

## **MAKING SENSE OF MELCHIZEDEK (GENESIS 14:18–20)**

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*Biblical criticism has debated for the last two centuries whether or not to include the Melchizedek episode (Gen 14:18–20) with the other incidents of the story in Gen 14. This article makes the case for the early integration of Melchizedek's episode in the narrative concerning Abram recovering Lot and his properties and in the Abraham narrative cycle as a whole. In order to achieve that, several general issues had to be addressed: the integrity of the text itself with its syntactic relationships, literary genre and plot. An investigation of some particular issues follows: Melchizedek's name, title, and actions, as well as assessing how well they fit the patriarchal context and the original plot. Since the debate is complex and multi-layered, various tools were employed: Hebrew grammar and syntax, form criticism, narrative criticism, and History of Religions. We found that, as it stands, Gen 14:18–20 is too well integrated in the story of Abraham and the fabric of its own world to need political agendas motivating its late addition as various source theories claim.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Melchizedek, Genesis 14, Abram and Melchizedek, narrative criticism, form criticism, Canaanite priesthood, Story of Abraham*

### INTRODUCTION

Critical scholars deny the place of Gen 14:18–20 within the larger context of chapter 14 on various grounds. The abrupt appearance of Melchizedek in the story of Abraham, among other things, triggered objections to accepting this fragment as part of the original script. Although Ps 110:4 and Heb 5:6, 10; 6:4; 7:1–17 explore Melchizedek from a theological viewpoint in terms of a priesthood superior to that of Levi, it does not help to clarify his peculiarity. For this reason Melchizedek has drawn a lot of attention among interpreters, despite the fact that he is a transitory character in the patriarchal narratives. The variety of interpretations he has received throughout the centuries stand

as proof of the extent of interest Melchizedek has generated. Some have identified him with the patriarch Shem,<sup>1</sup> while Philo found room both for a literal interpretation of Melchizedek as a human figure and a non-literal interpretation of Melchizedek as the Logos.<sup>2</sup> Jerome followed Hebrews in preferring to see the Logos in the person of Melchizedek.<sup>3</sup> In Qumranic and Gnostic literature he was seen as an angelic figure.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Rabbi Isaac identifies one of the four blacksmiths in Zechariah with Melchizedek.<sup>5</sup> More recently, some scholars have denied his historicity altogether, taking Melchizedek as only a mythical figure.<sup>6</sup>

This article assesses the details that Gen 14 offers about Melchizedek, investigates the solutions currently expressed in the debate, and proposes an integrative explanation of this character in the context of comparative literature, utilizing the tools of literary criticism. Once a resolution is reached, its implications can be drawn both in dating the text and in establishing the context of its writing, as well as in its relationship with the canonical literature, particularly with Ps 110 and

1. Rabbi Ishmael quoted in the Babylonian Talmud *b. Nedarim* 32b; Epiphanius, cited by Ephrem the Syrian in *Commentary on Genesis* 11.2, claimed that the Samaritans saw this connection as well. For the polemic context that might have generated Rabbi Ishmael's assertion, see J.J. Petuchowski, "The Controversial Figure of Melchizedek," *HUCA* 28 (1957): 127–36.

2. Philo, *Leg.*, 3.79–82.

3. Jerome, *Epistle* LXIII, Heb 5:5–10, 7:1–3.

4. Qumranic texts include 11Q13, 11Q17, 4Q401, 2 *En.* 71:2, and relevant Gnostic texts from Nag Hammadi such as *Melchizedek, Pistis Sophia*, fragment 52 found at Deir El-Bala'izah. For an evaluation of the interpretation of Melchizedek in Gnostic literature, see F. L. Horton, Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SNTSMS 30; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 131–52; B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (SAC; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990), 108–23; Anders Aschim, "Melchizedek the Liberator: An Early Interpretation of Genesis 14?" *SBL Seminar Papers* 35 (1996): 243–58; James R. Davila, "Melchizedek, Michael, and War in Heaven," *SBL 1996 Seminar Papers* 35 (1996): 259–72.

5. The other three were Elijah, Messiah, and the war priest. See James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was At the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 276–93.

6. John van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 296–308; M. Bodinger, "L'énigme de Melkisédeq," *Revue de l'histoire de Religions* 211 (1994): 299ff.; T. L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narrative: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 33; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 187–90.

Heb 7. In other words, the topic has reverberations in the fields of exegesis, hermeneutics, and the history of the text, though these implications are not the concern of the current article.

We start off by displaying the text and discussing its syntactic relationships. The following investigation of the literary genre and the narrative's plot will help to assess the clues that we can find to better integrate the text into the larger context of Gen 14. Finally, we will turn to Melchizedek's name, title, and actions to determine how well they fit the patriarchal context and the original plot.

#### THE TEXT

מלכ־צדק מלך שלם הוציא לחם ויין	18	(a)	<i>Melchizedek, king of Shalem, brought bread and wine.</i>
והוא כהן לאל עליון:		(b)	<i>He was a priest of 'El-'Elyon.</i>
ויברכהו	19	(a)	<i>He blessed him</i>
ויאמר		(b)	<i>and said,</i>
ברוך אברם לאל עליון		(c)	<i>"May Abram be blessed by 'El-'Elyon,</i>
קנה שמים וארץ:		(d)	<i>The Maker of heaven and earth.</i>
וברוך אל עליון	20	(a)	<i>May 'El-'Elyon be blessed.</i>
אשר־מגן צריך בידך		(b)	<i>He delivered your enemies into your hands."</i>
ויתן־לו מעשר מכל:		(c)	<i>He gave him a tenth of everything.</i>

The layout above highlights the clauses and the relationships between them. Thus, to the traditional verse number some lowercase letters have been added to divide each verse into its corresponding clauses (a, b, c, d). Clauses that are not part of the main narrative line, such as direct description (v. 18b) and direct speech (vv. 19c–20b) are indented. Despite its many contradictory interpretations, the text under scrutiny displays a clear textual reception. There are no manuscripts to suggest a variant, although there have been speculative suggestions to emend the text.

#### THE TEXTURE

The passage displays two types of literary forms: narrative and non-narrative. This delimitation is made plain mainly by means of verbal forms and parallelism of thought. Of the eight clauses in the text, five have a finite verb, but only four of these are part of the storyline (three *wayyiqtol*'s [19a, 19b, 20c] and a *qatal* integrated in a *waw-x-qatal*

construction [18a]). The other one (20b) is integrated in the poetic lines of the benediction. Clause 18b is a verbless identification clause. The non-narrative text is announced properly as direct speech by means of a quotative frame consisting of two meta-pragmatic verbs deriving from the roots בָּרַךְ and אָמַר (19a, 19b). Its lines are organized according to the principles of correspondence common with poetical parallelism of thought. In this case the repetition of the verb (*qal* passive participle בָּרַךְ, 19c, 20a) and the name of God ('El-'Elyon, 19c, 20a) further support the parallelism.

Horton thinks that the poetic structure of the double benediction is not perfect due to its inexact parallelism.<sup>7</sup> But this could be alternative parallelism, as Gray proposed earlier,<sup>8</sup> or an ABA'C quatrain as Watson more recently defined it.<sup>9</sup> Due to the repeated material, lines A (19c) and A' (20a) are almost identical with the exception of the name Abram which is missing in A' and the *lamed* fronting the name of God in line A. Examples of verses with alternative parallelism can be found among those generally accepted as ancient Hebrew poetry (Exod 15:6, 16b; Judg 5:26b with a second reconstructed 'Sisera').

#### GATTUNG

In terms of *Gattung*, suggestions vary from cultic saying,<sup>10</sup> ancient chant,<sup>11</sup> blessing,<sup>12</sup> Midrash on Ps 110:4,<sup>13</sup> to liturgical doxology.<sup>14</sup>

7. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 16.

8. G. B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry: Considered with Special Reference to the Criticism and Interpretation of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 62–64.

9. W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 185–87.

10. O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwells, 1965), 75.

11. A. Causse, *Les plus vieux chants de la Bible* (Etudes d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses publiées par la faculté de théologie protestante de l'université de Strasbourg 14; Paris: Alcan, 1926), 18.

12. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910), 269

13. H. H. Rowley, "Melchizedek and Zadok (Gen 14 and Ps 110)," in *Festschrift für Alfred Bertholet* (ed. Walter Baumgartner, et. al.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1950), 461.

Mitchell includes this blessing in the category of “benedictions of praise and congratulations” among other optative benedictions uttered by humans for their fellow humans.<sup>15</sup>

Among the word roots used to express blessing/cursing, the root בִּרַךְ is more frequent in the OT, Hebrew inscriptions, and manuscripts than all the other roots combined.<sup>16</sup> Three of the occurrences are found in Gen 14:18–20 alone. Benedictions are optative utterances by which humans call upon God to bless a person, and the words have nothing magic in them.<sup>17</sup> Aitken too concludes his study on the verb בִּרַךְ saying that when it has “both a human subject and a human object, it denotes the expressing of the favour conferred on the person by God.”<sup>18</sup> Melchizedek’s words of blessing affirm that God will continue to bless Abram, as he did when he was on his side in war.<sup>19</sup>

Both form and content qualify the utterance in Gen 14:18–20 as a blessing. It is obvious that Melchizedek’s blessing has two parts, one addressed to Abram (19cd), the other to God (20ab). They are better analyzed as distinct blessings. However, is such a literary form located closer to the more transparent end of the literary spectrum (narrative) or closer to its opaque end (poetry)? In order to reach a final conclusion, several texts must first be surveyed.

Deborah’s praise for Jael in Judg 5:24 comes closest to the first part of Melchizedek’s blessing (19cd). In Judg 5 (arguably one of the oldest poems in the Bible) the verb form is different (*pual* imperfect instead of passive participle), the verse comprises three poetic lines, instead of two, and the name of God is not invoked. The feature they share, though, is the second line expanding on the identity of the

14. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 302.

15. C. W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK “to Bless” in the Old Testament* (SBLDS 95; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 115–18.

16. Computing Aitken’s statistics for each verb and noun from the same root, see J. K. Aitken, *The Semantics of Blessing and Cursing in Ancient Hebrew* (ANE Studies Supplement 23; Louvain: Peeters, 2007).

17. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 168–69.

18. Aitken, *Semantics*, 116. Since in Rabbinic Hebrew, and even in some Biblical Hebrew texts, it can also mean “curse” when it has God as an object, it can be deduced that this is a late development. See 1 Kgs 21:10, 13; Job 1:5, 11; Prov 30:11, possibly Deut 33:11, Pss 10:3; 62:5; 109:28; Job 2:5, 9 (Aitken, *Semantics*, 114).

19. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK*, 116.

character mentioned. Note that the poet of Judg 5 recalls the first line by repeating it almost identically in the third line (a b c // c' // b d a).

ברוך אברם לאל עליון קנה שמים וארץ: (Gen 14:19b)	תברך מנשים יעל אשת חבר הקיני מנשים באהל תברך: (Judg 5:24)
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The same verb root is identified in two fragmentary blessings found on jars unearthed in the remains of the caravanserai from Kuntillet 'Ajrud (8th cent. B.C.). The inscription on the first one reads, "w . . . *brkt.'tkm / lyhwh.smrn.wl'srth*," meaning "I bless you before Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah." Although the verb is finite, notice the preposition *lamed* preceding the divine name. Another blessing found on the second jar reads, "[*'jmr / 'mryw / 'mr l.'dn[y] / hslm.'t/brktk.l[y] / hwh tmn / wl'srth.yb / rk.wysmrk / why'm.'d[n] / y[ . . . / k [ . . .* This means, "Thus says Amaryau: Say to my lord: Is it well with you? I bless you before Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah. May He bless you and keep you and be with my lord . . ." Again, the name of the deity invoked as giver of the blessing is preceded by a *lamed*. The third blessing is too fragmentary for our current purposes.<sup>20</sup>

The blessing found in Ps 115:15 is closer to Gen 14:19cd, both in form and content, although it also displays several original features: the recipient is plural, the verb that describes God is עשה not קנה, and יהוה replaces אל עליון as the name of God. The more recent poem did not employ the archaic elements with good reason.

ברוך אברם לאל עליון קנה שמים וארץ: (Gen 14:19b)	ברוכים אתם ליהוה עשה שמים וארץ: (Ps 115:15)
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Blessing God as an expression of joyous satisfaction for God's acts on behalf of the believer can be found not only in Genesis, but in other biblical texts as well. Noah's blessing for Shem (Gen 9:26) is forged on an unusual pattern, having the second line cast out with a jussive.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the second line does not recall past deeds of God in

20. Othmar Keel and Cristoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 225–27.

21. Horton mentioned Gen 9:26 but did not expand on it (*The Melchizedek Tradition*, 117).

relation to his enemies, as in Gen 14, but is optative about future dealings with them. A more concise formula is preferred in greetings (cf. 1 Sam 15:13).

וברוך אל עליון אשר־מגן צריך בידך (Gen 14:20)	ברוך יהוה אלהי שם ויהי כנען עבר למו: (Gen 9:26)
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Other blessings make use of the relative pronoun as in Genesis 14:20, and follow the same structure: BLESSED > DIVINE NAME > RELATIVE PARTICLE > DIVINE DEED.

ברוך יהוה אלהי אדני אברהם  
 אשר לא־עזב חסדו ואמתו מעם אדני  
 (Gen 24:27)

ברוך יהוה  
 אשר הציל אתכם מיד מצרים ומיד פרעה  
 אשר הציל את־העם מתחת יד־מצרים:  
 (Exod 18:10)

ברוך יהוה אלהי ישראל  
 אשר שלחך היום הזה לקראתי:  
 וברוך טעמך וברוכה את  
 אשר כלתני היום הזה מבוא בדמים והשע ידי לי:  
 (1 Sam 25:32–33)

ברוך יהוה  
 אשר רב את־ריב חרפתי מיד נבל  
 ואת־עבדו חשך מרעה  
 ואת רעת נבל השיב יהוה בראשו:  
 (1 Sam 25:39)

ברוך יהוה אלהיך  
 אשר סגר את־האנשים אשר־נשאו את־ידם באדני  
 המלך:  
 (2 Sam 18:28)

It appears from the above examples, and from the many other occurrences of such similar utterances (Ruth 4:14; 2 Sam 22:47; 1 Kgs 1:48; 5:21; 8:15, 56; 10:9; 2 Chr 2:11; 6:4; 9:8; Ps 66:20), that “blessing” God required a reason expressed by means of a clause introduced by a relative pronoun. This אשר though could be interpreted as having an

asseverative function only. Surprisingly, none of the above blessings has two verbs in their respective quotative frames, as Melchizedek's utterance does.<sup>22</sup>

The two blessings Melchizedek issues have distinct forms that qualify them as rather prosaic utterances, barely poetic, if at all, or as cultic utterances with a poetic ring. Therefore, the criteria for ancient poetry (parallelism, paronomasia, mixed meter) do not help the researcher in this case to discuss and decide on matters of its date.<sup>23</sup> The absence of the relative pronoun in authentic old Hebrew poetry and its rarity in formal poetry<sup>24</sup> are evidence against this being taken as a poetical form. It is best to take it as a prose form.<sup>25</sup> At any rate, the two blessings could well stand in for a complex ritual that took place in the real procedures of Abram's meeting with Melchizedek.

#### THE PLOT

After tracking Abram's able men in their northern campaign, away from the Siddim Valley and the peaceful and comfortable environment of Mamre, the plot returns to another valley. The old Valley of Shaveh, known also as King's Valley, witnesses the emergence of two unexpected characters, the king of Sodom and Melchizedek, king of Shalem and priest of 'El-'Elyon. Abram gives attention to the king-priest first. It was honourable to do so, because the king of Shalem brought gifts, whereas the king of Sodom had only requests.<sup>26</sup>

Some scholars doubt the unity of the plot. For Hermann Gunkel, the style of Gen 14 is mixed, mingling ancient history and legend, and he

22. For terminology and examples see Cynthia Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis* (HSM 55; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996).

23. For more grammatical, lexical and stylistic characteristics of archaic Hebrew poetry, see W. F. Albright, "A Catalogue of Early Hebrew Lyric Poems (Psalm 68)," *HUCA* 23 (1950–51): 1–39; F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Biblical Resource; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 5–8, 32.

24. Gesenius-Kautzsch, *Hebrew Grammar*, §2s.

25. Cross and Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, 19; D. N. Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 2–3.

26. G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 315. Emerton does not take the reply of the king of Sodom as discourteous, just for being laconic (J. A. Emerton, "Some Problems in Genesis XIV," in *Studies in the Pentateuch* [ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 41; Leiden: Brill, 1990], 82).



catalogued it for that reason as “an incipient historical scholarship.”<sup>27</sup> Margalith expects that a legend should not have “a well-constructed plot, but rather a badly-cobbled medley of episodes dimly remembered from past traditions.”<sup>28</sup> The variety of genres, noticed by other authors, has been interpreted as proof of multiple editorial interventions.<sup>29</sup> Emerton believes that verses 18–20 were a later interpolation from David’s time because they interrupt the natural flow of the story, introducing Melchizedek after announcing Bera’s arrival on the scene.<sup>30</sup>

One should see verses 1–11 functioning as exposition for the whole narrative in Gen 14. This exposition is not unparalleled among the narratives in the Abraham Cycle, if Gen 11:27b–32 is accepted as part of the narrative of Abram’s calling. There, too, the reader is given many details on the main characters of the story, as well as on some secondary characters. Thus, the story in Gen 14 loses its punch and its climax if verses 1–11 are not part of the original narrative. As it stands, Abram’s battle is told third, after the Mesopotamian campaign in the Transjordan and the battle of the plain. This fits with a triadic pattern the Hebrews preferred.<sup>31</sup>

It is to be noted that the role of Melchizedek in the plot is secondary. Even in relation to the king of Sodom, Melchizedek is secondary. The rebellion of the cities of the plain (Sodom included) prompted the Mesopotamian campaign, and Lot was a citizen of Sodom. Since the author follows the main conflict between Abram and the king of Sodom, the secondary details do not receive the same attention. The brief appearance of Melchizedek in the story allows both the narrator and the reader to stay with the main character and the main theme of Gen 14–15, namely Abram’s attitude toward earned goods. Such a function of the new character is called topicalization.

The device of switching attention onto Melchizedek immediately after announcing the entry of the king of Sodom in verse 17, only to have

27. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. M. E. Biddle; Macon, GA: Mercer, 1997), 289.

28. Similar legends would be Parsifal, Siegrid, and Wilhelm Tell (Othniel Margalith, “The Riddle of Genesis 14 and Melchizedek,” *ZAW* 112 [2000]: 501–8; 504–5).

29. Claus Westermann takes the introduction (vv. 1–11) as report, and verses 12–17, 21–24 as narrative, leaving aside verses 18–20 as an inserted episode (*Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1981], 190–92).

30. J. A. Emerton, “The Riddle of Genesis XIV,” *VT* 21 (1971): 407–8; idem, “Some Problems,” 78, 91.

31. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 307. Emerton (“Some Problems,” 83) is not ready to accept the validity of this argument for a unity between verse 17 and verses 18–20.

the king addressing Abram subsequently in verse 21, is meant to express simultaneity. In other words, while the king of Sodom was initiating the contact with Abram, Melchizedek's cortège approached Abram. Sodom's king was witness to all that took place between Abram and Melchizedek. Wenham explains the recall of the king of Sodom as a literary strategy of cohesion, holding together verse 17 with verses 18–20 by means of a chiasm, A: king of Sodom comes > B: Melchizedek brings > B': Melchizedek speaks > A': king of Sodom speaks.<sup>32</sup> Alongside the chiasm, there are other elements of coherence that bind together verses 18–20 to the immediate context.

The repetition of apparently redundant material for the purpose of simultaneity, known as "resumptive repetition" is one of these features.<sup>33</sup> In Gen 14:17–21, the repetition of the phrase "king of Sodom" is necessary to ensure the reader does not confuse this character with Melchizedek after his intervention in the plot. A narrative mainline does not need to specify explicitly the subject with every verb, especially if the subject does not change or is understood from the context. This is exactly what happens in Gen 14 with the verbs referring to the invading kings (vv. 5–7, 11–12), the kings of the Canaanite Pentapolis (vv. 3–4), and Abram (vv. 14–16). The fact that the phrase "king of Sodom" is stated again in verse 21 is by itself a sign that this story had included the Melchizedek episode from its very beginning. One wishes that a similar clarification had been in place for the otherwise ambiguous clause in verse 20c.

Another resumptive repetition, though on a larger scale, is found in Gen 14 when the name of the combative kings is given again (vv. 8–9) following several details on the military campaign of the Mesopotamian coalition (vv. 5–7). Although the main items are taken up in verses 8–9, there are three main differences.<sup>34</sup> First, the names of Canaanite kings are truncated; when repeated they all look like the anonymous king of Bela, without their respective personal names. The author could have opted for this possibility to anticipate their tragic end by depersonalizing them. Second, the author changed the order of the kings in his list. By giving priority to the Canaanite kings, the order of the two groups of kings in

32. *Ibid.*, 315.

33. Shemaryahu Talmon, *Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible: Form and Content* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993), 112–33, mainly 122ff.

34. For repetitions with variation see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 390–93.

verses 1–2 is reversed and allows switching the focus of the reader from the marauders to the patriots.<sup>35</sup> The names of the Mesopotamian kings are reversed as well (D E B C), although the repetition is verbatim in their case.

Third, the author employed repetition only after unexpected grammatical transformations. By that we do not mean replacing the introductory formula with a finite verb because that was expected. The renewed focus on the Canaanite kings required a proper active verb to describe their involvement in the war (A'). Most significant is the change from the very concise “they made war” (F) to a more detailed “they waged war against them in the Siddim Valley” (F'). Thus, a clearer sense of confrontation and a location are provided. The new rendering has a new addition as well, “four kings against five,” which underlines the possible odds of the outcome, which, after the account of the successful campaign in Transjordan and the depersonalization of the Canaanite kings, has only one possible reason: to postpone obvious conclusions.

ויהי בימי	A	ויצא	A'
אמרפל מלך־שנער	B	מלך־סדם	G'
אריוך מלך אלסר	C	ומלך עמרה	H'
כדרלעמר מלך עילם	D	ומלך אדמה	I'
ותדעל מלך גוים:	E	ומלך צביים	J'
עשו מלחמה	F	ומלך בלע הוא־צער	K
את־ברע מלך סדם	G	ויערכו אתם מלחמה בעמק השדים:	F'
ואת־ברשה מלך עמרה	H	את כדרלעמר מלך עילם	D
שנאב מלך אדמה	I	ותדעל מלך גוים	E
ושמאבר מלך צביים	J	ואמרפל מלך שנער	B
ומלך בלע היא־צער:	K	ואריוך מלך אלסר	C
(Gen 14:1–2)		ארבעה מלכים את־החמשה:	L
		(Gen 14:8–9)	

The general purpose of repeating such a large piece of the story is to reconnect the plot after the description of the Transjordanian

35. Wenham noticed the chiasmic reproduction of the kings, Mesopotamian > Canaanite > Canaanite > Mesopotamian, but did not integrate the switching of the Mesopotamian kings (*Genesis 1–15*, 305).

campaign intruded, altering the chronology of the story (i.e., dischronologization).

Repeating the phrase “king of Sodom” (v. 21) without giving his name follows the plot closely (he is anonymous on his second occurrence). It was necessary to repeat the phrase for clarity (making clear who is the subject), since the intrusive appearance of Melchizedek (simultaneity) might have directed the reader to take the king of Sodom for Melchizedek. Such a strategy bespeaks honest narrative artistry and not unscrupulous political maneuvering of texts.

Next to the previously mentioned features of inner coherence of the story, one could follow Mathews in identifying verbal and thematic connectors linking Gen 14 to the surrounding chapters.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Abram’s march to the most northern end of the country in pursuit of Lot (14:14) is seen as a fulfillment of God’s command to travel across Canaan (13:17). Abram is camped at Mamre’s oaks (14:13), where the story left him at the end of the previous narrative (13:18). His conflict with Kedorlaomer of Shinar is an expression of the ancient conflict between the descendents of Shem and those of Ham, whose main representative is Nimrod, the founder of Babel and Assyria according to Gen 10:9–12, thus the archenemy of Abram’s descendants. At Babel, humanity built a tower from bricks and bitumen (11:3), the latter being one of the economical assets of Sodom and Gomorrah (14:10), most likely the cause that sparked the war.<sup>37</sup>

Abram’s victory over the foreign coalition of kings comes as a fulfillment of God’s promise to give him international fame and use him by blessing others through him (12:1–3). Both the Amorite allies of Abram and the kings of Canaan, Melchizedek included, are blessed with riches due to Abram’s successful campaign. Several comments concerning Lot and Sodom at the end of chapter 13 anticipate the events of chapter 14. Thus, Zoar is another name for Bela (13:10; 14:2, 8; 19:22), Lot approached Sodom (13:11–12) only to settle there eventually (14:12), and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are described as evil (רעים; 13:13), and wicked (רשעים; 18:23, 25). The kings of these cities

36. J. G. Mathews’ recent monograph *Melchizedek’s Alternative Priestly Order: A Compositional Analysis of Genesis 14:18–20 and its Echoes Throughout the Tanak* (BBRS 8; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013) investigates the Melchizedek episode intertextually seeking reasons for the original inclusion of the episode into the narrative of Genesis 14 in order to prove that the Hebrew Bible exploited the theme to promote an alternative priesthood to that of Aaron.

37. *Ibid.*, 54–58.

have names that play on these very adjectives: ברע of Sodom and ברשע of Gomorrah (14:2).<sup>38</sup>

As for the connections to chapter 15, Mathews speaks of several plays on words, the first of which is between the verb “to deliver” (14:20) and the noun “shield” (15:1), whose roots are built on the same consonants (מגן).<sup>39</sup> God promised Abram a reward (שכר; 15:1), a term that is made by reversing the consonants of “possession” (רכש; 14:11, 12, 16, 21),<sup>40</sup> a term reiterated in 15:14.<sup>41</sup> Another wordplay is identified between the noun for “help” (עזר) in Eliezer’s name and the one for seed (זרע; 15:3, 5, 13, 18). The connection to chapter 14 comes in the form of a gematria, since Eliezer’s numerical value is 318, exactly the number of armed slaves Abram prepared to pursue the Mesopotamians.<sup>42</sup> Two more wordplays link Melchizedek’s name and title to Abram’s faith, which was credited to him as righteousness (צדקה; 15:6) and resulted in a life that ended in peace (שלום; 15:15).<sup>43</sup>

One theme stands out as binding together not only Abram’s life but the patriarchal narratives as well, namely “possessions.” Abram left Haran with all his possessions (12:5), took refuge in Egypt with them, and returned to Canaan having more (13:1–2), only to be separated from Lot because they had too much (13:6). Abram pursued the Mesopotamians to retrieve all the possessions of Lot and the kings of Canaan (14:11–12). The same pattern is evident in the story of Jacob, who sojourned in Padan-Aram, Canaan, and Egypt only to become richer in cattle (31:18; 32:5; 46:6; 47:4, 27). The term for “cattle” (מקנה) provides another wordplay with the verb “to acquire” (קנה), from whence

38. *Ibid.*, 58–60.

39. *Ibid.*, 61, following G. W. Coats, *Genesis* (FOTL 1; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 123; G. Granerød, *Abraham and Melchizedek: Scribal Activity of Second Temple Times in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110* (BZAW 406; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 75; and K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC 1B; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 158, 163.

40. Mathews, *Melchizedek’s Alternative*, 62.

41. Coats, *Genesis*, 123. Coats adds the verb “to go out,” he noticed to be used in 14:17, 18 but in 15:4, 5, 7, 14 as well.

42. Mathews, *Melchizedek’s Alternative*, 66–68. Whether the original author intended it or knew gematria at all is difficult to prove.

43. *Ibid.*, 70–71.

the participle קנה used in reference to God comes (14:19, 22).<sup>44</sup>

One can conclude that there are plenty of reasons to see the narrative in chapter 14 as well built, displaying features of coherence not only to its own plot, but also to the main story of Abraham and the patriarchal narratives. It is safe to say that the final form of the narrative in chapter 14 is the work of one mind, well aware of the biographical highlights of Abraham's life.

#### MELCHIZEDEK: WHAT IS IN THE NAME?

During the last two centuries, as the hypotheses for the origin and function of the Melchizedek text in Gen 14 multiplied, the interpretation of Melchizedek's name revealed aspects that were unknown before or considered of little importance. Several questions that sprang out of those critical interactions follow: How is one to understand the compound proper name made of two nouns in juxtaposition? What is the purpose of the *hireq* after the noun מלך? Is this a nominal-sentence name or a compound name? Is Melchizedek a theophoric name? How does מלך שלם relate to מלכ־יצדק?

In order to define the meaning of מלכ־יצדק, one has to explain the *hireq* after מלך. Layton identified four possible explanations: (1) pronominal suffix, (2) it signals a gentilic adjective, (3) hypocoristic suffix, and (4) *hireq compaginis*, nothing more than an archaic connector. Options (2) and (3) are not applicable to our context because they require a noun in an absolute state, not in construct, as is the case with מלך.<sup>45</sup> Whereas Layton decided reluctantly that *hireq* functions as a pronominal suffix here, Joüon & Muraoka are certain that it is rather a *hireq compaginis*.<sup>46</sup> Waltke & O'Connor presented the *hireq* as indicating a genitive singular, a remnant of the old case system.<sup>47</sup>

44. Ibid., 62–65.

45. Scott C. Layton, *Archaic Features of Canaanite Personal Names in the Hebrew Bible* (HSM 47; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 118–21.

46. See B. K. Waltke and M. P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lane, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §93 l, m. Evidence of compound names built by means of *hireq compaginis* were not found at Ugarit though, mainly because Ugaritic alphabet does not have a sign for it. Cf. Richard S. Hess, "The Onomastics of Ugarit," in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 507.

47. Waltke & O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, §8.2.c.

This matter is further connected to the interpretation of the relationship between the two nouns in the name. If it is not just a compound name, מלכ־יִצְדָק should be taken as a nominal-sentence name.

Various ancient authorities—Hebrews, Philo, and Josephus being among them—preferred to translate the name Melchizedek as “king of justice.”<sup>48</sup> If the character bearing the name מלכ־יִצְדָק in some fragmentary manuscripts from Qumran (4Q180, 4Q181, 4Q’Amram, and 4Q280)<sup>49</sup> is indeed the opponent of מלכ־יִרְשָׁע, translated as “king of wickedness,” it follows that Melchizedek should be translated as “king of justice” even in the manuscripts from Qumran.<sup>50</sup> This rendering assumes a *hireq compaginis*.

Layton prefers the rendering “my king is Zedek,” because he believes that this option reflects better the religious context that might have originated the name.<sup>51</sup> This was the preferred interpretation in Gunkel’s day as well.<sup>52</sup> Horton takes the compound name as a throne name, built as a construct relationship, but its interpretation is different altogether: “Zedek’s king.”<sup>53</sup> Rosenberg reads the god Zedek everywhere the term יִצְדָק appears in the Hebrew Bible, not only in narrative texts, but in prophetic texts as well.<sup>54</sup> All the above interpretations, though, are based on the as yet unproved assumption that there was a god bearing this name who was worshipped in Jerusalem as well as in other parts of Canaan, or that Zedek was a well-known divine epithet. To pretend that only some divine attributes stand for the name of homonymic gods could

48. Βασιλεὺς δίκαιος in *Antiquities* I 10,2 (§180–1).

49. 11QMelch is also useful for the presence of Melchizedek although his opponent is Belial. See J. T. Milik, “*Milki-sedeq* et *Milki-resa*’ dans les anciens écrits juifs et chrétiens,” *JJS* 23 (1972): 95–144; and Paul J. Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*’ (CBQMS 10; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981).

50. Kobelski (*Melchizedek and Melchiresha*’, 56) is ready to accept this translation only as a popular variant that eventually superseded the original cultic one (“Zedek is my king”).

51. See Layton, *Archaic Features*, 107–54 on *hireq compaginis*, and 139–40 for Melchizedek’s name.

52. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (3rd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 285.

53. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition*, 42–43

54. R. A. Rosenberg, “The God Tsedek,” *HUCA*, 36 (1965): 161–77.

have been a practice in antiquity, but who decides what divine attributes do not follow this practice, since Yahweh is described by many?<sup>55</sup>

“Zedeq” as an epithet is easier to accept than a divine name among scholars of ancient Ugarit. Wyatt takes the noun as a divine epithet only, rendered as “noble god” (KTU 1.108 R:1–3a),<sup>56</sup> and makes no mention of such a deity when he speaks of the Ugaritic pantheon.<sup>57</sup> The parallelism between צדק and שלם, functioning as fixed word-pairs in Hebrew poetry (Isa 1:26; 32:17; 48:18; 60:17), as well as in Ugaritic poetry, is long attested.<sup>58</sup> But the term צדק is also parallel with תמים,<sup>59</sup> and as far as we know no one looked for such a god. Moreover, the term צדק appears in the Ugaritic literature in connection with other nouns (e.g., *at*—“wife,” *b’l*—“husband, lord,” and *mlk*—“king”) and it is advised that one render the phrase as “legitimate/lawful wife/husband/lord.”<sup>60</sup> This interpretation makes use of the hendiadys principle, when two nouns are coordinated to express another concept.

Layton provides other examples of compound names constructed by juxtaposing a common noun to a proper noun denoting a place: נחליאל (Num 21:19), and אדמי הנקב (Josh 19:33), as well as the throne name אדני־בזק meaning “lord of Bezeq” (Judg 1:5–7).<sup>61</sup> In these cases Layton accepts the construct relationship as the sufficient explanation of the relationship between the two nouns. Consequently, it is possible to render מלכי־צדק as “king of Zedek” where the proper noun stands for a location or a divinity (possessive genitive).

If מלכי־צדק is not a compound clause, but a nominal-sentence name, what type of nominal verbless clause qualifies it? In a

55. Ahuva Ho, *Sedeq and Sedeqah in the Hebrew Bible* (American University Studies VII; Theology and Religion 78; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 43–45.

56. N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and his Colleagues* (Biblical Seminar, 53; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 395.

57. N. Wyatt, “The Religion of Ugarit: An Overview,” in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 528–85.

58. W. G. E. Watson, “Fixed Pairs in Ugaritic and Isaiah,” *VT* 22 (1972): 464.

59. W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 327.

60. See KTU 2.81: 2, 11, 20, 31. Cf. Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquin Sanmartin, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Handbook of Oriental Studies: Section 1, The Near and Middle East 67; trans. W. G. E. Watson; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 779.

61. Layton, *Archaic Features*, 117.



classification clause, an entity qualifies another (most likely an adjective), and the nominal predicate precedes the subject. In an identification clause, an entity is identified with another, and the subject comes before the nominal predicate.<sup>62</sup> The interplay of the subject-nominal predicate is important in these circumstances.

Identification clause  
(Gen 6:9)

נָה אִישׁ צְדִיק  
*Noah [was] a just man.*

Classification clause  
(1 Sam 24:18)

צְדִיק אַתָּה מִמֶּנִּי  
*You [are] more just than me.*

Since we have two nouns and not a noun and an adjective, the only alternative to the construct relationship (“king of justice”) is an identification clause (“my king is Zedek” or “Malki is justice”). By necessity, each of these options implies a theophoric name.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike “Melek Shalem,” the name “Malki-Zedek” has two peculiarities: it is written with a *maqeph* both in Gen 14 and in Ps 110, and has a connective *yod*. Compared with this, “Melek-S<sup>e</sup>dom” is always with a *maqeph*, with two exceptions (vv. 2, 22).<sup>64</sup> Hebrew compound names usually do not take a *maqeph* in the Massoretic tradition of the Hebrew Bible, but here the Massoretes preferred to keep the two nouns of Melchizedek as one thought unit.

#### MELEK SHALEM

This gloss on the name of Melchizedek knew many interpretations across the centuries. One of the main issues raised concerns the quality of the second noun שָׁלֵם. Is it a common noun, an adjective, a proper noun denoting a geographical location, or a deity?

62. F. I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* (JBL Monograph Series 14; Nashville: JBL, 1971), 31–34. For identification clauses, see examples #1 ff., and for classification clauses see examples #94 ff. Also S. Tatu, *The Qatal/Yiqtol (Yiqtol/Qatal) Verbal Sequence in Semitic Couplets: A Case Study in Systemic Functional Grammar with Applications on the Hebrew Psalter and Ugaritic Poetry* (Gorgias Ugaritic Studies 3; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 176–77.

63. As Roy A. Rosenberg proposed in “The God Tsedeq,” *HUCA* 36 (1965): 161–77. See also Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchiresha*.

64. Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 127, n. 6.

Anderson advanced the theory that the “king of Shalem” is actually the “king of Sodom,” and the text should be emended.<sup>65</sup> Thus, one could transform the name of the intruder into the name of the new king of Sodom who replaced Bera after he found his death in the tar pits where he had fallen. Anderson overlooks the fact that the king of Sodom is mentioned without a name, as all the other Canaanite kings, the second time he appears in the text (v. 8). Thus his anonymity is owing to the plot development, not to some untold events or narrator’s oversight. Besides, there are no textual variants to substantiate such an emendation. This theory has found no followers.

Sigmund Mowinckel, followed by Rosenberg, took שֶׁלֶם as the name of the sun god, whose manifestations were Melek (king), Shalim (covenant) and Zedek (justice).<sup>66</sup> H. H. Rowley, in his theory, even had a place for the sun god worshipped at Jerusalem prior to David’s triumph over Jerusalem, the bronze serpent Nehushtan.<sup>67</sup>

Shalim was indeed a Phoenician god, twin brother to Shahar, both sons of the supreme god El, known for their insatiable appetites and for bringing the day (Shahar = dawn) and making the day pass (Shalim = dusk).<sup>68</sup> His presence in the mythological texts of Ugarit is rather scarce (KTU 1.100:45–47), and the worship of this god alone is theoretically impossible in a polytheistic society and practically not attested to have been taking place in any ANE city.

Other scholars read שֶׁלֶם in Gen 33:18 as the earlier versions (LXX, Targums, Vulgate, Peshitta and Jubilees 30:1) suggested, as if it was another name for Samaria (Alexander Polyhistor, Eusebius of Caesarea),<sup>69</sup> a city neighbouring Samaria (Eusebius of Emesa,

65. C. E. Anderson, “Who Was Melchizedek? A Suggested Emendation of Gen 14:8,” *AJSL* 19 (1903): 176–77.

66. See the republished edition of his work *Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (2 vols. in one; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 2004) 132–33. Roy A. Rosenberg proposed (“The God Tsedek” 161–77) that the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah were actually promoting the sun-god of Jerusalem and were frustrated by Manasseh (177).

67. H. H. Rowley, “Zadok and Nehushtan,” *JBL* 58 (1939): 132–41.

68. John C. L. Gibson, “The Mythological Texts,” in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 200–201.

69. See Alexander Polyhistor, *Concerning the Jews* (1st cent. B.C.) quoted by Eusebius in *Prep. Ev.* 419a; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Onomasticon* 150:1–7. The Madaba map (6th cent. mosaic from St. George church in Madaba, Jordan) has Shalem associated with Shechem. S. Landersdorfer, “Der Priesterkonigtum von Salem,” *JSOR* 9 (1925): 203–

Epiphanius of Salamis),<sup>70</sup> or even a valley near Samaria.<sup>71</sup> Alternatively, Jerome proposed that Shalem was the place near Aenon, where John ‘the’ Baptist was active (John 3:23).<sup>72</sup> Going on, these scholars identify Shalem in Gen 33:18 with the one in Gen 14, but such a theory based on conjecture alone cannot stand. Not only is the adjective reinterpreted as a noun, but also the following assumed clause is too compact, missing a necessary הוּא אוֹ אִשֶׁר.

The evidence for the name of Jerusalem in ancient documents is mixed. On one hand the city appears in earlier extra-biblical documents under the names Urushalimu (Egyptian execration texts, 19th–18th cent. B.C.), Uru-Salim (El Amarna Tablets, 15th–14th cent. B.C.), and Ur-sa-lim-mu (Sennacherib’s stele, 8th cent. B.C.).<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, Jerusalem is known in the Bible during the pre-monarchic period under the name Jebus (Judg 19:10, 11; 1 Chr 11:4), a city where Jebusites used to live (Josh 15:63; Judg 1:21). Psalm 110 identifies the city of Melchizedek with Jerusalem (Zion). Shalem and Zion are also paralleled in Ps 76:3. Later on, *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:13 identifies Salem with Jerusalem. Even though there is no proof that Salem was used as a hypocoristicon simultaneously with the longer name Jerusalem, such a possibility still exists. The arguments in favor of identifying Salem with Jerusalem are still open to debate, but those against the option are not superior.<sup>74</sup>

Identifying Salem with Jerusalem is impossible to Margalith due to the geographical setting of Abram’s battle with the Mesopotamians. If the war took place in the area of Dan and the pursuit continued until they reached Hobah, in the vicinity of Damascus, his return, Margalith says, must have taken place via the King’s Way in the Transjordan.<sup>75</sup> Even so, there was an alternative route that followed the hill country of Ephraim

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16; J. A. Emerton, “The Site of Salem, the City of Melchizedek,” in *Studies in the Pentateuch* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 41, Leiden: Brill, 1990), 45–72.

70. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 55.2. This theory is embraced by A. Alt, “Das Institut im Jahre 1928,” *Palastinajahrbuch* 25 (1929): 5–59.

71. J. G. Gammie (“Loci of the Melchizedek Tradition of Genesis 14:18–20,” *JBL* 90 [1971]: 385–96) follows J.T. Milik’s suggestion.

72. Emerton, “The Site of Salem,” 45–51.

73. Gammie, “Loci of the Melchizedek tradition,” 389.

74. Emerton, “The Site of Salem,” 55–69.

75. Margalith, “The Riddle of Genesis 14,” 507–8.

and passed near Jerusalem.<sup>76</sup> Abram would have preferred the route through Canaan to the one through Transjordan, since his camp was loaded with all the prisoners and the animals recovered needed a more friendly and familiar territory.

Before we conclude this part of our analysis, it is useful to see how מלך שלם relates to מלכי־צדק. Traditionally the phrase “Malki-Zedek, Melek Shalem” was interpreted as a throne name, followed by a gloss with reference to the domain of the king. Thus Zedek is a dynastic title used for the kings of Salem.<sup>77</sup> The pattern of the name Melchizedek is evident in another name that belonged to a king of Jerusalem, namely Adoni-Zedek (Josh 10). Similarly, אבי־מלך was used for the monarchs of the Beer-Sheba area (Abi-Melek).

Margalith argues that “Melek Shalem” is just a gloss for “Malki-zedeq,” thus a theophoric name itself for the same person, because Shalem, Melek/Milku and Zedeq are all theophoric names.<sup>78</sup> If all are theophoric names, how do they relate to one another? Only an identification clause could explain such an agglomeration of theophoric names, but are they normal?

For Rowley, the presence of “Zedek” in a compound name is proof of a theophoric name, even though that name might have been long forgotten (e.g., Zedekiah, Jehozadak).<sup>79</sup> But these names are theophoric because they carry the name of Yahweh. Whether Zedek used to be the name of a god or his hypostasis is as good a speculation as any other. If the king of Babylon changed the name of Mattaniah into Zedekiah (“the justice of Yah,” also a prophetic name in 1 Kgs 22) for a purpose, which is not necessarily to revive an ancient religious tradition, but to warn the king in office of his covenantal allegiance to Babylon and the consequences derived from his oath taken in the presence of Yahweh.

76. Emerton, “The Site of Salem,” 60.

77. H. Zimmern and H. Winckler, K.A.T. 2:224 *apud* Rowley, “Melchizedek and Zadok,” 465, n. 7, 466. See J. A. Emerton, “Riddle,” 426.

78. Margalith (“The Riddle of Genesis 14 and Melchizedek,” 506) reads as follows: מלכי־צדק הוא מלך שלם. There are no textual variants to support this claim, it remains a mere speculation. Milk / Maliku could be rendered as a god, because the name is present in a prayer of a mythological mare to the goddess Shapsh, alongside other deities (KTU 1.100 R 40ff). See R. S. Hess, “Cultural Aspects of Onomastic Distribution in the Amarna Texts,” *UF* 21 (1989): 209–16; *idem*, *Amarna Personal Names* (SORDS 9; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993).

79. Rowley, “Zadok and Nehushtan,” 132.

The nine kings in Gen 14 are listed by name and have a gloss with reference to their respective domains. An auxiliary identification gloss inserted for the anonymous king of Bera (v. 2), makes clear that these nouns are meant as geographical terms. Therefore, מלך שלם should be taken as a gloss in reference to Melchizedek's domain.

Given all the above, we believe there is not enough evidence to offer an alternative to the traditional interpretation of the name Melchizedek. Thus, מלכי־צדק would stand as a compound proper name, having two nouns connected via a *hireq compaginis*, thus meaning "king of justice."

#### MELCHIZEDEK: INDIRECT DESCRIPTION

##### *The God 'El-'Elyon*

Although the *Tendenz* during the first half of the twentieth century was to read ['El]-'Elyon as a distinct deity superior to Yahweh,<sup>80</sup> or as part of a divine triad alongside Yahweh and El or Shadday,<sup>81</sup> there are scholars

80. G. von Rad, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testamenti* (TBü 8; Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1958), 1:144; O. Eissfeldt, "El and Yahweh," *JIS* 1 (1956): 25–37. Marvin H. Pope (*El in the Ugaritic Texts* [VTSup 2; Leiden: Brill, 1955], 55–57) reads the fragmentary evidence of the Ugaritic literature as if 'Elyon is El's grandfather, although in order to reach that conclusion he has to ignore the witness of the Sujin inscription where El and Elyon are connected by means of the conjunction *w*, as in other Ugaritic compound names like Kothar we-Khasis as well as Qudsh wa-Amrar, and refers to a single deity. For the Sujin inscription see H. Bauer, "Ein aramäischer Staatsvertrag aus dem 8. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Die Inschrift der Stele von Sudschin," *AfO* 8 (1932–1933): 1–16; G. R. Driver, "Notes on the Aramaic Inscription from Soudschin," *AfO* 8 (1932–1933): 203–6.

81. Levi della Vida proposes a triad on the basis of Aramaic inscription of Sefire (8th cent. B.C.), where El (Lord of Earth) and 'Elyon are distinctive deities and part of a divine triad alongside Shamen. This information concurs with that Eusebius collected about the Phoenicians (*Prep. Ev.* 1:10, 15–16). Thus, 'El-'Elyon in Gen 14 is for della Vida produced by merging two gods into one, rather than a "theological speculation." Cf. Levi della Vida, "El-'Elyon in Genesis 14:18–20," *JBL* 63 (1944): 1–9. Morgenstern ("The Divine Triad in Biblical Mythology," *JBL* 64 [1945]: 15–37) supports della Vida, and points out the Mesopotamian triad Anu, Enlil, and Enki-Ea, and the Greek triad Hypsistos, Ouranos, and Kronos. One god is responsible for each of the three cosmic planes. In search for other examples of triads in the Bible, Morgenstern notices other divine names, such as Shadday, and Eloah that appear in connection with El or Yahweh. His theory is that the Yahwist authors of the biblical text merged the tradition of the three gods and divine triad, as the activities, powers and attributes of one universal god. All this happened during the so-called Deuteronomic Reformation (516–490 B.C.).

who doubt that interpretation,<sup>82</sup> despite its contemporary supporters.<sup>83</sup>

For Kelso, אֵל עֵלְיוֹן is an ancient name, common among many Semitic peoples and fully convergent with the historical perspective of the material in chapter 14, not used exclusively for Yahweh (Num 24:16).<sup>84</sup> In Numbers, as in Ps 91:1, the name ‘Elyon is parallel to Shadday. The fact that אֵל עֵלְיוֹן is present in the oracles of Balaam, another non-Jewish character, is further proof of its non-Yahwistic original context as well as its antiquity. Rémi Lack finds that ‘Elyon is a common name among the West Semites for the supreme being in their respective pantheons, and the association of ‘Elyon with Shadday and Tsur in biblical literature is proof of its antiquity.<sup>85</sup>

Freedman noticed that such names are proof of ancient poetry, originating during the so-called patriarchal revival period (9th cent. B.C.).<sup>86</sup> The name אֵל שָׁדַי is preferred in the patriarchal blessings (Gen 28:3; 43:14) and is the name God revealed to the patriarchs (Gen 17:1; 35:11; 48:3; 49:25 cf. Exod 6:3).

The connection between El and Yahweh in relation to the use of the title “Maker (קָנָה) of heaven and earth” in the biblical literature and its theological evolution supports its antiquity. The title ‘El-’Elyon appears in the eighth-century extra-biblical literature (cf. the inscription at Sefire, with reference to the god El in a Karatepe inscription from 720 B.C.) and a fragmentary inscription from Jerusalem (7th cent. B.C.).<sup>87</sup> Therefore, it is safe to say that by this time at least, the god ‘El was known in Canaan.

82. D. I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (ETSMS 2; Jackson, MS: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988), 14, n. 18; N. Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (UBL 13; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1996), 350–51.

83. S. B. Parker, “Sons of (the) God(s) Myhla(h)/ Myla/ Nwylo ynb,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (ed. K. van der Toorn et al.; 2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 796.

84. J. L. Kelso, “The Antiquity of the Divine Title ‘El ‘Elyon in Gen 14,” *JBL* 20 (1901): 50–55.

85. Rémi Lack, “Les origines de ‘Elyôn, le Tris-Haut, dans la tradition culturelle d’Israël,” *JBL* 24 (1962): 44–64.

86. D. N. Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 78, 89.

87. The inscription found in the Jewish quarter reads, ‘אֵל קָנָה אֶרֶץ,’ that is ‘El, creator of earth.’ See P. D. Miller, “El, the Creator of Earth,” *BASOR* 239 (1980): 43–46.

It is also found in several pre-exilic biblical texts (Ps 18:14 = 2 Sam 22:14; Ps 46:5; Deut 32:8). Scholars suggest various theories on how exactly 'Elyon came to be associated with the God of Israel.<sup>88</sup> It is generally agreed that 'Elyon is a titular ascription that can be attached to any divine name, not only to El, a name that was used to define the supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon.

As for the phrase *קנה שמים וארץ*, late theological thinking disconnected the procreative overtones of the verb *קנה* from the title attributed to Yahweh, present in early literature (Gen 4:1; Deut 32:4–6, 8–9; Num 24:4, 8, 16),<sup>89</sup> and developed it through meditation on God's miraculous involvement in salvation history (Pss 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 134:5–6) and polemical reformulation of the role of Yahweh as creator (Deutero-Isaiah). This title is notably used in a formulaic structure in the context of the dispensation of blessing, a trait preserved from Gen 14 (cf. Gen 49:24–26).

In order to avoid the procreative connotation of the verb *קנה*, different verbs were used: *עשה*, and *ברא* (Exod 15:11; Pss 72:18; 98:11; and Isa 42:5; 45:18 respectively). Alternatively, speaking of God as creating heaven was avoided altogether (Ps 139:1–7, 10–11; Jer 32; Neh 9).<sup>90</sup> The association between heaven and earth represents the cosmic polarity and is used as a merism for all that exists.

Concerning its age, the phrase *קנה שמים וארץ* is either an ancient name, popular among the Semites, or a rather recent name (even post-exilic), and therefore an anachronism in Gen 14. Since it appears in the context of other terms that suggest a rather old history (Melchizedek, Shalem, 'El-'Elyon), the former interpretation is more probable.

### *King of Shalem and Priest of 'El-'Elyon*

As for Melchizedek's double function as priest and king in Canaan, Skinner states, "it is perfectly credible, though not historically attested."<sup>91</sup> Did anything change during the last century to alter such an assessment? Discoveries at Ugarit (from 1929 onwards) offered the

88. N. C. Habel, "'Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth': A Study in Tradition Criticism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 321–22.

89. Mathews (*Melchizedek's Alternative*, 76–77) noticed that the poem of Moses in Deut 32, 33 and Num 24 displays other connections to Melchizedek's blessing: the references to help and foes (Deut 32:27; 33:7; Num 24:4).

90. Habel, "Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth," 326–36.

91. Skinner, *Genesis*, 268.

necessary pieces of evidence. It becomes apparent from Ugaritic literature that the king enjoyed priestly functions. Looking at the heroic stories discovered at Ugarit, John Gray discovers that by their titles (son of god, dispenser of fertility) and actions (sacrifices and divination), the king of Ugarit “mediates divine revelation to his people.”<sup>92</sup>

As intermediaries between the patron god of the dynasty and the people, the role they played in religious rituals proves that the kings must have occupied a central position. Moreover, after death, when they were deified, kings continued to play the role of guardians of the dynasty.<sup>93</sup> Wyatt sees the king’s role as a *pontifex*, similar to the one played by Mesopotamian kings.<sup>94</sup> By the Amarna period (14th cent. B.C.), there were 12 priestly families attested at Ugarit, and the high priest belonged to the royal family.<sup>95</sup> This could be a sign of the emancipation of priesthood, but we cannot know where this could have led because Ugarit was destroyed by the Sea People invasion during the twelfth century.

### *The Exchange of Offerings*

What is the meaning of the offering of bread and wine? Some take it as expressing a full banquet.<sup>96</sup> Waltke arrives at this conclusion noting that “bread” and “wine” appear next to each other in biblical and Ugaritic literature as word-pairs.<sup>97</sup> The examples of Hebrew and Ugaritic poetry

92. John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan: The Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the Old Testament* (VTSup 5; Leiden: Brill, 1957), 153.

93. Juan-Pablo Vita, “The Society of Ugarit,” in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 468.

94. See N. Wyatt, “The Religion of Ugarit: An Overview.”

95. *Ibid.*, 154.

96. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 316; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 408; B. K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 233.

97. Although Waltke quoted 2 Sam 17:27–29 and Prov 9:5, the former is not a poetic text, but a list of goods. Similar lists can be found in 1 Sam 10:3, 16:20, 25:18. The Ugaritic text is quoted from John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 94.



where “bread” and “wine” are used as word-pairs could be multiplied.<sup>98</sup> It is likely that this poetic usage as a merism passed into common speech as in Gen 14:18 and other biblical texts.<sup>99</sup> Refusing any cultic connection, Emerton thinks that bread and wine were offered simply as refreshments, as Ziba did for David’s camp (2 Sam 16:1–8).<sup>100</sup>

For others, the phrase conveys a covenant feast between equal parties<sup>101</sup> or a cultic feast.<sup>102</sup> The interpretation of Melchizedek’s offering as a cultic meal seems to have been preferred in later antiquity and medieval Christian interpretation,<sup>103</sup> although the Epistle to the Hebrews did not go that far with its typological fulfilment of Melchizedek in Jesus. Since the text is wanting in details, one cannot be certain of the meaning of the bread and wine offering just from the information it offers. Nevertheless, the episode resembles the incident with the Gibeonite delegation to Joshua (Josh 9:12–14) and the meeting between Isaac and Abimelek (Gen 26:26–30). Comparing this scene (Abram and Melchizedek) with the following one (Abram and Bera), Elgavish concludes that the text reveals Abram’s openness for a partnership with Melchizedek and a denial of a similar link to Bera.<sup>104</sup>

Although the clause lacks an explicit subject, it was traditionally assumed that Abram was the giver and Melchizedek the receiver. Vawter and Smith assert that Melchizedek was actually offering Abram a tenth

98. Proverbs 4:17; 9:5; Eccl 9:7. Isaiah 55:1–2 adds “milk,” to the “wine,” and “bread,” and Deut 29:5 adds “strong drinks.” “Bread” and “wine” as parallel pairs are found in the following Ugaritic verses: KTU 1.4 iv:35–37; 1.5 i:24–25; 1.6 vi:43–44; 1.16 iii:14–15; 1.23:6 (M. Dahood, “Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs,” in *Ras Shamra Parallels* [ed. Loren R. Fisher; AnOr 49; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972] 1:249–50).

99. See Josh 9:12–13; Judg 19:19; Neh 5:15.

100. Emerton, “The Site of Salem,” 58.

101. David Elgavish, “The Encounter of Abram and Melchizedek King of Salem: A Covenant Establishing Ceremony,” in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction, and History* (ed. A. Wenin; BETL 155; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 498–99.

102. W. T. McCree, “The Covenant Meal in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 45 (1926): 121. J. E. Coleran (“The Sacrifice of Melchizedek,” *TS* 1 [1940]: 27–36) argues that it was more than refreshments because Melchizedek acted as a priest, supporting Jerome’s translation “for he was a priest of the Most High” (cf. participial clauses in Gen 15:2; 18:1, 8, 10, 27; 20:3; 25:29; 32:32; 37:2; 42:38; 48:14).

103. Cf. Lucien-Jean Bord, *Melchisédek: formation, histoire et symbolique d’une figure biblique* (Paris: Geuthner, 2013).

104. Elgavish, “Encounter of Abram and Melchizedek,” 506–8.

of all the goods the Mesopotamians plundered from Salem, which Abram had recovered. This is interpreted accords with a similar gesture by the king of Sodom afterwards.<sup>105</sup> Who is the giver and who is the receiver, after all? Is this a case of intentional ambiguity? It is very unlikely that Abram remained idle, without a reply to such a lavish initiative from a king-priest towards him. It is against his generous, outward approach to relationships. The text itself demands a reply, if not verbal, then at least a pragmatic one.<sup>106</sup> Besides, we find as an afterthought that Abram has sworn an oath not to keep any of the booty for himself, and with good reason, so that nobody can accuse him of capitalizing on others' sufferings (Gen 14:22–23). A tenth extracted from the plunder could well be interpreted as a gift to conclude a treaty between equal parties as in the covenant between Abraham and Abimelek (Gen 21:27), or as a gift to deity as the Israelites offered after war (Num 31:49–50; 1 Sam 20:26–31).<sup>107</sup>

Emerton draws attention to the ambiguity of “all” with reference to the goods from which Abram extracted the tithe.<sup>108</sup> Is it all the spoil Abram captured from the defeated eastern kings that he tithed or all his goods foreign and domestic? The same phrase appears in verse 23, but there it is qualified by “that [is] yours.” Again Emerton signals a problem because the gift already offered to Melchizedek should be subtracted from “all” that belonged to the king of Sodom.<sup>109</sup> If one follows the story, the context usually makes plain what is apparently obscure. Since the story was not written for twenty-first-century Europeans, we should expect that some things desirable for our clarification were not necessary at all for the primary audience. In order to make good sense of the story, one should gain all the information scattered in the text and not only within the one verse.

Therefore, it can be assumed—given the practice of vows—that Abram vowed to keep for himself nothing that belonged to the king of

105. B. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 199. R. H. Smith (“Abram and Melchizedek [Gen 14:18–20],” *ZAW* 77 [1965]: 129–53) builds his case on the parallel with the Keret story (Ugarit). Abram himself received riches from Pharaoh and Abimelek (Gen 12:10–20; 20; 21:22–33).

106. Although rare, the Bible records situations in which no answer is given.

107. Elgavish “Encounter of Abram and Melchizedek,” 502.

108. Emerton, “The Riddle of Genesis XIV,” 408.

109. Emerton, “Some Problems,” 82.

Sodom if God would give him the victory (vv 22–23). The enemies were defeated and the victorious party that included Abram and his Amorite allies took over all those defeated (vv. 14–16). On their way back home, the army was feeding on the goods recovered (v. 24a). When meeting Melchizedek, Abram gave him a tenth of his share (v. 20c), and later on, Abram promised the king of Sodom all that belongs to him from his share (vv. 22–24). Unless the king of Sodom was sovereign over the other four kings of the Canaanite alliance, so that he expected the return of all the goods recovered, Abram kept for himself his share from all the defeated, which included only properties that belonged to the other Canaanite kings. Thus, the king of Sodom was much poorer than before the Mesopotamian raid, but not totally impoverished.

#### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Scholars continue to be divided on the issues of the historicity and antiquity of Gen 14. Whereas members of the traditionalist school are still finding evidence of its antiquity (earlier than J with J glosses for Wenham),<sup>110</sup> representatives of the critical school argue for a late or very late origin of the text (during the monarchy for Emerton, Deuteronomist for Astour, and postexilic for Westermann).<sup>111</sup> There were times, though, when even critical scholars were convinced of its ancient origin. At the turn of the twentieth century, Gunkel declared, “The account contains very ancient information to be considered historical.”<sup>112</sup>

The Jerusalem legitimation hypothesis took the two offices Melchizedek held at once as justification for two distinct offices held by two different persons and founders of dynasties at Jerusalem: David for a dynasty of kings and Zadok for a dynasty of priests. Its aetiological function hangs by a thread: Zadok must be proven a Jebusite priest co-opted by David to share power in the conquered Jerusalem. In order to do so one must prove that David’s imperial bureaucracy was strongly controlled so that he could have built for himself a public image of impeccable virtue and true Yahwism despite his obvious concessions to

110. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 307.

111. Emerton, “The Riddle,” 407–426; M. C. Astour, “Political and Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis 14 and in Its Babylonian Sources,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (ed. A. Altmann; Studies and Texts 3; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 69–74; C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 192.

112. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 288.

paganism. Kingdom narratives, public memory, and prophetic memory witness against this case.

Besides, Melchizedek was not a high priest but a priest and a king, or a king acting in a priestly manner. There is too little evidence to make him a monotheist and, for that reason, the prototype of Israelite priesthood, and even less certain the forefather of the Hasmoneans (high priests and kings at the same time).<sup>113</sup> A text like this, holding a Canaanite priest in such a positive light, could not have been produced by the strong Yahwistic agenda of the post-exilic community. The only option that takes into account all the data is to place the events of the story as early as the Late Bronze Age, and have it written not later than the Early Iron Age. This story could not have been written during the time of the monarchy.

Genesis 14:18–20 is a very short episode that has generated a disproportionate amount of debate. Its transmission in time is surprisingly impeccable given the number of hypotheses offered to explain its content and origin. The passage consists of a few lines of narrative and two blessings uttered by a character named Melchizedek, having two different objects, Abram and ‘El-’Elyon. Both form and content qualify his utterances as blessings that follow a pattern with a long tradition in Israel, attested both in ancient Hebrew poetry and in inscriptions. The episode integrates well with the plot in terms of characters, their relationships, and contribution to the plot. Melchizedek’s presence is vindicated as topicalization, and his contribution in the story happens simultaneously with that of the king of Sodom. The resumptive repetition accounts for the repetition of the phrase “king of Sodom,” which some scholars thought to be a sign of the editorial work that inserted verses 18–20 into Abram’s heroic tale.

Name, titles, words, and actions describe Melchizedek. Following the most natural reading of names and titles in the narrative, מלכי־עֵלֹיִן stands for the name of the priest of ‘El-’Elyon, and מלך־שֵׁלֶם gives the extent of his domain. Whereas Shalem cannot be identified with any certainty in the narratives of the Abraham Cycle, it was customary among the Canaanite/Phoenician heads of city-states during the Late Bronze Age to function as priests on behalf of their people.

113. Skinner, *Genesis*, 270–1; Mark Treves, ‘Two Acrostic Psalms,’ *VT* 15 (1965): 81–90; John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 304–8; Bodinger, ‘L’énigme de Melkisédeq,’ 303ff.

Genesis 14:18-20. NIV Almeida Atualizada (Portuguese) American Standard Version Chinese Union Version - Pinyin Chinese Union Version - Simplified Chinese Union Version - Traditional Common English Bible Common English Bible w/ Apocrypha Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible Elberfelder 1905 (German) English Standard Version Giovanni Diodati 1649 (Italian) GOD'S WORD Translation Good News Translation Good News Translation w/ Apocrypha Hebrew Names Version Holman Christian Standard Bible Jubilee Bible 2000. 19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20 And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. In Context Parallel Compare. Melchizedek A minor OT character Genesis 14:18-20 A minor OT character Genesis 14:18-20 "King of righteousness. Published by Elfrieda Palmer Modified over 3 years ago. Embed. Presentation on theme: "Shadows & Substance Colossians 2:16-17. Melchizedek A minor OT character Genesis 14:18-20 A minor OT character Genesis 14:18-20 "King of righteousness." Presentation transcript: 1 Shadows & Substance Colossians 2:16-17. 2 Melchizedek A minor OT character Genesis 14:18-20 A minor OT character Genesis 14:18-20 "King of righteousness" "King of Salem" | King of peace "First person called a priest.