

SESSION TWO

Bread, Wine, and the Priest-King

Genesis 14:17-20; Psalm 76:2; Psalm 110

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants meet Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem who brings out bread and wine and blesses Abram, and then discover in Israel's own psalter the oath that the coming Messiah will be a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The session plants a question the study will spend weeks answering: what would the characteristic offering of an everlasting priest look like?

Catholic Touchstone. The Church sees in the gesture of Melchizedek, the king and priest who brought out bread and wine, a prefiguring of her own offering (CCC 1333), and confesses Christ as the one high priest after the order of Melchizedek (CCC 1544). Tonight the group finds the raw material of that confession sitting quietly in Genesis and the Psalms.

What You Need to Know

Set the scene of Genesis 14 briefly so the group is not lost: a coalition of kings has raided the cities of the plain and carried off Abram's nephew Lot. Abram musters his household, defeats the raiders, and recovers everything. He is returning from battle when two kings come out to meet him: the king of Sodom, who wants to make a deal, and the king of Salem, who brings bread and wine and a blessing. The contrast between the two kings is part of the scene's power.

Melchizedek appears from nowhere. In a book obsessed with genealogies, he has none: no father, no tribe, no birth, no death. He is named king of Salem and priest of God Most High, he brings out bread and wine, he blesses Abram, and he vanishes from the narrative. The strangeness is the point. Scripture introduces its first priest, and his signature act involves bread, wine, and blessing.

Be honest about an interpretive hedge here, because the group may raise it and you should raise it if they do not: Genesis does not explicitly call the bread and wine a sacrifice. It says Melchizedek brought them out and blessed. What the text does insist on is that this man is a priest, and that this is his characteristic act. The reading of a priestly offering here is ancient, and it became a longstanding and widespread Christian reading from the early centuries onward, but let the group see the inference for what it is. Honesty now purchases trust later.

Salem is Jerusalem. The group will discover this themselves in Psalm 76:2, where Salem and Zion sit in poetic parallel. This priest-king reigns, a thousand years before David, in the city where David will reign and where the decisive events of Scripture will unfold. Geography is doing quiet theological work.

Psalm 110 is a royal psalm whose superscription attributes it to David, and Jesus himself reads it on David's lips (Matthew 22:41-45). Its opening line is the puzzle: "The LORD says to my lord." David,

Israel's highest man, calls someone else my lord. Then verse 4 delivers the oath: "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'" Note the weight of a divine oath. God does not merely promise; he swears, and Scripture adds that he will not change his mind.

Psalm 110 is the Old Testament passage most quoted and echoed in the New Testament. You do not need to tell the group that tonight, but know it yourself: the apostolic Church read this psalm as a load-bearing wall.

Why Melchizedek's order rather than Aaron's? Three observations sit in the text. His priesthood precedes the law and the Levitical line entirely. Genesis withholds any genealogy from him, a silence the New Testament will later read as fitting a priesthood that does not depend on descent and so does not die with a family line (Hebrews 7). And its visible signature is bread, wine, and blessing rather than the repeated blood of animals. Let the group assemble these rather than delivering them as a lecture.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Melchizedek's city becomes David's city, and David's city becomes the stage for nearly everything this study will examine from Session Seven onward. When the group discovers Salem is Jerusalem, they are locating the end of the story without knowing it yet.

The New Testament's great meditation on Melchizedek is Hebrews 5 through 7, which argues from his lack of genealogy, from Abram's tithe, and from the oath of Psalm 110 that Christ's priesthood surpasses and outlasts the Levitical priesthood. Hold Hebrews for now. It surfaces briefly in tonight's Dig Deeper and returns in force in Session Eleven. If your group walked through A Great High Priest together, a few of them may feel this connection stirring; you can acknowledge the scent without opening the argument.

The bread and wine of Genesis 14 will not be mentioned again in the Old Testament, but the study will keep finding grain and the fruit of the vine at the pressure points of the story: the Passover's unleavened bread, the manna, the bread of the Presence, Wisdom's mixed wine, and the banquet of aged wine on the mountain. The instrument panel is lighting up one gauge at a time.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyprian of Carthage

Letter 63, to Caecilius, 3rd century

St. Cyprian wrote that Melchizedek prefigured the mystery of the sacrifice of Christ: as priest of God Most High he offered bread and wine and blessed Abraham, and the Lord, whose priesthood is of that order, fulfilled the figure when he offered his own body and blood. For Cyprian, Genesis 14 was not a curiosity but a portrait drawn in advance.

St. Ambrose of Milan

On the Sacraments, Book 4, 4th century

St. Ambrose, catechizing the newly baptized of Milan, pointed them to Melchizedek and argued that the mysteries the Church celebrates are older than Israel's own rites, for the priest who brought out bread and wine met Abraham before the law was ever given. What the Church does at the altar, he taught, stands in a line that begins before Sinai.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Summa Theologiae III, q. 73, a. 6

St. Thomas taught that the Old Testament foreshadowed the Eucharist from three directions at once: Melchizedek's bread and wine prefigured its outward signs, the sacrifices of the law prefigured the Passion of Christ it contains, and the manna prefigured its grace. One mystery, sketched three ways, centuries apart. Watch how closely his map matches the road this study is walking.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1333.** The Church sees in the gesture of the king-priest Melchizedek, who brought out bread and wine, a prefiguring of her own offering.
- **CCC 1544.** Everything that the priesthood of the Old Covenant prefigured finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus, the one mediator, whom the Church confesses as high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH · LEADER ONLY

Thread B planted tonight: the priest whose offering is bread and wine. Melchizedek is the first gauge on this panel. The thread runs quiet for several weeks and then pays off decisively in Sessions Ten and Eleven. Do not connect it to the Mass tonight, even if the group is circling it. Question 6 brings them right to the edge on purpose, and the answer box deliberately leaves them there.

Guard Salem. When the group discovers Salem is Jerusalem, someone may leap ahead to events located there. Affirm the instinct, decline the spoiler: Scripture will take us to that city itself, in its own order.

Guard Hebrews. The tithe argument and the full priest-for-ever case belong to Session Eleven. Tonight's Dig Deeper cracks the door only.

Session Goals

1. Meet Melchizedek and notice everything the text tells us and everything it strangely withholds.
2. Establish from the text that Scripture's first named priest is marked by bread, wine, and blessing.
3. Discover the oath of Psalm 110:4 and its permanence: a priest for ever, by an order older than the law.

4. Leave holding the planted question: what would the characteristic offering of an everlasting priest look like?

Time Note · One Hour Forty-Five with a Shared Meal

0:00 to 0:30, Table. Grace before the meal, eat together without hurry, and let the two Win questions surface naturally over food. Do not turn the table into a classroom.

0:30 to 1:20, Build. Fifty unhurried minutes. Bibles open at the table or moved to the living room, whichever your space favors. The Dig Deeper box is part of the flow, not an extra, and the live discovery moments deserve real hunt time.

1:20 to 1:35, Send. Two questions, no answer boxes, room for silence.

1:35 to 1:45, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer.

If the night truly runs long: Merge the two Psalm 110 questions by reading Psalm 110:1-4 once and asking both who is speaking and what God swears. Treat cuts as emergencies, not expectations; at this length the session should breathe on its own.

AT THE TABLE

Bread tonight, and wine or grape juice as fits your group. Set them out without comment. The menu is quietly doing catechesis, and silence is part of the recipe.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer · Grace Before the Meal

God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, you once blessed Abram through the hands of a priest who brought out bread and wine. Bless this table and these friends, and be blessed yourself over everything we share. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win · At the Table (30 minutes with the meal)

1. Have you ever been blessed by a stranger, a moment of unexpected kindness from someone you never saw again? What was it?
2. After a hard-fought win, some people celebrate loudly and some just want a quiet meal. Which are you, and why?

Leader note: these are dinner conversation, not an agenda item. Ask them while people are still eating, and let the meal take its time.

Build · Opening the Word (50 minutes)

1. Read Genesis 14:17-20. Working straight from the text, list everything we are told about Melchizedek. Then list what the text strangely does not tell us.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Told: he is king of Salem, he is priest of God Most High, he brings out bread and wine, he blesses Abram and blesses God, and Abram gives him a tenth of everything.

Not told: any father, mother, genealogy, birth, or death, in a book that is otherwise wall-to-wall genealogies. He simply appears, acts, and vanishes. Genesis wants us to feel the strangeness, and we should let ourselves feel it.

2. What does Melchizedek bring out, and what does he do with it? In the ancient world, what would you normally expect a priest's offering to involve, and what is surprising here?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He brings out bread and wine, and he blesses. At the center of ancient priesthood, in Israel and among the nations, stood animal sacrifice: blood, fire, and altar, though grain and wine offerings had their place in the cult as well. What is striking here is that Scripture's first named priest is marked by bread, wine, and blessing alone, with no altar and no blood in view.

One honest note: Genesis does not use the word sacrifice here. It shows us a priest whose signature act is bread, wine, and blessing, and it lets that picture stand. Christians from the earliest centuries have widely read a priestly offering in it, but the text teaches by portrait rather than by label. Hold the portrait.

3. Two kings come out to meet Abram that day. Read Genesis 14:21-24. What does the king of Sodom offer, and how does Abram treat the two kings differently? What is the difference between the two economies on display?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The king of Sodom proposes a deal: give me the persons, keep the goods for yourself. Abram refuses with an oath, down to a thread and a sandal-thong, "lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" But from Melchizedek he receives bread, wine, and blessing, and to Melchizedek he gives a tenth of everything.

Two economies stand side by side on the same road: a transaction that would leave Abram owing his wealth to Sodom, and a gift that leaves him owing nothing but gratitude to God Most High. Abram refuses to be made rich by a king and consents to be blessed by a priest. The scene quietly asks every reader which table they live from.

DIG DEEPER

Abram gives Melchizedek a tenth of everything (Genesis 14:20). In the ancient world the lesser tithes to the greater, which makes the father of Israel himself acknowledge a priesthood above the one his own descendants will carry. The New Testament builds a full argument on exactly this detail in Hebrews 7:4-10. We will stand on that ground properly in Session Eleven; for now, just notice who bowed to whom.

4. Live discovery: where is Salem? Find Psalm 76:2 and read it aloud. What do you notice?

Let them find it and make the identification themselves. Salem sits in parallel with Zion.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Psalm 76:2 sets Salem and Zion in parallel: Salem is Jerusalem. A thousand years before David takes the city, a priest-king of God Most High already reigns there, bringing out bread and wine and blessing.

File the geography. The city of Melchizedek becomes the city of David, and Scripture is not done with that city. We will let the story take us there in its own order.

5. Read Psalm 110:1-4. Who is speaking, and to whom? The superscription gives the psalm to David, and Jesus reads it that way too. So who is David calling "my lord"?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The psalm opens: "The LORD says to my lord." If David, the highest man in Israel, is the speaker, then he is calling someone else my lord, someone seated at God's right hand. Israel read this as the coming anointed king, greater than David himself.

This puzzle is not ours alone. Jesus poses exactly this question in the temple (Matthew 22:41-45), and no one dares answer him. The psalm is describing someone who outranks the greatest king

Israel ever had.

6. Focus on Psalm 110:4. What exactly does God swear, and how permanent is it? Why might it matter that this comes as an oath rather than a plain statement?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

God swears, and the psalm underlines it: he will not change his mind. The content: "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Not after Aaron, not by Levi's line. By the order of the genealogy-less priest-king of Salem.

An oath is God's most emphatic register. Scripture uses it sparingly, for the promises on which everything else hangs. Israel is being told, in its own psalter, that the coming king will also be a priest, that his priesthood will never end, and that its pattern is Melchizedek.

7. Put the evening together. Israel awaits a king who is also a priest for ever, after the order of a priest whose signature was bread, wine, and blessing. If that oath ever comes true, what would you expect this priest's characteristic offering to look like?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The text has quietly answered its own question: bread and wine, offered with blessing, in the line of Melchizedek, by a priest whose priesthood never ends.

Resist the urge to sprint ahead, and do not let the group sprint either. We are laying rail tonight, not arriving at the station. Where Scripture takes this, we will let Scripture show us, one week at a time.

Send · Taking It With You (15 minutes)

1. Melchizedek meets Abram after a battle, not before it, and brings blessing rather than a bill. Where in your life right now do you need blessing more than you need another fight?

2. Abram gave a tenth of everything to a priest he had met five minutes earlier, on the strength of a blessing. What would that kind of open-handed response to God look like in your week?

No answer boxes here. Ask, wait, and let silence do some of the work.

Live It This Week

1. Pray Psalm 110 once a day this week. It is seven verses. Let verse 4 slow you down every time.

2. Once this week, before you eat bread, silently bless God in Melchizedek's own register: blessed be God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.

3. Read all of Genesis 14 for the full battle context, and notice the contrast between the king of Sodom's offer and the king of Salem's gift.

Scripture Memory Verse

"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'"

Psalm 110:4

Closing Prayer

Father, you swore an oath and you will not change your mind. Give us the steadiness of your promises, teach us to receive blessing before we grasp at victory, and make our lives an offering that blesses you in return. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Passages in order of use

- Genesis 14:17-20 · Melchizedek meets Abram
- Genesis 14:21-24 · the king of Sodom's deal refused
- Psalm 76:2 · live discovery: Salem is Zion
- Psalm 110:1-4 · the oath: a priest for ever
- Matthew 22:41-45 · Jesus poses the Psalm 110 puzzle (cite if the group asks who reads it messianically)

Leader only · do not distribute or read aloud

- Genesis 14:1-16 · battle context for your own preparation
- Hebrews 7:4-10 · the tithe argument (Dig Deeper only; full treatment in Session Eleven)
- Hebrews 5-7 · Melchizedek and the priesthood of Christ (hold for Session Eleven)