make Abraham's children as numerous as the stars when Moses confronts the cruel Pharaoh with the declaration that Israel is God's first-born son. The presence of this powerful exegesis is explained by an earlier comment in *Gen. Rab.* 43:7, which we have not yet examined. It is the last of the explications of the bread and wine which Melchizedek offered to Abraham, but it is attached to the description of Melchizedek as priest of God Most High. The exegetical interest, however, is entirely on the wine which Melchizedek brought forth.

R. Abba b. Kahana and R. Levi: R. Abba b. Kahana said: All the wine which is written of in Torah makes a bad stain, apart from this instance. R. Levi said: Even this instance we do not exempt from its (the stain's) power, because from there God called out to him, "And they shall enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years" (Gen. 15:15)

R. Levi understands wine, whenever it is mentioned in Scripture, as always connoting some "stain": it has negative qualities. He insists that the wine which Melchizedek brought to Abraham is no exception: from this point onwards, R. Levi insists, Israel's afflictions began, for Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek announced the sufferings and slavery which the Jews would endure under the Pharaoh in Egypt. Thus Melchizedek, despite his appearance at a time of victory and triumph, might be understood also as a harbinger of future sufferings, which in their turn would be reversed by God with Moses' proclamation that Israel is the Lord's first-born son. In all this, it is not difficult to see a restrained, but powerful attack on the Roman "leaders" who are enslaving and persecuting Israel, even as *Genesis Rabbah* reaches its final form. The oblique, sophisticated exegesis may have the Christian Church in its sights as well.

The hesitation displayed in the last sentence is the result of awareness that Jewish engagement with Christian claims is much more clearly stated in midrashim other than *Genesis Rabbah*, and those comments have little to tell us directly about Melchizedek. As examples, one might cite *Mekhilta of R. Ishmael Shirta* 9 lines 118-126 commenting on Exod. 15:16, "the people whom You have possessed". We are told that four are called "possession", of which the second is the land of Israel, the proof for this being Gen. 14:19, God's title as "possessor of heaven and earth" being understood as "possessor of heaven and the Land (of Israel)". The same line of thought is pursued in a slightly different manner in

Sifre Deut. 309. Both these midrashim are of particular significance for their approaches to Israel, the Torah, the Land, and the Temple as God’s “possessions”; but they tell us nothing about Melchizedek.²⁸ For further Rabbinic information, we must turn to the Targumim.

3. *Melchizedek in the Aramaic Pentateuchal Targumim*

The importance of the Targumim for this particular purpose lies in the fact that they translate into Aramaic and offer comments on all the relevant Scriptural verses in the order of their appearance, such that a narrative version, shadowing the narrative in the Hebrew Bible, is offered to the hearer or reader. It is well known that Targum often “fills out” the Hebrew text of Scripture, filling gaps in the narrative and offering explanations of perceived difficulties. A survey of the various Targumim of Gen. 14:18-20 yields the following information.

(a) Targum Onqelos²⁹ informs us that Melchizedek was the King of Jerusalem: such is his interpretation of *melekh shalem* in Gen. 14:18. In the same verse, instead of the Hebrew “and he was priest of God Most High”, this Targum has “and he was ministering before God Most High”. His use of the Aramaic term >ym>m, “ministering”, means that he avoids stating directly that Melchizedek was a priest; but the term is used consistently elsewhere by this Targum to refer to the priestly service in the Temple (*e.g.*, of Aaron and his descendants at Exod. 28:1). Possibly the word involves a “pun” on the name of Shem: such a learned reference would certainly be in keeping with what we know of Onqelos and his exegetical procedures.³⁰ In Gen. 14:19, Onqelos stays close to the Hebrew until the divine title “possessor of heaven and earth” is used. For this, the Targum refers to “God Most High, whose possession/property (*qinyaneh*) consists of heaven and earth”. Finally, the Targum notes that the tithe designated in Gen. 14:20 is “one part out of ten”, an expression Onqelos invokes when speaking of Jacob’s vow to tithe (Gen. 28:22).

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²⁹ Aramaic text cited from A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic. I The Pentateuch according to Targum Onkelos* (Leiden: Brill, 1959). Translations are mine.

³⁰ See B. Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, *The Aramaic Bible* 6 (Edinburgh: Š & Š Clark, 1988), pp. 68-69.

(b) Targum Neofiti's opening statement at Gen. 14:18 is of the utmost importance.³¹ It runs as follows: "And the king Zedek, the king of Jerusalem, that is, Shem Rabbah, brought out bread and wine; and he was priest ministering in the high priesthood before God Most High". Zedek appears as the key element in the priest's name, and is reminiscent of the comment in *Gen. Rab.* 43:7, that the place Jerusalem makes its inhabitants "zedek", "righteous". Melchizedek's explicit identification with Shem, by now familiar, would activate in the mind of the reader who knew this Targum well the story of Rebecca who, pregnant with the fighting twins Esau and Jacob, went to seek mercy from before the Lord at the study house of Shem Rabbah (Targum Neofiti of Gen. 25:22). As priest he ministers, >m>m, the same Aramaic term which Onqelos had used to describe his activity. His high priestly status is explicit, and fits well with the tradition that high priestly rules had been revealed to him.³²

His blessing of Abraham in Gen. 14:19, according to this Targum, contained a reference to God Most High, who by His word, *Memra*, possessed heaven and earth. Mention of the *Memra*, which plays a key role in this Targum's version of Genesis 1, seems to indicate that the word hmq, which we have until now rendered as "possessor" or "acquirer", was taken by Neofiti to mean "creator".³³ If that is so, the business of creation obtrudes itself into the narrative yet again. In its version of Gen. 14:20, the text of Neofiti as it has reached us begins with a Hebraism, avh ;vrbv, "and blessed be He", the reference being to God Most High. If original to the Targum, this formula indicates on the part of the Targumist a recognition that Melchizedek uses the holy tongue, Hebrew, which Neofiti elsewhere describes as "the language of the house of the Sanctuary": the setting of these events would thus be the Temple mount.³⁴ Unfortunately, however, the late date of the single manuscript

³¹ Aramaic text cited from (ed.) A. Díez Macho, *Ms. Neophyti I Tomo I Génesis* (Madrid-Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968). For valuable notes on this Targum of Genesis 14:18-20, see B. Grossfeld, *Targum Neofiti I. An Exegetical Commentary to Genesis Including full Rabbinic Parallels* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 2000), pp. 139-140.

^{32,32} The notion that this Targum's description of Melchizedek as "ministering in the high priesthood" might date from post-Talmudic times has been convincingly questioned by A. Díez Macho, *Ms. Neophyti I Tomo II Exodo* (Madrid-Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1970), pp. 76*-78*. See further R. le Déaut, "Le titre *Summus Sacerdos* donné à Melchisedech est-il d'origine juive?", *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 50 (1962), pp. 222-229.

³³ For *Memra* in the creation narratives as expounded by Targum Neofiti, see especially D. Muñoz Leon, *Dios-Palabra. Memra en los Targumim del Pentateuco* (Granada: Institucion San Jeronimo, 1974), pp. 144-167.

³⁴ The phrase "the language of the House of the Sanctuary" referring to Hebrew is not uncommon in Targum Neofiti, for example at Gen. 2:19; 22:1; 31:47; 35:18; 45:12; Exod. 3:4. This Targum explicitly states that Hebrew is the "language of creation" at Gen. 11:1.

of Neofiti, and the errors for which the copyist may be responsible, make this last observation uncertain.³⁵

(c) Targum Pseudo-Jonathan introduces Melchizedek as follows³⁶: “And the righteous king, that is Shem the son of Noah, the king of Jerusalem, went out to meet Abraham and brought out to him bread and wine; and at that time he was ministering, >m>m, before God Most High”. Much of this familiar, but this Targum puts into relief something which has been implicit from the start: Jerusalem has been under the rulership of a great priest and king since the days of the great flood. The brief aside, that Melchizedek was ministering “at that time”, signals a matter of key importance for this Targum, which has carefully noted the building of altars and offering of sacrifice since the days of Adam. Thus Noah, after the flood, is said to have rebuilt the altar which Adam had constructed on leaving Eden, and on which Cain and Abel had offered sacrifice (PJ of Gen. 8:20). This altar features also in *Gen. Rab.* 34:9, which records that it was located in Jerusalem. Melchizedek and this altar are links which take us back to origins, to the creation of the world and the first representative of humanity. The Targum’s explication of Melchizedek’s name as “the righteous king” confirms this, as is clear from its interpretation of Gen. 14:19 when Melchizedek’s blessing of Abraham is made to speak of “God Most High, who on account of the righteous ones created/possessed acquired, anq, heaven and earth”. The notion that the world was created for the sake of the righteous is widespread in Rabbinic Judaism.³⁷ In this Targum, Melchizedek’s own status as righteous is thus directly linked to the creation of the universe and its purpose. In the final part of the blessing, Melchizedek remarks that God has made Abraham’s enemies like a shield which bears the blows directed against him; and the Targum of Gen. 14:20 ends with mention of the tithe paid out of “everything he had restored”. In this Targum, therefore, it is made clear that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, since he was the one who had rescued the property taken by the kings.

³⁵ For the date and provenance of the single manuscript of this Targum, see M. McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis. Translated, with Apparatus and Notes*, The Aramaic Bible 1A (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), pp. 7-9; B. B. Levy, *Targum Neophyti 1. A Textual Study*, vol. 1 (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 1-10.

³⁶ Aramaic text cited from E. G. Clarke, W. E. Aufrecht, J. C. Hurd and F. Spitzer, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1984); translations are mine.

³⁷ See the sources cited by M. Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis. Translated, with Introduction and Notes*, The Aramaic Bible 1B (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), p. 58.

(d) The Fragment Targums survive only for Gen. 14:18. The Vatican ms. speaks of Melchizedek as King of Jerusalem, identifies him as Shem Rabbah, and states that he was acting as priest to God Most High. The Paris ms., having noted Melchizedek's identification with Shem and his status as priest, goes on to say that he brought out *mazona*, food prepared for consumption, and wine; it then notes that he was standing and ministering in the high priesthood before God Most high. The high priestly status of Melchizedek is thus heavily underlined in this Targum.

To these observations should be two further important exegetical details. First, at Gen. 14:13, Pseudo-Jonathan identifies the one who escaped to tell Abraham that his friends had been taken captive with Og, "who out of the giants who had died in the Flood had been rescued; and he had ridden upon the ark..."; his plan was to ensure that Abraham was also taken captive by them. The escapee is identified as Og also at *Gen. Rab.* 42:7-8; *Deut. Rab.* 1:35, and by this means the exegetes lead us to understand that Abraham at that time was threatened with truly hostile and malicious forces. The last remnant of the wicked giants, who had helped to cause the great Flood, comes into direct conflict with him. Melchizedek, who is also Shem, is thus to be seen as the representative of righteous humanity such as it was before the Flood, a righteous chosen humanity selected by God in his covenant with Noah, a covenant made with a sacrifice which Shem-Melchizedek, as priest, had co-offered.

Second, the same Targum verse tells us that it was the eve of Passover when Og arrived, to find Abraham busy making *mazzot*, the unleavened bread for the Festival.³⁸ This is confirmed when the Targum arrives at verse 15 with its account of the night raid made by Abraham on the kings. The opening words of the Hebrew are difficult, and might be translated as either "the night was divided for them", or "he divided the night for them". Pseudo-Jonathan interprets as follows:

And the night was divided for them on the way: half (of it)
fought with the kings; and (the other) half was stored up to smite
the first-born of Egypt.

³⁸ Pseudo-Jonathan has a particular interest in the Passover: see the illuminating study of P. Å. Bengtsson, *Passover in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Genesis. The Connection of Early Biblical Events with Passover in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan in a Synagogue Setting* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001). Bengtsson does not discuss Melchizedek, but focuses on the sacrifices of Cain and Abel; the circumcision of Abraham; the visit of the three "men" to Abraham (Gen. 18:14); and Isaac's blessing of Jacob, all of which this Targum locates at Passover time.

Abraham's victory over the kings, then, this Targum understood Targum as part of a larger process which would be completed when the Passover was celebrated at the time of the Exodus, on the night when the Lord would smite the first-born of Egypt, but would miraculously spare the first-born of Israel: the division of the night is similarly explained in *Gen. Rab.* 49:3. These interpretations depend on Exod. 12:29, which states that God went out to smite the Egyptian first-born at midnight, literally, "at half of the night"; so Gen. 14:15's reference to the division of the night could easily be associated with the first Passover and its redemption. Melchizedek, high priest and Torah scholar who has survived the Flood as representative of those chosen by God to re-populate the world, thus meets Abraham at Passover, as Abraham returns from a defeat of enemies which represents one half of a victory to be completed in generations to come. Again, one recalls the exegesis of *Gen. Rab.*, which sets the announcement of Israel's Egyptian enslavement in the time of Melchizedek, but also employs the Melchizedek episode to announce the redemption of Israel, the Lord's first-born son.

Conclusion

The classical Rabbinic sources, insofar as we have been able in this short paper to look at key writings, have a good deal to tell us about the figure of Melchizedek and his status. The single reference to him in the Babylonian Talmud, though in its present form useful for questioning Christian claims about Melchizedek, seems to have its origins long before the days of the Church, in attempts to solve real problems presented by Scripture: why did Melchizedek the priest first utter a blessing of Abraham, and only then of his Creator? We have seen that biblical evidence presented two, contrasting answers to this question, one of which is represented by the Talmud, whose reserve towards Melchizedek is reflected in much earlier times by the Qumran Genesis Apocryphon. We considered the identification of Melchizedek with the Patriarch Shem, common in the Rabbinic texts. Again, this might be pressed into service as a means of casting doubt on Christian biblical exegesis device in a limited way; but it is better understood in tandem with the presence of another antediluvian figure, the "left-over" giant Og. These two representatives of the world before the Flood, the world which was people by Adam's descendants, are brought face to face in this episode against the background of a conflict which represents the first part (the "first half of a night") of Israel's redemption from the hands of hostile and tyrannical slave-masters.

For many of the sources we have examined, Melchizedek is high priest: he is also king, combining priestly and royal elements in a unique synthesis which is noted, but not discussed. His city is Jerusalem, when it is named; but his title *melekh shalem* speaks also of his perfection as a model, pious Jew, and exemplar for others. The sense that his perfection consists in his being born circumcised is clearly articulated in some, but not all, Rabbinic texts we have examined. While this, too, might be used to circumvent a Christian theological stance, it does not seem to require Christianity to account for its origins. The Book of Jubilees, which tells us virtually nothing about Melchizedek in its re-written version of Genesis 14, nonetheless insists that the angels were created circumcised, and that in this respect the Jewish people are on a par with the highest orders of angels (Jub. 15:25-32). The Qumran Jews held this book in high esteem, possibly regarding it as Scripture; and Melchizedek was certainly understood by the authors of 11Q Melch as having a heavenly, if not exactly angelic status.³⁹ For some Qumran Jews, therefore, the notion that Melchizedek was circumcised would be a necessary requirement for his role and function as announcing the final redemption. We are here in the presence of a very old tradition which is still alive in the Rabbinic period.

The conviction that Melchizedek was high priest of the Jerusalem sanctuary is remarkably well embedded in Rabbinic texts. He knows the *halakhot* of the high priestly office; he is directly associated with the most holy offering of the Bread of the Presence; he has knowledge of the wine libations; and he presided at Noah's great sacrifice at the flood. In all this, it seems that the Rabbinic writers do perceive in Melchizedek a figure of continuity. As Shem, he links the original cosmos of which Adam was first high priest with the new order established with Noah's covenant, and looks forward to Israel's redemption from Egypt. A certain reserve is necessary in saying these things; but the evidence we have seems to warrant it, and it is thanks to the Rabbis that this, and so much else, has been preserved into our own day.

³⁹ An account of Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek would be expected at Jubilees 13:24-27, but there seems to be a lacuna in the text. Surviving witnesses to the text of Jubilees preserve no mention of Melchizedek, though references to the tithe remain. The translation of Jub. 13:25 given by O. S. Wintermute in (ed.) J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983, 1985), vol. 2, p. 84, reads: "And he armed the servants of his house...upon Abram and his seed a tenth of firstfruits to the Lord. And the Lord ordained it (as) an ordinance for ever that they should give it to the priests, to those who minister before him so that they might possess it for ever."

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