

Some have had their minds so much impressed by the mysterious brevity of the Old Testament narrative, and the pre-eminence of character ascribed to this ancient worthy in the New Testament, that they have been led to regard his visit to Abraham as one of the appearances of Christ as the angel of the covenant.

No purpose is gained by such a supposition, while it is open to many obvious objections.

The Old Testament narrative does not warrant any such idea. The appearances, with which some would class this appearance of Melchizedek to Abraham, have a character of their own which marks them off from all ordinary historical events. This narrative, though brief and fragmentary, has upon it the stamp of veritable history. Salem was a real place—as much so as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, or Zeboim. Melchizedek was its king—as well known in that district as Arioch or Chedorlamer, Bera or Birsha. From all the kings of that time and neighborhood he stood distinguished in this respect, that he was also a divinely appointed priest. Which circumstance would be especially noticeable, as in those early times there was no separate priesthood, but every head of a family was also, as such, its priest.

This man, well known in this district both for his priestly character and the peacefulness and righteousness of his reign, went forth to meet Abraham after the slaughter of the confederate kings, to bless him as a servant of the most high God, and to refresh him with a kind and hospitable ministry.

If we refer to those instances in which divine manifestations have been vouchsafed to men, we find that those who enjoyed them were at the time, or afterwards, made sensible of their peculiar supernatural character. This event, however, seems to have been regarded by Abraham with no amazement, to have been esteemed as an ordinary incident of life, nor from the narrative can we gather that he viewed Melchizedek as invested with any greater sacredness of character than that which attached to him as a priest of the living God.

But even if the Old Testament narrative permitted such an interpretation, the use

made of it by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews should convince us that such an interpretation is quite inadmissible. The priesthood of Christ is said to be “*after the order of Melchizedek.*” Melchizedek is said to have been “*made like unto the son of God,*” in both of which expressions we have the reality of personal distinction unmistakably assumed. Indeed, after a careful study of the New Testament references to Melchizedek, we cannot do otherwise than regard him as *a type of Christ*; and when we say he is a type of Christ, we do not mean that there is to be observed a merely general resemblance—but that, to use words of Scripture, Melchizedek was “*made like unto the Son of God,*” and thus does he gleam forth for a moment in those far-off times prefiguring Him who was to come.

If we refer to the Epistle to the Hebrews we shall find that we are presented with many circumstances of interest as the inspired writer traces the parallel between Melchizedek and Christ.

We are invited (Heb. vii. 4) to “*consider how great this man was* unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.” He is thus lifted above Abraham, the friend of God and the father of the faithful—for he “*blessed him which had the promise.*” And without controversy the less is blessed of the better.” We are to consider the greatness of Melchizedek who was lifted in superiority above the founder of the chosen nation and the entire Levitical priesthood in order that with a more profound admiration we may regard the transcendent greatness of that other priest of whom Melchizedek was but a faint similitude.

We are invited not only to consider the greatness of Melchizedek, but the fact that he stands before us as *king of Salem and priest of the living God.* We find that there is something special—something designed when we see him coming forth as king among men and priest of the most high God; but our wonder ceases when we remember to whom he was made like, and that he stood there in those early days preshadowing Him who in His own person for ever combines the glories of kingship and priesthood.