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## The Melchizedek Material in Alma 13:13-19

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Alma's discourse on how man comes to know and participate in the plan of redemption (Alma 12:9-13:30) contains a noteworthy use of the material about Melchizedek in Genesis 14:17-24 and in other sources available to him. For Alma, the story of Melchizedek is a commanding illustration of how a person can obtain knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel and attain the blessings of sacred priesthood ordinances through faith, repentance, and righteousness (cf. Alma 12:30; 13:3, 10). Drawing these specific illustrations and teachings out of the Genesis and other accounts is unparalleled in a vast array of literature, which treats Melchizedek in a variety of ways.<sup>1</sup>

Alma found his basic information about Melchizedek in the books of Moses and from the ancient history of the Jews written on the plates of brass (1 Nephi 5:11-12) that were in his possession (Alma 37:1-3). In exploring his use of that material, this article approaches Alma's text from several directions. First, I examine Alma's discourse, focusing in particular on his comments about Melchizedek. Second, I consider Alma's possible sources. He may have had a text similar to the short and puzzling text of Genesis 14:17-24, yet more than likely his scriptures contained a

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longer account similar to JST, Genesis 14:17-40. In conjunction with my discussion of the traditional biblical material, I also consider the major interpretations which subsequent Jews and Christians have imposed upon that material through the ages. Those diverse interpretations provide an interesting comparison to the rich messages of Alma 13:13-19.

### **The Melchizedek Text in Alma 13**

Alma turned to Melchizedek to illustrate the doctrine that all people may obtain knowledge of the mysteries of God through humility, righteousness, and the ordinances of the priesthood. It is not the historical details about Melchizedek himself that are important to Alma, but rather the symbolic priesthood ordinances associated with him. Melchizedek was a man of God and peace because he had obtained the spiritual powers and knowledge necessary to lead his people into the rest of the Lord through the order of the Son.

Alma's text is of particular interest for several reasons. First it is unique – *sui generis*. No other known sermon has imputed such a practical religious and ceremonial meaning to Melchizedek, although in certain respects the sacerdotal approach of 2 *Enoch* and the account in the Joseph Smith Translation (discussed below) come close.

Second, on its face it is one of the earliest extant expositions of the significance of Melchizedek. Working in the early first century B.C., Alma acknowledged that ancient scriptures stood behind his interpretation (Alma 13:20). Unless Alma was radically interpolating his sources (which seems unlikely in light of his own warning in Alma 13:20 that readers of the scriptures should not “wrest them”), his text is based upon a preexilic version of Genesis 14 (and perhaps other sources), known to him from the plates of brass.

Third, it gives us a rare opportunity to see one of the

most fertile minds and sensitive spirits among the Book of Mormon prophets at work on a passage of ancient scripture. Where other Jewish and Christian interpreters have seen only remote abstractions, precedents, or shadows, Alma brings forth powerful lessons on humility, repentance, priesthood, ordinances, and revelation.

Alma's sermon in chapters 12 and 13 teaches the principle that God will provide men access to certain mysteries of God (Alma 12:9-11). The first verse of this sermon sets the theme for the entire discourse. Alma says that many know these mysteries as priests (Alma 13:1), but they are laid under a strict condition of secrecy (Alma 12:9) that can be lifted only by the diligence and repentance of the children of men (Alma 12:9-11; 13:18; cf. Alma 26:22). The plan provides all mankind a chance to know the mysteries in full (Alma 12:10), by humility (Alma 12:10-11; 13:13-14) and through the ministrations of properly ordained priests (Alma 13:16; cf. Mosiah 2:9; Alma 26:22).

The substantive portion of the sermon (Alma 12:12-27) describes the judgment of God and tells how man can avert a second death through obedience to a new set of commandments. According to Alma's exposition, the fall of mankind was prefigured by Adam violating a first set of commandments (Alma 12:22); thus men must die in order to come to judgment (Alma 12:24). Messengers (i.e., "angels," Alma 12:29) were then sent, and God conversed with men, making known the plan of mercy through the Son (Alma 12:29). Man was then given a second set of commandments (Alma 12:32) accompanied by an oath that whoever broke those commandments should not enter into the rest or presence of the Lord (Alma 12:35) but would die the ultimate or last death (Alma 12:36).

Following this introductory explanation, Alma expounds upon the Nephite procedure through which the ordinances of the priesthood were received (see Alma 13:16) and how men might choose between obeying the

Lord's commandments and thereby "enter[ing] into the rest of the Lord" (Alma 13:16), or rebelliously disobeying him and suffering death. The Nephite ordination was a symbolic ritual, since it was performed "in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption" (Alma 13:2). That manner is discussed by Alma only in veiled terms.<sup>2</sup> Candidates were "called and prepared from the foundation of the world" (Alma 13:3) with a "holy calling" (Alma 13:3, 5, 8).<sup>3</sup> This calling was according to a "preparatory redemption" from before the creation of the world (Alma 13:3), and it was patterned after, in, and through the preparation of the Son (Alma 13:5). Then they were "ordained with a holy ordinance" (Alma 13:8), "taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order" (Alma 13:6, 8-9). Thereby the candidates became "high priests forever, after the order of the Son" (Alma 13:9). Following these preparations, and after making a choice to work righteousness rather than to perish (Alma 13:10), the candidate was sanctified by the Holy Ghost, his garments were washed white, and he "entered into the rest of the Lord" (Alma 13:12).

Having thus discussed this ordination procedure, Alma discusses Melchizedek as the archetype of high priests after this order of the Son. He gives the following account:

*The Need for Humility and Signs of Repentance:*

And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest. Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever. And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed (Alma 13:13-15).

*The Need for Symbolic Ordinances:*

Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord (Alma 13:16).

*Melchizedek as a Leader to Peace through Repentance:*

Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness. But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father (Alma 13:17-18).

*The Greatness of Melchizedek among Many:*

Now, there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention (Alma 13:19).

For Alma, Melchizedek was a great high priest who took upon him the high priesthood forever after the order of the Son that Alma has described. Melchizedek's people were wicked, but through repentance, they became humble and were taught by certain ordinances how to look forward on the Son of God for a remission of sins. In this way, Melchizedek established peace in the land of Salem, where he ruled under his father.

In order to compare this information about Melchizedek with that in the Bible, I now turn to examine the biblical narrative and how it has been interpreted.

## Genesis 14:17-24 in the Old Testament

Alma's material is fundamentally related to the text of Genesis 14, which contains some of the most ancient history in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> Although any quest for a conclusive picture of the historical Melchizedek may ultimately be stifled by our lack of contemporaneous information about the man and his period, an examination of the ancient literature pertaining to him yields valuable insights into the theological treatment of this religious figure through the ages.

Genesis 14:17-24 is the fountainhead of many ideas about Melchizedek. This text recounts the following events:

### *The Meeting:*

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him [Abraham] after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale (Genesis 14:17).

### *Melchizedek's Appearance:*

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God (*El Elyon*) (Genesis 14:18).

### *Melchizedek's Blessing:*

And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand (Genesis 14:19-20).

### *The Payment of Tithes:*

And he gave him tithes of all (Genesis 14:20).

### *Division of the Spoils:*

And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram

said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: [I will take] only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion (Genesis 14:21-24).

In his brief encounter with Abraham described in this account, Melchizedek appears as a moderator of peace serving a dual political and religious role, probably in sanctioning Abraham's disposition of the spoils of war. In the battle, Abraham had freed his nephew Lot, a resident of Sodom, who had been taken captive when Sodom fell to Chedorlaomer and his allies. Upon Abraham's return, the king of Sodom came out to meet him. At this point, Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of El the Most High, brought forth bread (or "food") and wine, and blessed Abraham with a hymn of beatification, extolling God's deliverance of the enemy into Abraham's hands. Tithes were then paid, although Abraham refused to accept any spoils of war taken from Sodom, lest it should ever be thought that the king of Sodom, rather than God, had enriched Abraham.

In general, the organizational dependence of Alma's words on Genesis 14 is apparent. Similar in length, the lines of these two passages concerning the payment of tithes (Genesis 14:20; Alma 13:15), Melchizedek's priesthood (Genesis 14:19; Alma 13:14), and the designation of Melchizedek as the king over the land of Salem (Genesis 14:18; Alma 13:18) are closely related. Nevertheless, Alma's text is interpretively independent. His perspective provides unique meanings: Where Genesis begins by simply describing powerful earthly kings meeting humbly before this righteous man of God (Genesis 14:17), Alma goes on

to draw an express lesson on humility (Alma 13:13-14); where the Genesis text next speaks of Melchizedek blessing Abraham (Genesis 14:19), Alma next speaks of the ordinances whereby all people might be blessed (Alma 13:16); and where Genesis finally discusses the division of spoils and Abraham's forbearance (14:21-24), Alma concludes by expounding upon the wickedness of the people and their repentance led by Melchizedek's influence (Alma 13:17-18).

When we turn to specifics, however, the Hebrew text leaves many questions unanswered. Out of this account has arisen a multitude of intractable questions over which scholars have puzzled. Consider the Hebrew name *Malkî-sedeq*. Does it hold some hidden meaning? It may be translated in many ways, including, "the King is Righteous," or "the King is Legitimate," or perhaps "Righteousness is King,"<sup>5</sup> or "My Lord is Sedeq (a Canaanite deity)."<sup>6</sup> The intrinsic meanings in these roots themselves have led some to claim that Melchizedek is not a personal name in Genesis 14:18 at all. The words may simply refer epithetically to "the just king"<sup>7</sup> (the king of Sodom?),<sup>8</sup> or, as Albright suggests, they may be a corruption of a line once reading "the king who was allied with [Abraham]."<sup>9</sup>

The questions proliferate. What was Melchizedek's political position? What city or land did he rule? Was it Jerusalem, or another town, or is this reference to "Salem" merely figurative?<sup>10</sup> What was his lineage and priesthood, and what was the effect of his blessing upon Abraham? What relations had he previously had with Abraham? Had a political treaty or a religious covenant regarding the campaign against Chedorlaomer been entered into between Abraham and Melchizedek before the war? Why would Melchizedek meet Abraham in the field outside any city walls, especially if the meeting had religious significance? What significance did the offering of bread and wine have?<sup>11</sup> Who paid tithes to whom,<sup>12</sup> and were the tithes

religious contributions or political tribute?<sup>13</sup> Who was Melchizedek's God, El Elyon, the Most High God?<sup>14</sup> My purpose is not to belabor the obfuscated. The point is simply that the Hebrew text and all archaeological efforts to clarify it offer little in the way of answers. Aside from the perspectives given by additional scripture or inspiration such as that offered by Alma, only theology generates avenues for dealing with these uncertainties.

The only other Old Testament passage in which Melchizedek appears is Psalm 110.<sup>15</sup> It has been read in two general ways.<sup>16</sup> The standard reading, found in the King James Version, follows the Septuagint, where the theme of the psalm is political victory over enemies (Psalms 110:1-2) through the strength of the Lord (Psalms 110:5-7), with a central affirmation of the righteous reign of the Davidic monarch over a willing people Israel (Psalms 110:3-4): "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. . . . Thou art a priest forever after the order of (*ʿal dibrātī*) Melchizedek." A relationship between the political blessing conveyed in this rendition and the literary image of Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham's military victory in Genesis 14 is readily discernible.

A second reading of the Psalm, however, is suggested by Mitchell Dahood, who has recently proposed a reconstruction of the text in which *malkî-sedeq* in Psalms 110:4 is not treated as the proper name "Melchizedek," but as a construct chain of *malk* (king) and *sedeq* (legitimate) with a possessive third-person singular suffix *-î* (his) interposed, meaning "his legitimate king."<sup>17</sup> Under this reconstruction, the psalm is understood to emphasize the king's legitimate succession to the throne through covenants with God and has nothing to do with the man Melchizedek, except through a possible play on words: "You are a priest of the Eternal according to his *pact*: His *legitimate King*, my lord, according to your right hand."<sup>18</sup> While Dahood's translation is novel and subject to disagreement, both it and the

traditional reading of the psalm may be compared favorably with Alma's text, for Alma refers both to the willingness of the people of Melchizedek to submit to his righteous reign (as in the standard translation) and also to the ordinances or pacts associated with Melchizedek's divine kingship under his Father (as in Dahood's rendition).

If one prefers the traditional approach to Psalm 110, one must also deal with the very difficult Hebrew phrase, *ʿal dibrātī malkī-sedeq*, which is loosely rendered in the Greek as *kata tēn taxin Melchisedek*.<sup>19</sup> Whether this should be translated "because of Melchizedek," "in the manner of Melchizedek," or "after the order or arrangement or office of Melchizedek," as conventional renditions have suggested,<sup>20</sup> or simply "according to his pact," as Dahood prefers, is quite unsettled. One can concur, however, with Joseph Fitzmyer that the phrase cannot be understood in terms of hereditary succession: "The priesthood of the king is due to something else."<sup>21</sup> Alma's text certainly agrees.

### **Subsequent Jewish and Christian Interpretations of Melchizedek**

From these traditional biblical texts, there have come about as many interpretations of Melchizedek as there have been heresies and orthodoxies, for few systematic biblical commentators have passed over this intriguing figure without accommodating him in one way or another. The importance ascribed to him varies with the system in which each interpretation stands. In some views he is regarded merely as a political figure who established certain legal precedents, while in others he becomes a central eschatological figure who will lead the war against Satan in the final battle against evil. Elsewhere he is raised to membership in the Godhead by one early Christian sect, while he is defamed as a bastard by Jewish apologists who found his unpedigreed preeminence in the Pentateuch disquieting. Gnostics and Christian mystics have ascribed cos-

mological powers to him, whereas Protestants have dismissed any notion that he was anything more than a feudal Canaanite king. Exactly what is made of the man Melchizedek in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today is not entirely clear,<sup>22</sup> but Alma's text has been underutilized in this connection.

There is no evidence that Jewish theology took much cognizance of Melchizedek until between 110 B.C. and A.D. 132, when several Jewish writers undertook to present Judaism in various Hellenistic contexts. To this end, Melchizedek readily served as a bridge for them to the Gentile world. Around this time, Melchizedek began to figure importantly in early Christian writings as well.

To the writer of the book of Jubilees,<sup>23</sup> who was sympathetic toward the establishment of a Maccabean royal priesthood over Palestine, Melchizedek provided a convenient precedent for the Maccabean desire to bestow the offices of king and priest upon a single person – and a non-Levite at that. In addition, the Maccabean priests apparently appropriated to themselves for political uses the Melchizedekian epithet, “a priest of the Most High God,”<sup>24</sup> probably because Melchizedek is one of the few non-Levites in the Old Testament acceptably bearing the title of priest. Furthermore, Melchizedek was used to justify the all-important political right of the Maccabean king-priests to receive and personally enjoy the tithes of the people as political tribute and as “an ordinance for ever . . . to [which] law there is no limit of days.”<sup>25</sup>

Far more inscrutable and intriguing is the Melchizedek legend in *2 Enoch* 71-72, whose date and provenance cannot even be approximated. “All attempts to locate the intellectual background of *2 Enoch* have failed. The most remarkable token of continued puzzlement over this work is the failure of scholars to decide whether it came from Jewish or Christian circles. It hardly stands in the mainstream of either religion.”<sup>26</sup> It appears, however, that

“there was a sect which accepted the Enoch writings as sacred scripture in the highest sense, but who they might have been we cannot now discern.”<sup>27</sup> To such people, Melchizedek was sacerdotal.<sup>28</sup> He was miraculously born to the wife of Noah’s brother out of her corpse after she had died.<sup>29</sup> His sacred mission was to be sequestered in Paradise and preserved from the Flood, so that he could pass the priesthood on to postdiluvian peoples, becoming “the priest to all holy priests, the head of the priests of the future, and the head of the thirteen priests who existed before.”<sup>30</sup> He will be sanctified and changed “into a great people who will sanctify [God],”<sup>31</sup> serving as “the head of priests reigning over a royal people who serve you, O Lord.”<sup>32</sup> “Afterward there will be a planting from his tribe, and there will be other people, and there will be another Melkisedek, the head of priests reigning over the people, and performing the liturgy for the Lord.”<sup>33</sup> Ultimately for the people who used this text, this Melchizedek prefigured another, who was expected to perform greater miracles than ever before: “In the last generation, there would be another Melkisedek, the first of 12 priests. And the last will be the head of all, a great archpriest, the Word and Power of God.”<sup>34</sup>

For the community at Qumran, whose writings in the first century B.C. are largely concerned with apocalyptic events, Melchizedek took on significance as a heavenly warlord. He will wage the last war against evil to free the spirits held captive by Belial and to “restore their captives to them and will proclaim release to them, to set them free and . . . atone . . . in the year of the last jubilee . . . for all the sons of light and men of the lot of Melchizedek.”<sup>35</sup> This interpretation is dependent upon Genesis, where Melchizedek was involved in setting free the captives and disposing of the spoils of Abraham’s war. Yet the adaptation of this material to an apocalyptic setting is innovative. Melchizedek was also expected by the people at Qum-

ran to “exact the vengeance of the judgments of God [El] . . . with the help of all the eternal gods [*ēlē ʿōlām*],”<sup>36</sup> and by means of some heady textual substitutions he was identified with the royal being (*elohim*) who takes his stand in the solemn assembly of the highest god (*El*).<sup>37</sup> Thus, in this picture of the end of times, Melchizedek serves both priestly and kingly functions, not in an earthly sense but by driving away the wicked and bringing the righteous into their inheritance by his atonement while standing at the side of the magistrate to execute his commands and wage his battles.

For Philo, whose philosophical system intellectualized most of sacred history, Melchizedek was seen as a particular manifestation of the unseen powers of the realm of pure thought. “He is a priestly manifestation of reason (*hiereus logos*) whose possession is reality, for around him circulate high, illustrious and timely thoughts.”<sup>38</sup> Like all divine (philosophical) creations for Philo, Melchizedek was created by God with a royal nature “before a single deed of Melchizedek had been performed.”<sup>39</sup> He was the king of intellectuality (*basileus nous*) whose peaceful persuasion brought the souls of men into the knowledge of Neoplatonic reality.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Philo also latched onto the idea that because Melchizedek was not a product of the patriarchal traditions he, like the philosopher, must have been without teacher, self-taught (*autodidakton*), and intuitively perceptive (*automathē*), making his thoughts products of higher spheres.<sup>41</sup>

Roughly contemporary with the Qumran writings and Philo is the New Testament interpretation of Melchizedek. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews saw in Melchizedek a prototype of Jesus—one without father, without mother, without genealogy, “having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God” (Hebrews 7:3).<sup>42</sup> Hebrews 7, arguing on four grounds for the superiority of Jesus the eternal High Priest over the

Levitical priests, uses Melchizedek to substantiate this point. Not all of the arguments are strictly logical. First, the argument runs, because Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi (who was then in the loins of Abraham) was less than Melchizedek, because Melchizedek must have been greater than Abraham since the greater allegedly always blesses the lesser (Hebrews 7:4-10). Second, Psalm 110 indicates that a priest *in Judah* must arise "after the similitude of Melchizedek," a priest *forever*, "not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life" (Hebrews 7:11-19). The psalm itself, however, does not literally make such a prophecy. Third, it is argued that to the Levites no oath was given that their priesthood should remain for ever; but Jesus, like Melchizedek, makes a "surety of a better testament," for the Lord has sworn an oath to this type of being in saying, "Thou art a priest for ever" (Hebrews 7:20-22). This argument presupposes a "likeness" between Jesus and Melchizedek and in order to make this point bends the phrase "after the *order (kata ten taxin)* of Melchizedek" to read "after the *similitude (kata ten homoioteta)* to Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:15). Fourth, Levitical priests all die and so do their sacrifices, which must be constantly renewed for the benefit of themselves, as well as for the benefit of the people; but in Jesus' case this is not so, for he lives eternally to make intercession for those who come to God by him (Hebrews 7:23-28).<sup>43</sup> Without diminishing the greatness of Melchizedek, it seems that these polemic arguments are somewhat tendentious and not rationally compelling.

In the ensuing centuries, Christian Fathers expanded the typology initiated in Hebrews 7 in a manner which reflected the later Christian liturgy and doctrine. Practically every Father comments on the formulaic ways in which Melchizedek can be said to have foreshadowed Christ: Both Jesus and Melchizedek were seen as kings of justice and of peace (*salem, shalom*).<sup>44</sup> Both were seen as true, non-

Levitical priests.<sup>45</sup> Melchizedek had no biblical genealogy, while Christ was said to be without father in his human generation and without mother in his divine generation.<sup>46</sup> Melchizedek was perceived as being without beginning of days, without natural beginning, just as Christ existed *in principio* ("in the beginning") and will exist forever.<sup>47</sup> Both lived by faith, as Melchizedek was said to have obtained his knowledge of the sacrament of bread and wine by revelation and not by the letter of law;<sup>48</sup> and both offered a sacrifice of bread and wine instead of an animal sacrifice.<sup>49</sup> In many ways, particularly in relationship to the symbols of the eucharist, Melchizedek was simply seen by these Fathers as a Christian before his time.

For the Gnostics, Melchizedek became a subject for even wider speculation, although it is difficult to reconstruct their ideas with confidence. In the spiritual cosmology of certain Gnostics, the "order (*taxis*) of Melchizedek" is the ordering arrangement of the cosmos.<sup>50</sup> He is the great repossessor, purifier, and preparer of the elements of the universe.<sup>51</sup> He himself is the power of the true mystical universe.<sup>52</sup> His powers make men mystics, revealing to them the all.<sup>53</sup> He is the archon of righteousness, of whom Christ is a shadow.<sup>54</sup> Under the name Zorokothora in the Pistis Sophia, he is the Great Receiver of Light who comes mysteriously from the pure light of the fifth tree, but he only appears periodically when his constellation or number comes up.<sup>55</sup> When he is gone, darkness prevails; as he returns, light is victorious.<sup>56</sup> "In the place of those of the right hand," he seals souls to be taken to the Treasury of Light.<sup>57</sup> Melchizedek worship probably reached its zenith in the Gnostic Melchizedekian sect of the third century A.D. To them, Christ himself was subordinate to Melchizedek, for Christ had been said to be of *his* order.<sup>58</sup> They even went so far as to claim that because Melchizedek had no father, he was the father of all, including the father of Jesus.<sup>59</sup> He was also called the virtue

or strength of God (*virtutem dei*),<sup>60</sup> an angel with supernatural powers,<sup>61</sup> the Holy Ghost,<sup>62</sup> and sometimes he was given an independent place in the Godhead.<sup>63</sup>

The Jewish rabbinical response to the Christian, Essene, Gnostic, and philosophical aggrandizement of Melchizedek was predictable: Where the challengers of Judaism elevated Melchizedek, the rabbis debased him. Where the innovators cultivated the mysterious or esoteric intrigue of Melchizedek's supernatural powers and origins, the Jewish apologists invented down-to-earth explanations to defuse such doctrines.<sup>64</sup> The basic Jewish attitude, not yet reacting to the Christian, can be observed in Josephus, who simply viewed Melchizedek as a righteous Canaanite, a paragon of hospitality, who gave Jerusalem a noble beginning (as Aeneas had done for Rome).<sup>65</sup> But soon after the time of Josephus, when the Christian challenge to Judaism had become more intense, the focus of rabbinic writing on Melchizedek shifted from his goodness and sought to explain him away. By writing the name as two words, *malki sedeq*, and identifying *sedeq* (righteousness) with the city of Jerusalem itself, the *Midrash Rabbah* could speak simply of the "king (*malki*) of Jerusalem (*sedeq*)" and thereby removed the proper name "Melchizedek" from the picture of Genesis 14.<sup>66</sup> In time, the Jewish response to the Christian challenges grew quite pointed. Where the Christians argued against the need to be circumcised on the ground that Abraham had paid tithes to the uncircumcised Melchizedek,<sup>67</sup> the Jews asserted that Melchizedek had been born circumcised.<sup>68</sup> Where it was argued that Melchizedek had a superior priesthood, the Jews retorted that he had lost his powers, which passed to Abraham, when Melchizedek blundered by blessing Abraham before recognizing God.<sup>69</sup> Where it was asserted that the offering of bread and wine foreshadowed the Christian eucharist, the Jews either dismissed this as a mere act of hospitality,<sup>70</sup> or responded in kind, claiming that Melchizedek was instruct-

ing Abraham in the shewbread and ritual libations of the Torah.<sup>71</sup> The absence of genealogy was cured by giving him a genealogy—and not always a flattering one. The easiest solution was to call him Shem,<sup>72</sup> but other theories about his parentage, usually attributed to the Jews, also claimed that he was a descendant of Sidon,<sup>73</sup> or of Sidus an Egyptian,<sup>74</sup> Heraklas,<sup>75</sup> Melchi or Malakh,<sup>76</sup> Ham,<sup>77</sup> or a heathen named Melchi.<sup>78</sup> His mother was Astaroth, Astoriane, or Saltiel, or alternatively some argued that his genealogy was not mentioned because he was the son of a prostitute.<sup>79</sup>

And so we have run the gamut. Melchizedek is treated both favorably and unfavorably in these texts. This is a world of diverse theological contrasts.<sup>80</sup> From this brief sampling of the literature, it is clear that people have said of Melchizedek primarily what their theologies required. Whether a text treats him historically, politically, sacerdotally, apocalyptically, philosophically, polemically, typologically, cosmologically, or defensively, the orientation is dictated by the theological framework within which each interpretation of the basic Old Testament texts was made. Such interpretations tend to reveal far more about the interpreters than they do about Melchizedek.

### **JST, Genesis 14:17-40**

Another text that sheds light on Alma 13:13-19 is found in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14. It reads as follows:

*The Meeting:*

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him [Abraham] after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale (JST, Genesis 14:17).

*Melchizedek's Appearance:*

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he brake bread and blest it; and he blest

the wine, he being the priest of the most high God (JST, Genesis 14:18).

*Melchizedek's First Blessing:*

And he blessed him, and said: Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand (JST, Genesis 14:19-20).

*The Payment of Tithes:*

And he gave him tithes of all (JST, Genesis 14:20).

*Division of the Spoils:*

And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: [I will take] only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion (JST, Genesis 14:21-24).

*Melchizedek's Second Blessing:*

And Melchizedek lifted up his voice and blessed Abram (JST, Genesis 14:25).

*How Melchizedek Obtained His Priesthood:*

Now 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. And thus, having been approved of God, he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch, It being 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; And it

was delivered unto men by the calling of his own voice, according to his own will, unto as many as believed on his name (JST, Genesis 14:26-29).

*The Powers of This Order:*

For God having sworn unto Enoch and unto his seed with an oath by himself; that every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide the seas, to dry up waters, to turn them out of their course; To put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, to break every band, to stand in the presence of God; to do all things according to his will, according to his command, subdue principalities and powers; and this by the will of the Son of God which was from before the foundation of the world. And men having this faith, coming up unto this order of God, were translated and taken up into heaven (JST, Genesis 14:30-32).

*Melchizedek's Use of These Powers:*

And now, Melchizedek was a priest of this order; therefore he obtained peace in Salem, and was called the Prince of peace. And his people wrought righteousness, and obtained heaven, and sought for the city of Enoch which God had before taken, separating it from the earth, having reserved it unto the latter days, or the end of the world; And hath said, and sworn with an oath, that the heavens and the earth should come together; and the sons of God should be tried so as by fire. And this Melchizedek, having thus established righteousness, was called the king of heaven by his people, or, in other words, the King of peace (JST, Genesis 14:33-36).

*Melchizedek's Third Blessing:*

And he lifted up his voice, and he blessed Abram (JST, Genesis 14:37).

*Melchizedek, Keeper of the Storehouse for the Poor:*

Being the high priest, and the keeper of the storehouse of God; Him whom God had appointed to receive

tithes for the poor. Wherefore, Abram paid unto him tithes of all that he had, of all the riches which he possessed, which God had given him more than that which he had need (JST, Genesis 14:37-39).

*God Fulfills Melchizedek's Blessings:*

And it came to pass, that God blessed Abram, and gave unto him riches, and honor, and lands for an everlasting possession; according to the covenant which he had made, and according to the blessing wherewith Melchizedek had blessed him (JST, Genesis 14:40).

This text supplies much information about Melchizedek. Some of its details are interestingly consistent with points reflected in other Jewish and Christian texts discussed above. For example, in the JST, Melchizedek's bread and wine is evidently seen as a form of sacrament (JST, Genesis 14:18), and, somewhat like the remarkable paragraphs in *2 Enoch* 71-72, the JST reports miraculous events associated with Melchizedek's childhood (stopping the mouths of lions and quenching the violence of fire), leading to his receipt of the priesthood and being translated into heaven, to guide an especially righteous group of followers. Certain aspects of the JST account are also echoed in Alma's text. Thus, both report Melchizedek as a man of extraordinary faith, a worker of righteousness among his people, called and ordained a high priest after the order of the Son of God (JST, Genesis 14:27-30; Alma 13:2-10, 18). Alma, however, indicates no awareness of the idea that such people were translated to heaven, that the order of Melchizedek was pertinent to the covenant made by God with Enoch, that an oath was connected with this priesthood (Genesis 14:30, 35), that Melchizedek was called the king of heaven by his people (JST, Genesis 14:36), or several other such details.

Nevertheless, although one cannot say for certain, several key factors would point toward the conclusion that

Alma's version of Genesis 14 on the plates of brass was similar to the text in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.

### Synthesis and Conclusion

Having set the stage, we are now prepared to examine more specifically Alma's use of his Melchizedek sources. As the following eight points show, Alma works the Melchizedek material into his sermon with great perceptiveness.

First, in Genesis, Melchizedek is called a priest of the most high God (*El Elyon*). For Alma, however, he is a *high priest* after the order of the Son of God (Alma 13:14). This is rather singular. Besides the book of Alma and the JST, no other text calls him a high priest (although *2 Enoch* 71:29 calls him "the priest to all holy priests"). Perhaps the word "high" (*elyon*) has shifted position in the texts between "high God" and "high priest." The word *elyon* generally means exalted, or comparatively high. It is a quite distinctive word, most often used to describe the Lord as the Most High God (e.g., Numbers 24:16; Deuteronomy 32:8; 2 Samuel 22:14; Isaiah 14:14; and repeatedly in the Psalms); but sacred things and people can also be called *elyon*: The temple is called *elyon* by the Lord (1 Kings 9:8), and his peculiar people are likewise said to be exalted and blessed because of the covenant: "Thy God will set thee on high (*elyon*) above all nations" (Deuteronomy 28:1), "to make thee high (*elyon*) above all" (Deuteronomy 26:18-19; cf. 1 Peter 2:9, "a royal priesthood, a peculiar people"). Thus, the term "high priest" in Alma's text is particularly apt and meaningful in describing priests who receive the ordination of which he speaks. Nevertheless, one should also observe that Alma in no way polemicizes against the Levitical priesthood, as does the author of Hebrews. Rather, Melchizedek stands as a precedent for a priesthood composed of all the righteous who receive the ordinances

through their faith and good works. Moreover, besides distinguishing Alma's priests favorably from the high (*gādōl*) priest and other priests of the hereditary priesthood at Jerusalem, to which the Nephites (like the Maccabeans) had no claim, Alma's application of the word "high" to these priests "after the order of [God's] Son," rather than to God, may reflect the Nephite understanding that their Lord was not the highest God, but a son of God (e.g., Alma 36:17), who in turn does the will of the Father.

Second, Melchizedek was associated in Alma's mind with the idea of "priests forever after the order of the Son." He could have found such words in Psalm 110, containing the words "priest forever" and the cryptic remark about an "order" or "pact" (cf. Alma 13:14). In Alma 13:2 and 13:14, however, it is clear that this order is not Melchizedek's order (as it is at Qumran, in Psalm 110, in Hebrews 7, and among the Gnostics), but that of the son of God. In this regard, Alma's text is close to the Genesis account in the JST, where the order was "after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch, it being after the order of the Son of God" (JST, Genesis 14:27-28). The "order" for Alma, however, in its primary sense was understood as a *manner of* ordination rather than an *order* of hierarchy or structured body of priesthood bearers. This would suggest that the phrase *‘al dibrātī* could best be understood modally,<sup>81</sup> yielding the sense of "a priest *ordained like* Melchizedek was," i.e., in that manner which looks forward to the Son for redemption (Alma 13:2). Being a priest after the order of Melchizedek ultimately refers to obtaining such ordinances (Alma 13:9), something that only Alma makes explicit.

In an additional sense, however, Alma also uses the term "order" to refer to a specific commission to preach repentance (Alma 5:49) and to teach certain commandments leading into God's rest (Alma 13:6). Indeed, one of the great messages of Melchizedek for Alma (and he is the

only commentator to draw such a conclusion) was the success of Melchizedek as a teacher of righteousness. For Alma, such teaching was the paramount responsibility and calling of the priesthood (Alma 5:49; cf. Mosiah 6:3). Little significance appears to be ascribed by Alma to the bureaucratic, authoritarian, official, or sacrificial powers or functions of the priesthood.

Third, the Book of Mormon text portrays Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek, but unlike other ancient texts in which this tithe is either taken to establish the right of some priestly class to collect revenues or in which it is seen as a religious contribution, a disbursement, or a hospitable gift of the spoils of war,<sup>82</sup> it appears that for Alma the tithe of Abraham illustrates the injunction, "Bring forth fruit meet for repentance" (Alma 13:13), which is a condition for receiving the priesthood ordinances. For Alma, the tithe of Abraham is not just on the spoils of war (as it is in Hebrews and many other texts), but is full and complete, on *all he possessed*, just as the required repentance would have to be total and complete. This interpretation of Genesis 14:20 commends itself in light of the fact that Abraham renounced all interest in the spoils; he would have had no reason to pay a tithe on property in which he claimed no interest, as would be the case if he only tithed on the spoils. It is also consistent with JST, Genesis 14:39: "Abram paid unto him tithes of all that he had, of all the riches which he possessed, which God had given him more than that which he had need," to care for the poor.

Fourth, in the early Christian writings Melchizedek typifies Christ,<sup>83</sup> but in Alma the typology is not found in Melchizedek, his name, his station, or his actions, but in the manner of the priesthood's ordinance, "*it being a type of God's order*" (Alma 13:16). The most prominent touchstone of the Christian typology (the offering of bread and wine) is therefore not used by Alma, although it may stand

behind part of Alma's manner of looking forward to the Son of God for redemption.

Fifth, Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the most high God, is understood in most traditions primarily in his role as a priest, not as a king.<sup>84</sup> This is carried so far that he is most often depicted by medieval artists in priestly vestments officiating at an altar under a canopy. But in the Book of Mormon, the image of Melchizedek is equally that of a royal leader and a priest: a king who establishes peace in the land among his people through righteousness (Alma 13:17-18). The fascinating account in 2 *Enoch* 71 comes close to Alma in this regard, reporting that God would change Melchizedek "into a great people who will sanctify [him]" and make him "the head of priests reigning over a royal people."<sup>85</sup> Likewise the JST reports that Melchizedek ruled over his people as a priest and king of heaven and of peace, with power to "subdue principalities" and "to put at defiance the armies of nations" (JST, Genesis 14:31), although in both of these cases the emphasis is more on Melchizedek's role as priest than king. Alma's dual understanding of Melchizedek as king and priest is consistent with local Nephite politics, since the Nephite ruler (i.e., king or chief judge prior to Alma's day) shouldered the highest responsibilities for both church and state.<sup>86</sup>

Sixth, most commentators have been content to speculate about the sources of Melchizedek's knowledge of the priesthood. Some suggest that he received it from Noah, Abraham, the Patriarchs, angels, or philosophical reflection, as well as from a number of fictitious individuals. One tradition holds that he acquired his priesthood from Noah when he was bitten and defiled by a lion as he was disembarking from the ark.<sup>87</sup> It is rare, however, for writers to dwell on how such knowledge is acquired. In Philo's thought, the contemplative man was typified by Melchizedek, but even there he does not become actively involved in any religious process. Alma gives the most information

of any text, including the JST, about how such knowledge is acquired from God (Alma 12:29): through the mysteries (Alma 12:9-10), calling upon God's name (Alma 12:30), obedience (Alma 12:32), and after exercising mighty faith, humility, charity, and repentance (Alma 13:14-15, 18).

Seventh, Melchizedek's genealogy or lack thereof raises questions practically everywhere. Nothing in Alma 13, however, hints at the churning conflict which divided the Old World over the question of his birth. There is no inclination toward the later hypothesis that Melchizedek was Shem, and there is no reference to the phrase first found in Hebrews 7:3, "without father, without mother, without descent." In Alma's text, only God and the priesthood order are called eternal: "This high priesthood . . . without beginning of days and end of years" (Alma 13:7; cf. also JST, Hebrews 7:1); "the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years" (Alma 13:9). Alma's perspective here runs parallel to an extent with that of the JST: "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, Genesis 14:28). But if Alma's statement, "and he did reign under his father" (Alma 13:18), refers to a political reign under his mortal father (rather than to a spiritual reign under God) or to a combination of the two (as King Benjamin described his own reign in Mosiah 2:31), we have here a singular and significant reference to Melchizedek's royal parentage and vassalage.

Eighth, perhaps because of the Nephite conviction of the wickedness of Jerusalem (1 Nephi 7:13-14), Alma also makes no attempt to equate Salem with Jerusalem. Indeed, for Alma, Melchizedek was not the king of a city, but of a land of Salem. Alma also feels no need for pendants over etymologies either regarding the name Salem or the name Melchizedek.

In conclusion, the Melchizedek text of Alma 13 is quite

remarkable. It reveals a profound understanding of Melchizedek. The text is unique and complex, yet internally coherent and concise. Alma has a clear concept of what Melchizedek means to him and he relates that meaning powerfully to the message of his sermon.

Alma's text bears the hallmarks of an early record. In my opinion, Alma's use of the Melchizedek material from Genesis is conceptually and textually superior to later interpretations in which the meaning of Melchizedek turns upon ideological notions and etymological devices. Alma 13:13-19 conveys far more than the usual historical or etiological interpretations of the puzzling Genesis account; it is conceptually prior to the polarization of Jewish and Christian thought, and it is free from the apocalyptic, philosophical, and metaphysical tendencies that have molded much of Western thought since Hellenistic times. For Alma, Melchizedek is not a transcendent or intuitive being, but an example of the fact that all men can receive the same knowledge and authority that made Melchizedek great. He is not a priest who will conduct some cosmic atonement for man's benefit, but was the teacher of a sacred course that showed men how to benefit from the atonement of Christ and the manner in which they should look forward to redemption (Alma 13:2). He is not the extension of a preexistent form of royal or priestly *logos*, but he epitomizes a practical realization of each individual's preexistent potential which was prepared from the foundation of the world (Alma 13:3). He does not typify or epitomize any other reality.

Alma 13:13-19 also bears characteristics of dependence on earlier sources. While one can see how Alma may have derived its key words and phrases from the traditional Old Testament materials, it appears that his sources were closer in content to the Genesis text in the JST than to the cryptic statements in the King James Version.

Moreover, this material was relevant to Alma's own

day and age. His text is integrally bound up with Nephite sacred ritual and practical religion. In addition, many aspects of the traditional Genesis material and the wordings of Psalm 110 harmonize with Nephite religion and politics in Alma's day, for example, in placing emphasis on a joint office of a righteous priest and king under his father, in being silent on the victorious military context of Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek, and in supporting the non-hereditary posture of the Nephite priesthood.

There is no dearth of commentators who have suspected the significance of Melchizedek, but none offers the insights of Alma 13. This chapter of the Book of Mormon is among the best regarding Melchizedek.

### Notes

1. Thorough bibliographies of the sources are accumulated by Gottfried Wuttke, *Melchisedech der Priesterkonig von Salem*, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kund der älteren Kirche, 5 (Giessen: Topelmann, 1927), and Paul J. Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, 10 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981). See also Gerald T. Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conception of the Priesthood of Melchisedech* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1951); and Fred L. Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition through the First Five Centuries C.E.*, SNTSMS 30 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

2. This is as one would expect, given the accompanying "strict command" of secrecy (Alma 12:9). Although little is known of the Nephite mysteries, it seems clear that they had certain sacred teachings that were not discussed publicly.

3. Was the "calling" a new name, a job assignment, or a ritualistic summons? Mosiah 5:10-12 supports the idea that they were called by a new name in Christ. In Alma's text, however, the people are not only called *with* that holy calling (Alma 13:3) and *by* it (Alma 13:6), but also *to* the calling (Alma 13:4), which would seem to make the calling more like a post or office rather than a new appellation. The ambiguity may be intentional, however, since the important thing is being able to recognize the voice of the Lord when he calls, and that is learned only by serving him (Mosiah 5:12-14); cf. JST,

Genesis 14:29, "it was delivered unto men by the calling of his own voice, according to his will."

4. See generally, Paul Winter, "Note on Salem-Jerusalem," *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1957): 151-52; William F. Albright, "Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Interpretation," *Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research* 163 (1961): 36-54; Loren R. Fischer, "Abraham and His Priest-King," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 264-70; Robert H. Smith, "Abraham and Melchizedek," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (1965): 129-53. Discoveries at Ebla seem to confirm the general historicity of materials in Genesis 14.

5. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "'Now this Melchizedek . . .'" (Heb 7,1)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 305-21. Cf. Adonizedek, the name of an early king of Jerusalem mentioned in Joshua 10:1-3. That name would mean "Sedeq [Righteous] is my lord." *Ammi-Seduqa* was the Amorite name of a Babylonian king in the sixteenth century B.C.; *ibid.*, 312.

6. *Sedeq* is known to have been the name of a Canaanite deity at Mari, Ugarit, and in South Arabia. Compound names incorporating the name of a god were not uncommon; witness Adonizedek in Joshua 10:1-3; Malchiel (El is my King) in Genesis 46:17; Malchiah (Yahweh is my king) in Ezra 10:31 and Jeremiah 38:6. This is thought to suggest that Canaanite kings had priestly functions and that *Sedeq* was part of a local cult. John Gray, *History of Jerusalem* (New York: Prager, 1969), 67.

7. This view is represented as early as the second century of the Christian Era in Targum Neofiti. A. Dies Macho, *Neophyti I: Targum Palestinense I: Genesis* (Madrid: Confejo Superior de investigaciones científicas, 1969).

8. This has been suggested by H. E. del Medico, "Melchisedech," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 69 (1957): 160-70, since "upright king" and "peaceful king" are epithets of the king of Sodom, mentioned in the previous verse.

9. Albright, "Abram the Hebrew," 52.

10. The Jews, naturally, have preferred the equation of Salem with Jerusalem. See Psalm 75:3; Josephus, *Antiquities* I, 10, 2 (Solyma is later called Jerusalem); Genesis Apocryphon 22:13 ("Salem, that is Jerusalem"). But W. F. Albright is among those who resist the geographical identity between Salem and Jerusalem, in "Abram the Hebrew," 52.

11. To the Christians, seeing a foreshadowing of the sacrament was irresistible here. The Jews figured this constituted instruction

in the laws of the priesthood by alluding to shewbread and libations. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, trs., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. (London: Soncino, 1961), 1:356. It has been argued, however, that wine was not used for libations during the time of Abraham. Edward Busse, *Der Wein im Kult des alten Testaments* (Freiburger Theologische Studien 29).

12. The Hebrew text is wholly ambiguous here. Alfred Jeremias, *Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient East* (London: Williams, 1911), 1:29, states that Melchizedek paid tithing to Abraham.

13. A tithe was a political tax often taken as tribute in antiquity; see, e.g., Herodotus, *Historia* II, 135; IV, 152.

14. Is it Yahweh, as in Genesis 14:22, or was Yahweh added there by gloss, since it is absent in the Septuagint, Peshitta, and Genesis Apocryphon? Or are these Canaanite deities? Cf. Numbers 24:16; Isaiah 14:14; Daniel 3:26; see G. Della Vida, "El Elyon in Genesis 14:18-20," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63 (1944): 2.

15. In addition, some rabbinic speculation on the Song of Songs involves Melchizedek as one of the four craftsmen of Zechariah 2:3. TB *Sukkah* 52b lists the four as: Messiah ben David, Messiah ben Joseph, Elijah, and the priest of Righteousness (*Kohen Sedeq*).

16. Psalm 110 is a royal psalm in which a Davidic king is addressed as a hero and probably associated with the past as a successor of Melchizedek. J. W. Bowker, "Psalm CX," *Vetus Testamentum* 17 (1967): 31-41. Alexander F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 663.

17. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 3:117.

18. *Ibid.*

19. The problems involved in using *taxis* to translate the semitic concepts here are shown by T. Noldeke, "Taxis im Semitischen," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 23 (1909): 145-49.

20. For a discussion of these translations, see Fitzmyer, "Now This Melchizedek," 305-21.

21. *Ibid.*, 308.

22. The idea, for example, that Melchizedek was Shem has been found in Church literature since John Taylor qualifiedly volunteered it in *Times and Seasons* 5 (December 15, 1844): 745-46, as "not allowing it to be revelation but history." That history, however, is suspect, and some Church writers have prudently declined to follow it. See John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 232; Charles E. Haggerty, "Melchizedek . . . King of Salem," *Improvement Era* 55 (1952): 512. Bruce

R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960) refers to the idea that Shem was Melchizedek as an unconfirmed Hebrew tradition. But others have gone to extraordinary lengths to preserve that connection, see Hyrum Andrus, *Principles of Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 422, even in the face of D&C 84:14: "Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek, who received it through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah." For a more tentative approach, see Alma E. Gygi, "Is It Possible That Shem and Melchizedek Are the Same Person?" *Ensign* 3 (November 1973): 15-16. D&C 138:41 only speaks of Shem as "the great high priest." The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, while silent on any connection between Melchizedek and Shem, adds many other relevant details to the Genesis account, mentioned further below. For other information about the power of the Melchizedek priesthood as "the power of 'endless lives,'" and about Melchizedek giving the priesthood to Abraham, see *TPJS*, 322-23.

23. *Jubilees* 13:25-29; 32:1. R. H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), dates this work around 110 B.C. Unfortunately, however, *Jubilees* 13 has a lacuna in the text where Melchizedek was probably mentioned, and *Jubilees* 32:1 contains only an allusion to Melchizedek in the expression "priest of the most high God."

24. This title is used consistently by Maccabees and elsewhere to describe them; see 1 Maccabees 14:41; Josephus, *Antiquities* XVI, 6, 2; *Assumption of Moses* 6:1; *Testament of Levi* 8:14-15. The *Testament of Levi* does not refer to Melchizedek by name, but in a passage which appears to be free from interpolation, the *Testament* speaks of a new priesthood called by a new name to be established after the fashion of the Gentiles. The priesthood of Levi, however, remains the greatest of the three mentioned. *Testament of Levi* 8:13.

25. *Jubilees* 13:25-27. Note that where *Jubilees* has the law of tithing being without limit of days, and where Hebrews 7:3 has Melchizedek's *genealogy* without beginning of days or end of years, Alma 13:7 denotes the high *order* as being without temporal bounds or, in other words, arising from the foundation of the world.

26. *OTP* 1:95.

27. *Ibid.*, 1:97.

28. Compare, in several respects, *JST*, Genesis 14:26-36.

29. *OTP* 1:206-7; see also A. Vaillant, *Le Livre des Secrets d'Enoch* (Paris: Institut D'Etudes Slaves, 1952), 77; Rubenstein, "Observation on the Slavonic Book of Enoch," *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962): 1-21.

30. 2 *Enoch* 71:29, 33, in *OTP* 1:208.
31. 2 *Enoch* 71:29, in *OTP* 1:209.
32. 2 *Enoch* 71:37, in *OTP* 1:211.
33. 2 *Enoch* 71:37, in *OTP* 1:209-10.
34. 2 *Enoch* 71:33-34, in *OTP* 1:208.
35. 11<sup>Q</sup>*Melch* 6-8. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 25-41; J. T. Milik, "Milki-sedeq et Milkiresa dans les anciens écrits juifs et chrétiens," *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972): 95-144; James A. Sanders, "The Old Testament in 11Q Melchizedek," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1973): 373-82; Paul J. Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, Number 10 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981).
36. 11<sup>Q</sup>*Melch* 13-14.
37. 11<sup>Q</sup>*Melch* 15-21 is apparently commenting on Psalm 82:1 and also Isaiah 52:7. The latter was also a cryptic passage to Nephites; see Mosiah 12:20-21.
38. Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis II*, III, 82.
39. *Ibid.*, III, 79.
40. *Ibid.*, III, 80-81. See also, Philo, *On Abraham* 235.
41. Philo, *On the Preliminary Studies* 99. For Philo, the adjectives *automathe* and *autodidakton* are attributes of wisdom (*sophia*) and the wise man, and mean that he has not been improved by investigation, drill, and labor, but from his birth he has discovered ready-prepared *sophia* from above showered down from heaven.
42. See generally V. Hamp, "Melchisedek als Typus," *Pro Mundi Vita: Festschrift zum eucharistischen Weltkongress* (Munich, 1960); J. Derambure, "Melchisedech, Type due Messi," *Revue Augustinienne* 12 (1908): 37-62.
43. Cf. 11<sup>Q</sup>*Melch* 6-9. The relationship between Hebrews and the writings at Qumran is the strongest on this point, with the exalted status of Melchizedek as eternal priest reflecting the christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews. See M. de Jonge and A. S. van der Woude, "11Q Melchizedek and the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965-66): 301-26.
44. Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* IV, 3, 10 and 12, in *PL* 16:457-58; John Chrysostom, *Homilia XII in Epistolam ad Hebraeos* 7, in *PG* 63:97; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* IV, 25, in *PG* 8:1369-71.
45. Athanasius, *De Titulis Psalmorum* CIX, 9, in *PG* 27:1145; see also Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* IV, 3, 10, in *PL* 16:457-58; Augustine, *De diversis Quaestionibus* I, 83, 2, in *PL* 40:49; Cyprian, *Epistolae* LXIII, 4, in *PL* 4:387-88; Isidore, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis* I, 18, 1, in *PL* 83:754.

46. Alcuin, *Interrogationes et Responsiones in Genesis* 164, in *PL* 100:536; Ambrose, *De Mysteriis* VIII, 45-46, in *PL* 16:421; Bruno, *Expositio in Psalmos* 109, in *PL* 152:1227-28; John Chrysostom, *Homilia de Melchisedeco*, in *PG* 56:259-60; Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Oratorio* XXX, 21, in *PG* 36:132-33; Isidore, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum in Genesis* XI, 4, in *PL* 83:239-40. Theodoret, *Interpretatio Epistolae ad Hebraeos* VII, 3, in *PG* 82:724-25.

47. Fulgentius, *Ad Trasimumdum Regem Vandalorum* II, 6, in *PL* 65:250-51; see also Jerome, *Epistola* 73, in *PL* 22:676-81; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I, 3, in *PG* 20:73-76; Leo the Great, *Sermo* V, 3, in *PL* 54:154; cf. Ambrose, *Hexaemeron* I, 3, 9, in *PL* 14:137-38 ("Deus est enim Melchisedech . . . qui est sine initio.")

48. Chrysostom, *Homilia de Melchisedeco* 3, in *PG* 56:260-62; cf. Ambrose, *Expositio in Lucam* III, 21, in *PL* 15:1680. Cf. JST, Genesis 14:18.

49. Arnobius, *Commentarii in Psalmas* 109, in *PL* 53:496; Bede, *Expositio in Lucae Evangelium* VI, 22, in *PL* 92:596; Bruno, *Expositio in Psalmos* 109, in *PL* 164:1127; Claudius of Turin, *In Hebraeos*, in *PL* 104:926; Isidore, *Allegoriae quaedam Sacrae Scripturae*, in *PL* 83:104; Leo the Great, *Sermo* V, 3, in *PL* 54:154.

50. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* LV, 1, in *PG* 41:972-73.

51. *Pistis Sophia* I, 25-26. See Hugh W. Nibley, "Treasures in the Heavens, Some Early Christian Insights into the Organizing of the Worlds," in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, vol. 1, *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1986), 182.

52. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* LV, 1-3, in *PG* 41:972-77.

53. Melchizedek, in James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 399-403. Cf. Isidorus of Pelus, *Epistolae* III, 152, in *PG* 78:844.

54. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* LV, 4-5, in *PG* 41:980-81; Origen, *Contra Haereses* VII, 36, in *PG* 16:3343.

55. *Pistis Sophia* 360:13-361:4.

56. *Ibid.*, 34:7-35:24.

57. *Ibid.*, 324:20-325:1.

58. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* LV, 4, in *PG* 41:980-81; Theodoret, *Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium* II, 6, in *PG* 83:392-93.

59. *Ibid.*, LV, 9-13.

60. Pseudo-Augustine, *Quaestiones Veteres et Novi Testamenti* (Vienna: Souter, 1908), 268, question 109; Arnobius, *Praedestinatorum Haeresis* I, 34, in *PL* 53:598.

61. Jerome, *Epistolae* 73, in *PL* 22:681. Melchizedek also enters as

a candidate for being the archangel Michael in Jewish speculation. Such angelology is refuted by Ambrose, *De Fide* III, 11, in *PL* 16:632.

62. This was the reported opinion of Hierax in Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* LXVII, 3, in *PG* 42:172-84. See also Jerome, *Epistolae* LXXIII, 1, in *PL* 22:676-77. He is also associated with the baptism of fire in 2 *Jeu* 45.

63. Hippolytus, *Refutatio* VII, 24.

64. Gerald T. Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conception of the Priesthood of Melchizedek* (Washington: Catholic University of American Press, 1951), 130, concludes: "The talmudic interpretation of the figure and role of the priest-king of Salem were often the result of wishful thinking or false conclusion from an erroneous apologetic designed to counteract the New Testament clarification of the person and function of Melchizedek."

65. Josephus, *Antiquities* I, 179-81; *Jewish Wars* VI, 438.

66. *Midrash Rabbah Genesis (Lekh Lekha)* 43:6, tr. Freedman and Simon (London: Soncino, 1961), 356. "Jerusalem is called Zedek (righteousness), as it is written, Zedek (righteousness) lodged in her (Isaiah 1:21)." The name is also written as two words in Psalm 110:4.

67. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 19, in *PG* 6:516-17; Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos* 3, in *PL* 2:640-44. One may quite confidently date the the formulation of the Jewish theories about Melchizedek by the fact that the Jewish arguments were still unknown to Justin in A.D. 165 and Tertullian in A.D. 220.

68. *Genesis Rabbah* 43:6, Jacob Neusner, ed., 3 vols. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 3:119. Rabbi Isaac the Babylonian inferred from the title King of Salem (*Shalem*) that Melchizedek was born circumcised. *Midrash Rabbah Genesis (Lekh Lekha)* 43.

69. TB *Nedarim* 32b. Note that the Jewish explanation of *kata tēn taxin* (after the order of) Melchizedek is to paraphrase it as "according to the blundering utterance of Melchizedek," for thus Abraham became his successor in the priesthood.

70. R. Jizchak, *Bereshit Rabbah* 43 on Genesis 14:19 (third century A.D.).

71. *Midrash Rabbah Genesis (Lekh Lekha)* 43:6, tr. Freedman and Simon, 356, explicating Proverbs 9:5, "come, eat of my bread, and drink of my wine."

72. This is common, beginning with the second-century Targums Neophiti I, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Fragmententargum (but not Onqelos). It is assumed without question in most rabbinic writing. See *Bemidbar Rabbah* on Numbers 3:45, *Der Midrasch Bemidbar* (Leipzig, 1885); R. Jizchak, *Bereshit Rabbah* 43 on Genesis 14:19; *Sefer*

*Eliahu Rabbah* 25; Nachmanides, *Perush ha-Ramban 'al ha-Torah* 14:18; *Wajikra Rabbah* 25 on Leviticus 19:23; *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 27. The same tradition is reported in Christian writings after the fifth-century: Jerome, *Hebraicae Quaestiones in Genesim* 14, in *PL* 23:1010; Isidore, *De Ortu et Obitu Patrum* 10 in *PL* 83:132; Rupert, *Dialogus Inter Christianum et Judaeum* II, in *PL* 170:583; Jerome, *Epistola* 73, in *PL* 22:679.

73. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* LXVII, 7, in *PG* 42:181.

74. John Malalas, *Chronographa* III, in *PG* 97:134.

75. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* LV, 2, in *PG* 41:973.

76. Georgios Monachos, *Chronikon* I, 10, in *PG* 110:145-48. *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, E. A. W. Budge, ed. (London, 1927), 152.

77. *Chronikon Paschale*, Dindorf, ed. (Bonn), 90, listed in Wuttke, *Melchisedech der Priesterkonig von Salem*, 48.

78. Athanasius (dubia), *Historia de Melchisedech*, in *PG* 28:525.

79. Eustathius of Antioch, *Nicephoros Cat.* I, 198 (*hyios pornes*), in Wuttke, *Melchisedech der Priesterkonig von Salem*, 48.

80. Numerous other accounts cast Melchizedek in even further roles. One depicts him as a guard over the treasure cave where the body of Adam was buried. He was "set apart all the days of his life. He shall not take a wife, he shall not shed blood, he shall not offer up the offerings of wild animals and feathered fowl; but he shall offer unto God bread and wine, for by these redemption shall be made for Adam and all his posterity. . . . He shall wear a garment of skin, he shall not shave his head, and he shall not cut his nails, but shall remain alone natural because he is the priest of God the most High." *Book of the Cave of Treasures*, Budge, ed., 105-6. There is also a legend that Melchizedek fell asleep in a cave along with Ham and Japheth and awoke at the time of the nativity of Christ to travel to Bethlehem as one of the Magi. Sabine Baring-Gould, *Legends of the Patriarchs and Prophets and Other Old Testament Characters* (New York: Alden, 1885), 141.

81. Cf. Fitzmyer, "Now This Melchizedek," 308-9. See text accompanying nn. 17-21 above.

82. See, for example, Josephus, *Antiquities* I, 181; Hebrews 7:4; *Genesis Apocryphon* 22:12-20.

83. This extends to more recent religious writings as well. See John Lewis, *Melchizedech's Antitype* (London: Okes & Whitakers, 1624); George C. Currie, "Melchisedec," *Virginia Seminary Magazine* (July 1892), in the Duke University Collected Monographs, vol. 288. Luther, however, rejected the typology in his "Predigt über Genesis

14" (1527), in *Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weiner: Hermann Böhlau, 1900), 24:277-86; see also *Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften*, J. Walch, ed. (Gross Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung, 1987), 5:1021, 19:1208. See also 2 *Enoch* 71, in *OTP* 1:208.

84. Josephus is an understandable exception, since he wrote in the court of a Roman emperor.

85. 2 *Enoch* 71:30, 37, in *OTP* 1:209, 211.

86. This conjunction of kingship and priesthood may also reflect an ancient attribution of divine commission of the king (cf. Mosiah 2:18-19), and it is consistent with ordaining people to become kings and priests. As Joseph Smith taught, the Melchizedek "Priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy." *TPJS*, 322.

87. Baring-Gould, *Legends of the Patriarchs and Prophets*, 141. Cf. *JST*, Genesis 14:26, "he stopped the mouths of lions."