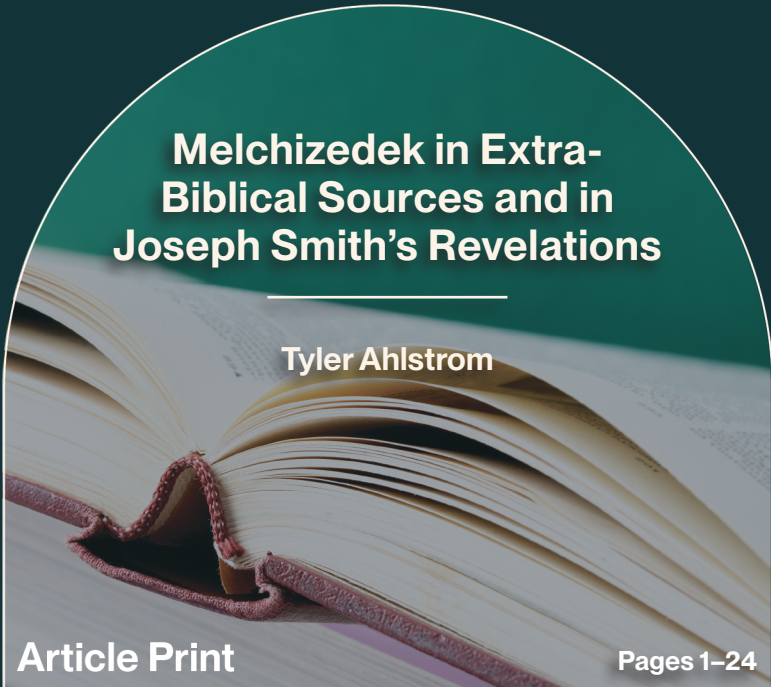


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Melchizedek in Extra- Biblical Sources and in Joseph Smith's Revelations

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Melchizedek in Extra-Biblical Sources and in Joseph Smith's Revelations

Tyler Ahlstrom

Abstract: *The Bible contains few scriptural accounts about Melchizedek and the order of the priesthood that bears his name. However, the restored gospel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offers much more about this otherwise lesser-known figure and this priesthood. There are also multiple, ancient extra-biblical texts that discuss Melchizedek and the Melchizedek Priesthood, most of which have been discovered after the publication of Joseph Smith's accounts regarding Melchizedek. These ancient texts demonstrate many parallel concepts to those found in the restored gospel. They support the accuracy of the additional information contained in Joseph's revelations and writings, enhancing our knowledge and understanding of Melchizedek and the priesthood named after him.*

Joseph Smith recorded many things about Melchizedek and the Melchizedek Priesthood that exceeds the information found in the Bible. The Bible mentions Melchizedek and the Melchizedek Priesthood in only a handful of accounts. For example, Genesis 14:18–20 reveals that upon a return trip from a battle, Abraham met with Melchizedek:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. 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. And he gave him tithes of all.

In Psalm 110:4, there is an apparent messianic prophecy of Christ's

priesthood in the declaration, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” And in Hebrews, chapters 5 through 8, Paul discusses the Melchizedek Priesthood as being higher than the Aaronic Priesthood, and Christ being after this order.

From these accounts, we learn little about who Melchizedek was, nor from whom he received his priesthood, and other specifics about his life. There are a few other biblical verses that hint at this higher priesthood, distinct from the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood, but these scriptures do not give specifics nor name the priesthood (see Jeremiah 31:31–32; John 15:16; Revelation 1:6).

Because of the latter-day restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ — through the Prophet Joseph Smith — we have a great deal more than the Bible offers in relation to the life of Melchizedek and the details of the Melchizedek Priesthood and its rights and responsibilities. In the Joseph Smith Translation, the Lord reveals that Melchizedek feared God as a child, was ordained a high priest after the eternal priesthood order of God (which was previously revealed to Enoch), was exceptionally righteous, turned his people from wickedness, and was called the prince of peace (see JST Genesis 14).

The Book of Mormon also reveals more about Melchizedek and the priesthood, especially Alma 13, which shows that Melchizedek was a participant in the ancient order of the priesthood and that priesthood holders were ordained from the foundation of the world. The Doctrine and Covenants also speaks of the priesthood line in sections 84 and 107, showing that the higher priesthood bears the name of Melchizedek because he was a uniquely great high priest (see Doctrine and Covenants 107:2). The books of Moses and Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price also record the history of the higher priesthood being passed down.¹ The Melchizedek Priesthood also plays a prominent role in temple ceremonies of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as revealed primarily to Joseph Smith.

The restored gospel shows us that Melchizedek had similarities to Enoch, being after the same order; performing miracles, and leading cities to righteousness that resulted in being translated.² The sources

1. Abraham 1:1–4, 2:9–11; Facsimile 2, Fig. 3, Pearl of Great Price; Moses 6:7, 67; 8:19. Melchizedek is only explicitly named in Facsimile 2.

2. See Frank F. Judd Jr., “Melchizedek: Seeking after the Zion of Enoch,” in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskinson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU], 2022), rsc.byu.edu/sperry-symposium-classics-old-testament/melchizedek.

also show that Melchizedek had similarities to Jesus Christ.³ This same order of the priesthood was held by Christ and his Apostles and was passed from the resurrected Peter, James, and John to the Church in the present day.⁴ This priesthood has been referred to with various names, such as the order of Enoch or the order of Melchizedek, but its original name is "the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 107:3).

The fullness of this priesthood is the power by which Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ operate, and a portion of this priesthood is conferred upon men in our day, entailing specific responsibilities and requiring righteousness, faithfulness, and a willingness to serve (see Doctrine and Covenants 107:18–22). These responsibilities entail many important rights and privileges for both the holders of this priesthood and those they serve. This can bring forth many blessings, including communing with heaven and eventually becoming gods (see Doctrine and Covenants 76:57–58; 107:19).

Similarities Between Extra-Biblical Accounts and Joseph Smith's Writings

There are numerous ancient extra-biblical sources that discuss Melchizedek and offer additional insights into his life and the Melchizedek Priesthood. These sources come from early Jewish texts and traditions, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Gnostic writings such as the Nag Hammadi Library, early Christian writings, and other accounts from early historians. These sources conflict with each other in significant ways, and some are most certainly fictional or fraudulent works. However, there are many consistencies between the texts and certain themes appear in multiple sources from different faiths and time periods, suggesting that these ideas were pulled from earlier sources that influenced later works.

There are many similarities between these ancient sources and the restored gospel as revealed to Joseph Smith. There are also many differences, but Joseph's writings largely fit comfortably into the overall body of information, rather than being at odds. The similarities include Melchizedek being righteous in his youth, turning people from wickedness, being a uniquely great high priest; and the priesthood line passing from Adam through his righteous patriarchal line to Melchizedek,

3. Judd, "Melchizedek: Seeking after the Zion of Enoch."

4. Joseph Smith—History 1:72; Doctrine and Covenants 13; 27:12–13; 128:20.

who in turn passed it on to Abraham and eventually through others, to Moses. Other similarities between the restored gospel and ancient sources include the teaching that the Melchizedek Priesthood is eternal, the identification of the blessings that come from the Melchizedek Priesthood, the use of priesthood in the temple ceremony, and the wearing of the holy garments of the priesthood.

Melchizedek was Righteous in his Youth

The Bible says nothing of Melchizedek's youth, but in Genesis 14:26 of the Joseph Smith Translation, it states that Melchizedek was righteous and "when a child he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire." God approved of him and "he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch" (JST Genesis 14:27). Several ancient sources show Melchizedek's righteousness as a youth, similar to the Joseph Smith Translation.

For example, in the early Christian Ethiopic *Book of Adam and Eve*, also known as the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, Melchizedek is shown to have divine favor in his youth.⁵ Michael, the archangel, appears to Melchizedek's father Cainan and explains the important role Melchizedek is to play in taking the body of Adam from the ark to a mountain at the center of the earth to watch over it.⁶ This "center of the earth" is the mount where Christ will one day die on the cross and his blood would baptize the head of Adam. Melchizedek is to stay on the mountain to minister as God's high priest, watching over the body of Adam forever. Methuselah and Noah tell Noah's son, Shem, to help Melchizedek on this journey and also to take him as his son.⁷ Melchizedek is chosen for this role based on "his righteousness and purity."⁸ The angel then wakes Melchizedek, who is referred to as a "youth of perfect heart," and anoints him "on the head and on the breast," telling him that he must fulfill this mission and that he was

5. Duane Wilson, "Temple Symbolism in the Conflict of Adam and Eve," *Studia Antiqua* 2, no. 2 (2003): 1, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studiaantiqua/vol2/iss2/7.

6. Solomon C. Malan, trans., *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (London: Williams and Norgat, 1882), 3:16, archive.org/details/bookofadameveals00malaiala/page/n5/mode/2up.

7. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:5.

8. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:16.

chosen from his childhood to serve God as a "seed of the blessed."⁹ Melchizedek was fifteen years old on this journey.¹⁰

In the Slavonic 2 Enoch, Noah's brother, Nir, has a wife who is aged and sterile, but becomes pregnant even though Nir has not touched her since he became a priest. When Nir discovers this, he accuses her of unfaithfulness, and she dies. Nir gets Noah to help bury her secretly, so that no one will find out about this potential scandal and think Nir killed his wife. As they were digging a grave, a child came out of the body of Nir's wife and they find the child sitting beside the body of his mother. He was "fully developed physically, like a three-year-old," and was able to speak and "blessed the Lord." He had the glorious badge of priesthood on his chest. They determined that God was renewing his priesthood from blood related to them. They "washed the child, and they dressed him in the garments of priesthood, and they gave him the holy bread," and named him Melchizedek. They then had a public funeral for Nir's wife and they honor her, but they hid the true origins of this child.¹¹

A History of Melchizedek is an anonymous Greek version of Melchizedek's life. This is a later account with many versions that appears to be a fraudulent Christian account of Melchizedek made from cobbling together stories of other individuals, such as Abraham.¹² In this, the boy Melchizedek decides to only worship the true God and not make sacrifices to false idols, which angers his father, Melchi, the King of Salem. His father sacrifices Melchizedek's brother and hundreds of other boys. Melchizedek is upset about this and, on his plea to God, covers with earth all those who participated. Melchizedek then wanders in the wilderness on a mountain for seven years before Abraham is commanded to find Melchizedek, clean him up, and be blessed by him.¹³

As can be seen, these accounts are very different from each other in many details, which supports that some of these accounts, if not all,

9. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:17.

10. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:19.

11. F. I. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 71, marquette.edu/maqom/slavonicenoch.html.

12. S. E. Robinson, "The Apocryphal Story of Melchizedek," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 18, no. 1 (1987): 26–39, jstor.org/stable/24658096.

13. Robinson, "The Apocryphal Story of Melchizedek," 28–30.

are fictitious in many respects. However, there are some details about the life of Melchizedek that do seem to be consistent across several accounts, which, while it could be coincidental, may actually indicate that the authors were drawing upon ancient knowledge that is now lost. Each of these accounts, despite their differences, supports that Melchizedek was exceptionally righteous since his youth.

Melchizedek Leads the People to Turn from Wickedness to Righteousness

The book of Hebrews in the Bible identifies Melchizedek as the King of righteousness, or King of peace, but does not explicitly state what he did to earn these titles (see Hebrews 7:2). Alma 13 gives more detail and states that the people during his time

were full of all manner of wickedness; but Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith . . . 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 (Alma 13:17–18).

The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14 also states that Melchizedek established righteousness and “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” (JST Genesis 14:33–34). Additionally, Melchizedek “was called the king of heaven by his people, or, in other words, the King of peace” (JST Genesis 14:36). Other ancient sources also show that Melchizedek earned these titles because he called his people to repentance, which is something Joseph Smith could not have learned from the Bible.

In the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, the people become exceedingly wicked after the Flood, and they begin to practice idol worship. They also engage in human sacrifice and listened to the enticings of Satan.¹⁴ However, the people discover Melchizedek in the land after his journey to take the body of Adam to the center of the earth. The people were comforted by Melchizedek’s words, and the kings of the earth and many people gathered together and came and bowed to him, wanting him to be king over them. They also wanted him to come and dwell with them and were drawn to his beauty and

14. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:24.

discourse. But he would not leave the spot where Adam's body was buried, so instead, they built a city there, which is now the city of Jerusalem. Kings came and were blessed by Melchizedek until his death.¹⁵

In *War of the Jews*, the historian Josephus says that Melchizedek was called the Righteous King, "for such he really was."¹⁶ In the fragmented Gnostic *Melchizedek Tractate*, Melchizedek is identified as a high priest and a teacher to all tribes and peoples: "But all the tribes and all the peoples will speak the truth who are receiving from you yourself, O Melchizedek, Holy One, High-Priest, the perfect hope and the gifts of life."¹⁷ In the Dead Sea Scrolls, Cave 11Q13 also speaks of Melchizedek establishing Zion with "[the congregation of all the sons of justice, those] who establish the covenant, those who avoid walking [on the pa]th of the people."¹⁸ All of these sources identify Melchizedek as a righteous teacher of the gospel, leading his people away from wickedness and creating a Zionistic community.

Melchizedek was a Uniquely Great High Priest

The Bible states that Melchizedek was great. Paul states in his epistle to the Hebrews, "Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils" (Hebrews 7:4). The restored gospel places an even greater emphasis on the unique importance of Melchizedek. In Alma 13:19, it states "there were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore, of him they have more particularly made mention." Also, Doctrine and Covenants 107:2–4 shows that this priesthood was named after Melchizedek because he was such a great high priest. The ancient extra-biblical sources agree with the restored gospel sources and support that Melchizedek was a uniquely great high priest, more than those before and after him.

In the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, the lifeless body of

15. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 4:3.

16. Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews or History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, trans. William Whiston (London: n.p., 1737), Book VI, 10:1, m.gutenberg.org/files/2850/2850-h/2850-h.htm#link62HCH0010.

17. "Melchizedek," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, trans. Søren Giversen and Birger A. Pearson, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), gnosis.org/naghamm/melchiz.html.

18. Jin Yang Kim, "Melchizedek in 11Q13 (11QMelch)," *Old Testament Story* (blog), 17 April 2008, otstory.wordpress.com/2008/04/17/melchizedek-in-11q13-11qmelch/.

Adam says to Melchizedek — as Melchizedek is transporting him from the ark to the middle of the earth — that “of all our race, God chose no one [except] you, neither did He anoint any one of them priest with His own hand, [but] you; neither did He breathe into the face of any one His pure Spirit, as He breathed it into you.” The voice of Adam rejoiced that Melchizedek was found worthy of such honor from God.¹⁹

In 2 Enoch 71, God is quoted as saying, “Melkisedek will be the priest to all holy priests, and I will establish him so that he will be the head of the priests of the future.” It refers to him as a great priest multiple times and states that he will be the head of the thirteen priests who came before him. In the last generation, there will be another Melchizedek, the first of twelve priests, which will be a great “archpriest, the Word and Power of God.”²⁰

Numerous other ancient sources show the greatness of Melchizedek. Both the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran and the Gnostic writers show Melchizedek as a significant pre-mortal and post-mortal being, who is a key figure in restoring souls to the light.²¹ The *Melchizedek Tractate* states that Melchizedek received an angel of light from the Father, that raised him up from ignorance and said, “I know that it is I who am truly the image of the true High-Priest of God Most High.”²²

The Priesthood Line of Authority was Passed from Adam to Melchizedek

The Bible is silent regarding how Melchizedek obtained the priesthood. It implies that more than one person had the priesthood, for there is an “order” of Melchizedek, and it also implies that Jesus Christ was a part of this order (Psalm 110:4). In contrast, numerous scriptures revealed to Joseph Smith put great emphasis on this eternal priesthood line that was passed down from before the foundation of the world to Adam, and from Adam down through other early patriarchs

19. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:19.

20. Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 71.

21. See Jin Yang Kim, “Melchizedek in 11Q13 (11QMelch)”; 4Q544 (4QVisions of Amram^b), frag. 1, lines 10–11; “Melchizedek”; *Pistis Sophia*, 1.25–26, 4.128–131, ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. Violet MacDermot (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 38–41, 324–33; “The Second Book of Jeu,” bk. 1, chap. 46, ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. Violet MacDermot, in *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

22. “Melchizedek,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

to Melchizedek.²³ Doctrine and Covenants 107:40–52 reveals great details about this ancient priesthood and gives the priesthood line as Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah; and Doctrine and Covenants 84:14–16 states that Melchizedek received the priesthood

through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah; And from Noah till Enoch, through the lineage of their fathers; And from Enoch to Abel, . . . who received the priesthood by the commandments of God, by the hand of his father Adam, who was the first man.

This priesthood line is entirely consistent with several ancient texts identifying these men as righteous patriarchs, kings, and bearers of the priesthood.

The *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* establishes that the priesthood started with Adam and later shows Melchizedek as a priest of the Most High. This text also says that Adam was given three glorious gifts: 1) A kingdom; 2) the “priesthood, in that God breathed into his face a spirit of life”; and 3) prophecy.²⁴ The account shows Adam and Eve were taken to a cave on a high mountain after leaving the Garden of Eden, where they built an altar to pray and also received tokens of gold, incense, and myrrh from the garden, from three angels sent by God. Satan tries to tempt them and trick them numerous times, but God protects them and their righteous posterity. Shortly before his death, Adam gathers Seth and all his righteous posterity to the doors of the house of prayer and blesses them.²⁵ Numerous ancient texts revere Seth as an exceptionally righteous figure and show that he was a bearer of the priesthood and had a righteous posterity in place of his slain brother, Abel.

In the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, there are repeated references to the children of Seth who are righteous and live separately from the children of Cain, until they succumb to the temptation to come down off the mountain to pursue the daughters of Cain.²⁶ After the death of Adam, Seth becomes a righteous protector of his people, who are called the “Children of God.”²⁷ While the text does not

23. Doctrine and Covenants 84:14–17, 107:40–52; Moses 6:7, 67; Moses 8:19; Abraham 1:3.

24. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:5.

25. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 2:8.

26. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 2:20.

27. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 2:10–11.

specifically mention the priesthood being passed down, it does show that Melchizedek is one of the righteous descendants of Seth and is identified as a priest of the Most High. Also, it tells of Methuselah asking God to bestow the three gifts of kingship, priesthood, and prophecy on Noah's posterity.²⁸

There are many striking comparisons in this text with Doctrine and Covenants 107 and with the Latter-day Saint temple ceremony. These show numerous elements not found in the Bible, such as Adam being a prince, receiving the priesthood, building an altar to pray, receiving tokens from three angels, resisting further temptations from Satan, and gathering his posterity prior to his death to bless them (see Doctrine and Covenants 107:40–56).

The *Syriac Testament of Adam*, or the *Cave of Treasures*, is a similar account and shows Adam was made a king, priest, and prophet. It does not directly identify the priesthood as being passed down, but it does mention that Adam was the “first priest,” indicating he passed this priesthood down until it reached Melchizedek.²⁹

The *Melchizedek Tractate* cites the names of “Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Melchizedek,” in that order.³⁰ There are only a few other words on this specific page, which appears to reflect the importance of this lineage.³¹ This is consistent with the exact names given in Doctrine and Covenants 84:14–16, showing the priesthood line. The *Melchizedek Tractate* also mentions “the congregation of the children of Seth, who are above thousands of thousands, and myriads of myriads.” It speaks of a “race of the High-priests” of which Jesus Christ is part.³² Melchizedek is identified in this text as a high priest and teacher of truths to all tribes and all peoples.

In 2 Enoch, it gives the lineage from “Adam and Sith and Enos and Kainan and Maleleil and Ared,” Enoch's father. These individuals are

28. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:5.

29. *The Book of the Cave of Treasures: A History of the Patriarchs and the Kings Their Successors from the Creation to the Crucifixion of Christ*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge from British Museum MS. Add. 25875 (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927), 53, 62.

30. “Melchizedek,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

31. Ann N. Madsen, “Melchizedek at Qumran and Nag Hammadi,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1986), 292, rsc.byu.edu/apocryphal-writings-latter-day-saints/melchizedek-qumran-nag-hammadi.

32. “Melchizedek,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

shown to be worthy of divine protection by guardian angels.³³ The priesthood is not mentioned initially until Methusalam, Enoch's son, who was called by God to the priesthood. Methusalam receives a vision of the Lord God and is appointed as the priest over the people.³⁴ Towards the end of his life, God commands Methusalam to call Nir, Lamekh's second son after Noah, and to invest him in the garments of his consecration; and he becomes the next priest.³⁵ The text identifies Nir as the father of Melchizedek, and that Melchizedek holds this priesthood after him, after it was taken from the earth during the Flood.³⁶

Although early in 2 Enoch the text mentions the priesthood starting with Methusalem, it later mentions Melchizedek as a great high priest among other high priests, including "Sit [Seth], and Enos, and Rusi, and Amilam, and Prasadam, and Maleleil, and Serokh, and Arusan, and Aleem, and Enoch, and Methusalam, and . . . Nir." Specifically, it mentions multiple persons as being high priests, who are also mentioned in Doctrine and Covenants 107, such as Seth, Enos, Mahalaleel, Enoch, Methuselah, and Melchizedek. There are some obvious differences between this text and those of the restored gospel, such as showing the priesthood coming through Noah's (probably fictitious) brother, Nir, rather than through Noah. However, it does show the patriarchal line starting with Seth and passing through the generations to Melchizedek, similar to other accounts.³⁷

In the *Legends of the Jews*, which is a large collection of Jewish oral traditions, Noah and his son Shem are both identified with performing priestly duties. According to this source and other Jewish tradition, Shem is the same person as Melchizedek. In this account, Noah cannot perform a sacrifice in the office of a priest because he was lame after being struck by a lion in the ark. Thus, his son, Shem, or Melchizedek performs this priestly service.³⁸

As can be seen, many early texts establish the order of a higher priesthood that came before the later arrival of the Aaronic Priesthood.

33. Andersen, "2 Enoch," 33.

34. Andersen, "2 Enoch," 69.

35. Andersen, "2 Enoch," 70.

36. Andersen, "2 Enoch," 71 and 72.

37. Andrei Orlov, "Melchizedek Legend of 2 (Slavonic) Enoch," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* (2000): 31, jstor.org/stable/24669030.

38. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold, vol. 1, chap. 4, "Noah" (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909), pseudepigrapha.com/LegendsOfTheJews/index.htm.

It also shows a priestly line that passes down from Adam to his righteous posterity, with there being a presiding high priest in charge, who is often seen as a king and prophet.³⁹

Melchizedek Passed the Priesthood to Abraham, which Continued to Moses

The Bible states that Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:18–20), but it does not mention what he blessed him with. One may infer that he blessed him with the priesthood, but the text does not state this. On the other hand, the restored gospel accounts explicitly state that Melchizedek conferred the priesthood upon Abraham, who passed this on through the generations until Moses. Doctrine and Covenants 84:14 states “Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek” and this revelation shows that the priesthood was passed down to Moses, who was ordained by his father-in-law, Jethro (see vv. 6–14).

The Book of Abraham also shows that that Abraham received the priesthood from the fathers, stating:

In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence; And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers. (Abraham 1:1–2)

The ancient extra-biblical accounts support the restored gospel accounts from Joseph Smith. The book of Jasher has a similar account to Abraham 1:1–2, stating that Abraham moved from his home to receive instructions from the Lord from “the fathers” rather than his own fathers. In the Jasher account, Abraham learned the “instruction of the Lord and his ways” from Noah and Shem, after having fled from

39. See Ken Johnson, introduction to *Ancient Order of Melchizedek* (self-pub., 2020).

among the wicked and his idolatrous family, to then live with Noah and Shem and serve them for thirty-nine years.⁴⁰ Once again—in this source—Shem is the same person as Melchizedek.⁴¹

The Babylonian Talmud also supports a priesthood line from Shem, also identified as Melchizedek according the Rabbinic tradition.⁴² The Talmud shows that the priesthood transferred from Melchizedek to Abraham upon his blessing and Melchizedek lost the priesthood due to upsetting God.⁴³

A similar account also appears in the *Legends of the Jews*, wherein Melchizedek, the “high priest[,] instructed Abraham in the laws of the priesthood and in the Torah.” Melchizedek is stripped of the priesthood due to naming Abraham before God, and the priesthood line is instead passed to Abraham and his descendants.⁴⁴ While this is consistent with the restored gospel accounts in showing that Abraham and his descendants received the priesthood from Melchizedek, the texts of the restored gospel do not support that Melchizedek lost his priesthood (Doctrine and Covenants 84:14).

In *Visions of Amran* from the Dead Sea Scrolls, before his death Amran gathers his sons, Moses and Aaron, and tells them of a vision he had of two angels fighting over him. One is Belial, or Mikiresa, an angel of darkness and ruler of the wicked. The other angel’s name is only partially given due to the fragmentary nature of the text, but appears to be Melchizedek. He is represented as having dominion over all light and is associated with everyone who is wise and true, and over the children of light who are also called “children of blessing,” and possibly also the children of righteousness.⁴⁵ Dualism, which is common in the Dead Sea Scrolls, is prominent in the text as it states that the Sons of Light will be made light and are destined for joy, while the

40. *The Book of Jasher: Referred to in Joshua and Second Samuel; Faithfully Translated from the Original Hebrew into English* (Salt Lake City: J. H. Parry, 1887), chap. 9:5–6, sacred-texts.com/chr/apo/jasher.

41. *Book of Jasher*, 12:61.

42. Orlov, “Melchizedek Legend of 2 Enoch,” 26.

43. Rabbi Joshua Garroway, “Who Assumed Melchizedek’s Priesthood?,” *The Torah.com*, 2016, thetorah.com/article/who-assumed-melchizedeks-priesthood#:~:text=God%20indeed%20appointed%20Melchizedek%20the,Abraham%20through%20Levi%20and%20Aaron.

44. Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, vol. 1, chap. 5, “Abraham.”

45. *The Testament of Amram*, in Dead Sea Scrolls 4Q543–549, couldbeanonymous.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/testament-of-amram.pdf.

Sons of Darkness will be made dark. Light will triumph over darkness and the Son of Darkness will be destroyed.⁴⁶

The *Testament of Amram* seems to be concerned with the establishment of the priesthood and refers to a succession of seven figures who are favored of God, which is reconstructed as being Abraham to Aaron. The text states that the seventh of these, and last, who may be either Moses or Aaron, “shall be chosen as a priest forever.”⁴⁷ The phrase “priest forever” is not common in ancient texts but is similar to Psalm 110:4, which says of the future Messiah: “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek,” also supporting that the phrasing in the *Testament of Amram* is in reference to the Melchizedek Priesthood, not the Aaronic Priesthood. This is similar to Doctrine and Covenants 84:6–14, which denotes a priesthood lineage that passes from Abraham down to Moses. However, there are differences between the texts. The Doctrine and Covenants shows eight men in this priestly chain, not seven as given in the *Visions of Amram*, and it goes through Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, not Moses’s father, Amram. Despite the differences, it supports the concept that Melchizedek passed the priesthood to Abraham, who passed it down to Moses.⁴⁸

The Melchizedek Priesthood is Eternal

Again, Psalm 110:4 states that Christ will be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (see also Hebrews 5:6). The word *forever* indicates that this is an eternal priesthood, and the restored gospel puts a greater emphasis on the eternality of the higher priesthood, both before the foundations of the world and after. A number of restoration scriptures attest to this and state that the priesthood is from before the foundations of the world, was passed down from Adam to all generations, and will continue into the eternities.⁴⁹ Alma 13 shows a preexistence of this priesthood and the righteous who are ordained to it, verse 3 stating that Melchizedek Priesthood holders were called and

46. Liora Goldman, “Dualism in the ‘Visions of Amram’” *Revue de Qumrân* 24, no. 3 (95) (2010): 421–32, [jstor.org/stable/24663139](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24663139).

47. *The Testament of Amram*.

48. See Liora Goldman, “Between Aaron and Moses in 4Qvisions of Amram” in *Vision, Narrative, and Wisdom in the Aramaic Texts from Qumran*, ed. Mette Bundvad and Kasper Siegismund (Boston: Brill, 2020), 101–2, doi.org/10.1163/9789004413733_007.

49. See JST Genesis 14:28; JST Hebrews 7:3; Alma 13:7–9; Doctrine and Covenants 84:17; Abraham 1:3; Moses 6:7.

"prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works." The ancient, extra-biblical accounts, while not specifically mentioning a pre-earth priesthood, are consistent with Latter-day Saint teachings of a pre-earth life and the righteous among them who fight against Satan, and also helping in the creation of the earth (Abraham 3; Moses 1–2). A priesthood power is implied, and the sources support that Melchizedek played an important role in the pre-earth life.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls Qumran account, Melchizedek is a redemptive figure who acts under the direction of El, the highest God. His priesthood is seen as transcending mortality and he plays a prominent role as a leader of an army of the sons of light against Belial and the spirits that followed him, turning aside from the commandments of God. Melchizedek is also called Elohim and is a leader of a divine council of gods. He plays a Christ-like role in freeing people, judging them, and comforting them.⁵⁰ His mission is also to bring back at the end of days the exiles, to announce to them their liberation and the expiation of their sins.⁵¹

In the Gnostic *Pistis Sophia*, Melchizedek plays a similar, prominent role as a leader of souls in the pre-earth life.⁵² The *Pistis Sophia* purports to be the transfigured Jesus's teachings to the disciples, his mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Martha. Upon Jesus's transfiguration, he receives his true garment and can now reveal the higher mysteries. The prized mysteries relate to complex cosmologies and knowledge necessary for the soul to reach the highest divine realms. In Book 1, Jesus answers a question from Mary about the state of souls. He tells of the beings in the pre-earth life and the prominent role Melchizedek, the "great Receiver of the Light," played as one of the chief rulers in freeing them and helping create souls for them. Melchizedek helps provide light to the world of mankind and also helps purify these souls and takes their light to the treasury of light for perfect souls.⁵³ In Book 4 of the *Pistis Sophia*, the receivers of Melchizedek lead souls out of outer darkness into the midst before the virgin of light. Melchizedek

50. Qumran, Cave 11Q13, Dead Sea Scrolls.

51. M. Delcor and Burgess A. Pearson, "Melchizedek from Genesis to the Qumran Texts and the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 2, no. 2 (1971): 115–35, jstor.org/stable/24656156.

52. *Pistis Sophia*, trans. G. R. S. Mead, rev. 2nd ed. (1921), bk. 1, chaps. 25–26, gnosis.org/library/pistis-sophia.

53. *Pistis Sophia*, bk. 1, chaps. 25–26.

takes souls that refuse the purification of the light, as he is the great Receiver of the Light.⁵⁴

Melchizedek continues to play a similar role in the Gnostic *Second Book of Jeu*, where Jesus prays that Melchizedek might come and “bring the water of the baptism of fire of the Virgin of the Light” to purify his disciples, thereby “sealing them with a seal.”⁵⁵ The *Melchizedek Tractate* also portrays Melchizedek in this role.⁵⁶

It would be disingenuous to focus only on similarities to modern Latter-day Saint beliefs without understanding that other sects—namely the Jewish sect in Qumran and the Christian Gnostics in Egypt—had their own beliefs and interpretations. However, it is interesting that these sects, which had very different beliefs from each other and were separated by time and space, came to similar views of Melchizedek and portrayed him as a heavenly, apocalyptic personage, closely associated with light and with characteristics typically associated with Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ While it may be possible that both groups came to this independently, it may be that they drew from similar sources that have been lost to time.

Although the scriptures of the restored gospel do not mention Melchizedek’s role in the pre-earth life, it can be hypothesized that he played an important role, such as Abraham, who was told by God that he was among the “noble and great ones” who were made his rulers before they were born (Abraham 3:22–23).

The priesthood named for Melchizedek is projected to continue blessing lives into the future. The *Melchizedek Tractate* account states that all tribes and peoples will speak the truth, as they receive the perfect hope and gifts of life from Melchizedek, the high priest.⁵⁸ This appears consistent with promises given by revelations to the Joseph Smith, that the priesthood was to be restored in the last days and bless all the earth.⁵⁹

The account in 2 Enoch also shows a connection of Melchizedek with what appears to be Christ, indicating a continuation of this priesthood to Jesus. The archangel Michael is sent to take Melchizedek to

54. *Pistis Sophia*, bk. 4, chaps. 128–31.

55. Peter Thompson, “Book of the Knowledge of the Invisible God with the Book of Jeu (Yew),” bk. 1, chap. 46, academia.edu/39684149/Book_of_the_Knowledge_of_the_Invisible_God_with_the_book_of_Jeu_Yew_.

56. “Melchizedek,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

57. See Madsen, “Melchizedek at Qumran and Nag Hammadi,” 294.

58. “Melchizedek,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

59. See Moses 6:7; Doctrine and Covenants 84:17; Joseph Smith–History 1:72.

the Garden of Eden during the Flood. Michael prophesies to Nir that in twelve generations, or 3,432 years since the creation of Adam, there would be a righteous man who finds another Melchizedek hiding in the ark of Noah, and that this Melchizedek would be a priest and a king in Salem.⁶⁰

In the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, Adam enabled his blessing to descend upon Seth, and upon his children, and upon all his children's children.⁶¹ This is consistent with Abraham 2:9–11, showing that the seed of Abraham will bear the priesthood unto all nations and that all the families of the earth will be blessed.

As can be seen, the restored gospel accounts and the ancient extra-biblical texts agree that the Melchizedek Priesthood is eternal, having played an important role before the foundation of the world and destined to play an important role in the future, as it is passed through the generations to bless humanity.

Blessings Pertaining to the Order of the Melchizedek Priesthood

The Bible tells very little about what blessings come from the order of the Melchizedek Priesthood. However, the restored gospel reveals a great number of significant abilities and powers that flow from the Melchizedek Priesthood, from breaking down mountains to becoming gods (see JST Genesis 14:30–31; Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–20; 76:56–58; 107:18–19). In short, Doctrine and Covenants 84:20 states that through the ordinances of this priesthood, the powers of godliness are manifest.

Multiple ancient sources support extraordinary blessings, all in close connection with this priesthood. The *Melchizedek Tractate* mentions female and male gods, together with archangels that are "world-rulers" and appear to cause Death and his followers to tremble and be angry.⁶² Due to the fractured nature of this account, it is difficult to know who these gods and goddesses are, what power they have over death, and their connection to the priesthood of Melchizedek. However, it does appear consistent with accounts from the restored gospel that promise the ability to become a god through the Melchizedek Priesthood, according to one's righteousness (see

60. Andersen, "2 Enoch," 72.

61. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 2:8.

62. "Melchizedek," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

Doctrine and Covenants 76:57–58; 131:2; 132:19–20). The *Melchizedek Tractate* also discusses the importance of Jesus Christ in relation to this priesthood, as the firstborn of the Aeons and the chief commander of the luminaries.⁶³

Doctrine and Covenants 84:19 and 107:19 indicate that the Melchizedek Priesthood holds the key of the “mysteries of the kingdom.” Similarly, “Hidden mysteries” are given to the world-rulers in the *Melchizedek Tractate*.⁶⁴ In the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, Adam tells Seth during his final blessing that he had revealed unto him “hidden mysteries” that God had revealed to him.⁶⁵ Later on in this text, Melchizedek blessed Abraham and communed with him of the “holy mysteries” which he had consecrated with his own hand.⁶⁶ The *Pistis Sophia* also focused on revealing the higher mysteries to participants.

Melchizedek Priesthood Connection to Temple Ordinances

The Bible shows connections between the Aaronic Priesthood and officiating in priestly duties for the tabernacle of Moses and for the temple in Jerusalem. However, prior to the tabernacle of the Israelites, it does not directly show temple worship and its connections to the Melchizedek Priesthood. The restored gospel emphasizes temple worship and shows connections to both the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods. Extra-biblical ancient accounts also show many temple themes and the temple’s close affiliation with the higher priesthood, distinct from the priesthood of Aaron. The ancient extra-biblical texts state that Melchizedek built a temple, as did previous patriarchs. The restored gospel does not directly identify Melchizedek building a temple, but given the importance of Melchizedek, we may postulate that he was initiated in temple ordinances.

In the *War of the Jews*, Josephus says Melchizedek was the first to build a temple in Jerusalem.⁶⁷ In Pseudo-Eupolemus, Abraham visits Melchizedek’s city—known as Argarizin, or the Mount of the Most High—and is admitted as a guest into the temple. Abraham also receives gifts from Melchizedek, who was the king and priest of God.⁶⁸

63. “Melchizedek,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

64. “Melchizedek,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

65. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 2:8.

66. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 4:1.

67. Josephus, *War of the Jews*, Book VI, 10:1.

68. Pseudo-Eupolemus, in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.17–18, frag. 1., thelostbooks.org/eupolemus/.

In *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from the Dead Sea Scrolls, a figure, possibly Melchizedek, is a priest amongst others who administer in the temple, being positioned within the heavenly congregations, worshiping God as King in the heavenly temple.⁶⁹

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, God shows Abraham a vision of Adam and Eve and their posterity. Abraham sees a building, beautiful in art and design. God explains that it is the temple, patterned after that which is in the heavens. It is glorious in its aspect and beauty and shall be given to the sons of men to ordain a priesthood for God's glorious name, in which men will pray and offer sacrifices, as he ordains a people who shall arise out of Abraham's generation.⁷⁰ This text appears to support the idea that Abraham is an initiate of the celestial priesthood.⁷¹

The *Legends of the Jews* mentions Adam gathering all his descendants before the house of worship in which he had always offered his prayers to God, to give them his last blessing (compare to Doctrine and Covenants 107:53–56).⁷² It also mentions that all souls must pass through seven portals, including the Garden of Eden, before they arrive at the highest level of heaven. If the soul is worthy, a guard will open the next "portal and admit her 'to the heavenly Temple. Michael presents her to God, and conducts her to the seventh portal,' Arabot, within which the souls of the pious, changed to angels, praise the Lord."⁷³

These accounts show a heavenly temple and earthly temples, also showing that the priesthood plays a significant role. They show that Melchizedek likely built a temple on earth and is a priestly officiator in the heavenly temple.

Garments of the Melchizedek Priesthood

The Bible shows that Aaron and his sons were clothed in "garments" to administer the ordinances of the tabernacle under the Levitical or

69. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Melchizedek in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 41, no.1, 124–38, doi.org/10.1177/0142064X18788983.

70. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 25:6–11, trans. *Abrahamic Study Hall* (November 2020), 43–44, abrahamicstudyhall.org/2020/11/16/apocalypse-abraham-full-text-commentary/.

71. Andrei A. Orlov, *Heavenly Priesthood in the Apocalypse of Abraham* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1, marquette.edu/maqom/heaven123.pdf.

72. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, chap. 2, "Adam."

73. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, chap. 2, "Adam."

Aaronic Priesthood (see Exodus 29:4–5, 8; 39:27). It also states that God clothed Adam and Eve in coats of skins, as they left the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:21). However, the Bible makes no explicit connection to the use of holy garments in relation to the Melchizedek Priesthood, nor their use prior to the introduction of the Aaronic Priesthood.

God revealed to Joseph Smith the practice of wearing sacred garments. Thus, in the restored gospel, Latter-day Saints—both male and female—receive their temple garments in a washing and anointing ceremony when they first attend the temple for their own endowment. This garment is often referred to as *the garment of the holy priesthood*, and is tied to the Melchizedek Priesthood. The ancient extra-biblical texts support the importance of priestly garments prior to Aaron. They also indicate that Melchizedek was clothed in these holy garments.

In 2 Enoch, when Enoch's son, Methusalem, is called to the priesthood, the Lord instructs the elders of the people to dress him in the designated garments and place a blazing crown on his head.⁷⁴ Methuselah then invests his grandson, Nir, with his “garments of . . . consecrations” and makes him stand at God's altar and prophesy all that would happen in his days.⁷⁵ Melchizedek is later born in a miraculous way, to his father Nir and his recently deceased mother. When Melchizedek was still a child, Nir and his brother Noah washed Melchizedek and “dressed him in the garments of priesthood.”⁷⁶

The *Legends of the Jews* states that because Shem—who is Melchizedek according to Jewish tradition—along with Japheth, to a lesser extent, covered Noah's nakedness with a garment, and thus the descendants of Shem received the garment as a special reward, leaving the Japhethites with only the toga. These garments are described as having special abilities and were not destroyed when the children of Shem were burned. Because of jealousy, Ham stole these garments and gave them to his son Cush, who gave them to Nimrod. These garments would make the wearer both invincible and irresistible.⁷⁷

In the *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, Satan stripped Adam and Eve of their garments of light and glory in the Garden of Eden and further did not want them to be covered with an earthly garment

74. Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 69.

75. Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 70.

76. Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 71.

77. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, chap. 4, “Noah.”

of sheepskins.⁷⁸ Eventually, an angel shows Adam and Eve how to make garments of skins at God's order.⁷⁹ Satan later shows up in garments of light and a bright girdle. Eventually God commands an angel to go to Adam and Eve and banish Satan from their midst, then to clothe them in garments of light and restore them to their former state of grace.⁸⁰ Satan eventually teaches the wicked followers of Genun to make dyes for garments and make diverse patterns and colors.⁸¹ Later, Methuselah explains that Melchizedek is to be clothed with simple leather skins and no other ornament, as he ministers before the body of Adam.⁸²

Other patriarchs also received these garments. In another version of 2 Enoch, Michael, the archangel, is commanded by God to take Enoch out of his earthly garments, anoint him with sweet ointment, and put him into the garments of God's glory. Michael does this and Enoch observes that he appeared like one of God's glorious ones.⁸³ This is similar to Moses 7:2–3, when Enoch climbed Mount Simeon and was "clothed upon with glory."

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, Abraham appears to be passing through a temple-like experience and vision. His angelic guide takes him by the right hand and pulls him to his feet. He leads Abraham into the Holy of Holies, located in the upper heaven.⁸⁴ He shows him Azazel, the all-evil spirit who is stripped of his garment, which is given to Abraham. Azazel is forbidden from tempting all men and is sent to earth as punishment.⁸⁵

In the *Pistis Sophia*, Jesus (who is also after the order of Melchizedek; see Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20, 7:17) is given a garment of light that gives him authority and powers, and also reveals mysteries.⁸⁶ He is eventually able to put on the garment that was prepared for him from the beginning.⁸⁷

78. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 1:51.

79. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 1:52.

80. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 1:60.

81. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 2:20.

82. Malan, *Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*, 3:5.

83. *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, trans. W. R. Morfill, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 28, archive.org/details/bookofsecretsofe0000wrmo/page/28/mode/2up.

84. *Apocalypse of Abraham*, 10:7.

85. Andrei A. Orlov, "The Garment of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham," *Scrinium* 7–8, no.1 (2011): 1–55, doi.org/10.1163/18177565-90000057.

86. *Pistis Sophia*, bk. 1, chaps. 7–11.

87. *Pistis Sophia*, bk. 4, chaps. 8.

In 1 Enoch, the Lord of the Spirits resurrects the righteous dead and gives each of them a garment of glory, or life, that will not grow old.⁸⁸

These accounts support the importance of garments of the holy priesthood and are consistent with the restored gospel, wherein garments are given after temple washing and anointing, being associated with the bestowal of a crown and a kingdom of glory (Doctrine and Covenants 109:75–76). In the scriptures and in the extra-biblical texts, many of the righteous patriarchs, including Melchizedek, are identified with receiving this garment, in conjunction with the priesthood.

Conclusion

The Bible briefly mentions Melchizedek, but there are numerous additional sources of information about him, with many details found in extra-biblical, non-canonical accounts. Revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith offer many more scriptural sources, all fitting comfortably into the known corpus of information. There are many consistencies between the ancient texts and the restored gospel accounts. These consistencies include Melchizedek being righteous in his youth, turning people from wickedness, and being a uniquely great high priest. Additional consistencies show the priesthood line passing from Adam to Melchizedek, on to Abraham, and down through the generations. There are also similarities showing the Melchizedek Priesthood to be eternal, along with its associated blessings. And, there are similarities found in the use of the Melchizedek Priesthood in LDS temple ceremonies, including the wearing of the holy garment of the priesthood.

The only sources that could have possibly been available to Joseph Smith, such as the writings of Josephus, share few details that differ from the Bible, such as stating that Melchizedek had built a temple in Jerusalem. Without access to those ancient sources, Joseph Smith produced expanded information, compatible with these sources, allowing us a greater picture of Melchizedek, a most significant religious figure of his time, with an impact that continues today. From these ancient extra-biblical sources and from Joseph's recorded revelations, we learn that Melchizedek was an exceptional prophet, the priesthood being named for him due to his righteousness. He appears to have played a significant role in pre-earth life and will continue to

88. *Book of Enoch* 62, bookofenochreferences.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/the-book-of-enoch-chapter-62/.

play a role in the future. The priesthood order that bears his name is eternal and that priesthood will continue to be the power by which the work of God is accomplished.



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