The author of Hebrews goes to great lengths to explain Jesus’ role as heavenly high priest in light of Melchizedek’s priesthood, offering tantalizing hints of their relationship by commenting three times in chapters 5-6 (5:6; 5:10; 6:20) that Jesus is priest or even high priest “according to the order of Melchizedek.” He lays the exegetical groundwork for this correlation by reading Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:1 together in Heb 1:5-14 and then Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:4 together in Heb 5:5-6. It is not until Heb 7, however, that the author finally explains this relationship, then he promptly drops Melchizedek from further discussion after 7:17, apparently convinced that he has served his purpose.

As with many things concerning the book of Hebrews, the author’s understanding of Melchizedek has long puzzled interpreters. Clearly Melchizedek is utilized to affirm the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood to the Levitical priesthood, but no scholarly consensus has been reached as to how the author understands the nature of Melchizedek, especially in 7:3, where...
one reads of Melchizedek: “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.” An understanding of the author’s conception of Melchizedek is important, however, in order for the reader to grasp fully how the author uses 7:3 to explain Jesus’ priesthood later in the chapter.

Hebrews 7 unfolds in a logical manner. The author opens the chapter with a midrash on this passage incorporating Gen 14:18-20, including a playful interpretation of the significance of Melchizedek’s reception of tithes from Abraham (7:1-10). His point is that Melchizedek’s priesthood is superior to that of the Levites, thus Jesus, as a priest like Melchizedek, also holds a superior priesthood. The appearance of Jesus as a priest—despite Jesus’ roots in the tribe of Judah, but instead in the order of the non-Levitical Melchizedek—is said to be necessary because perfection was not attainable in the Levitical system (7:11-14). He arises as priest “through the power of an indestructible life” (7:16) and takes his office by virtue of a divine oath (7:20-22). By this point Melchizedek has faded from view; even the book’s final refrain of Ps 110:4 is cut short before mention of him in Heb 7:21. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the advantages of Jesus’ eternal nature (7:23-25) and the finality of his self-sacrifice (7:26-28) compared to the Levitical priesthood; here the author compares Jesus and the Levitical priests directly without utilizing the three-way comparison vital earlier in the chapter.

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3 Hebrews uses the name Ἄβραμ anachronistically for Abram, following the spelling used in the LXX for the patriarch’s later name. This practice was common in accounts of this meeting by writers in the Second Temple period, as evidenced by the similar habits of Pseudo-Eupolemus (Ἀβραὰμ) and Josephus (Ἀβραὰμ). Philo does not call the patriarch by name in his accounts of the encounter with Melchizedek, but his normal practice is to use Ἄβραμ. On the other hand, the authors of Jubilees and the Genesis Apocryphon preserve versions of the earlier name Abram.

4 Melchizedek, according to Heb 7:3, ἀφωμοιομενὸς δὲ τῷ ὑιῷ τοῦ θεοῦ, “resembles the Son of God.”
The author correlates Jesus and Melchizedek in part because both are priests outside of the Levitical system. Some scholars find this to be the only connection between Melchizedek and Jesus in the passage, even in 7:3, while others argue that the author of Hebrews asserts more—that Melchizedek and Jesus also share an eternal nature. Hebrews seems to hint at this in 7:8 (where Melchizedek is referenced as “one of whom it is testified that he lives”) and 7:16 (where he is ascribed “an indestructible life”), but ultimately everything hinges on the interpretation of 7:3.

**The Nature of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:3**

The difficulty of understanding Hebrews’ view of Melchizedek arises in part from the sparsity of information about the figure in the Hebrew Bible. He is mentioned there in only two passages: Gen 14:18-20, in which the Canaanite priest-king abruptly encounters Abram as he returns from warfare; and Ps 110:4, a royal psalm in which a Davidic king is also promised a priesthood. He is mentioned by several writers in Second Temple Jewish literature, who overwhelmingly draw on the narrative of Gen 14 rather than the poetic account of Ps 110.5

In Heb 7:1, one reads that Melchizedek met Abraham as he was returning from war and blessed him. The awkward nature of the Genesis account, in which the king of Sodom went out to meet Abram but Melchizedek instead encounters him first, prompted multiple explanations in the Second Temple period. The author of the Genesis Apocryphon, for example, sought to

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5 For fuller discussion of Melchizedek traditions in the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Second Temple literature, see Mason, ‘You Are a Priest Forever,’ 138-90.
smooth over the disjuncture, perhaps even implying that the two kings rendezvoused first and then traveled together to meet Abraham (1QapGen ar XXII 13-14).  

Melchizedek is proclaimed great in Heb 7:4 because Abraham paid him a tithe, but the Hebrew of Gen 14:20 is ambiguous about who pays whom. The author of Hebrews, like Josephus (Ant. 1.181), Philo (Congr. 99), the author of the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen ar XXII 17), and numerous modern Bible translation committees, confidently asserts that Abraham pays it, though Pseudo-Eupolemus may preserve an alternate tradition. Unlike in Hebrews, where the tithe episode offers playful but conclusive proof of Melchizedek’s superiority over the Levitical priesthood, Philo and the author of Jubilees (13:25) use this passage to support the practice of tithing in the Levitical system, though Philo as expected allegorizes it.

Melchizedek is identified in Gen 14:18 as priest of El Elyon (אֵל עַל), and his own name literally means “my king is Sedek.” Though assimilated into the Pentateuch as a priest of Abram’s God Most High, most modern scholars understand him originally as a character in the service of a Canaanite deity, either Sedek or El ‘Elyon. Nevertheless, most Second Temple period interpreters followed the biblical example of assimilating Melchizedek into the priesthood

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6 Admittedly the author does not explicitly state that the two kings traveled together, but the king of Sodom is said to travel to Salem, home of Melchizedek, and both kings subsequently encounter Abram, who was camped in the Valley of Shaveh. Michael C. Astour, “Shaveh, Valley of,” ABD 5:1168, notes that several ancient writers located this valley near Jerusalem.

7 Pseudo-Eupolemus (Eusebius, Praep. ev. 9.17.6) may preserve an alternate tradition: Melchizedek invites the patriarch to Jerusalem to tour the Temple and showers him with gifts. Pseudo-Eupolemus states that παρά δὲ τοῦ Μελχισεเดκ . . . λαβεῖν δῶρα, but the identification of these “gifts” and their possible correlation with elements of Gen 14:18-20 are uncertain. Among major modern Bible translations, the editors of the NJPS are most cautious, printing the name of Abram as payee in brackets.

8 This is in contrast to the popular—but grammatically specious—etymology common in the Second Temple period among Greek-speaking Jews that rendered Melchizedek as “king of righteousness” (see further below).

9 See, for example, Claus Westermann, Genesis 12-36 (CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 203-04.
of Abraham’s God. Josephus (J.W. 6.428) and likely also Philo (Congr. 99) understood him to be God’s first priest, and Josephus, who explicitly remarks that he was Canaanite, nevertheless credited him—and not Solomon—as having constructed the first Temple devoted to the Hebrew God in Jerusalem. Hebrews alone contrasts the priesthoods of Melchizedek and the Levites.

Not content simply to identify Melchizedek by his vocations, the author of Hebrews offers etymological interpretations of the mysterious figure’s name and royal title in Heb 7:2. Thus the name Melchizedek is said to mean “king of righteousness,” and as king of Salem he is “king of peace.” These popular but specious etymologies are similar to those of Philo (Leg. 3.79) and Josephus (Ant. 1.180).

Melchizedek, then, obviously is extremely important for the argument of the author of Hebrews. Who, though, is Melchizedek for this author? Again we turn to 7:3.

Commentators on this verse routinely address the possibility that a hymn has been utilized here, but there is no consensus and theories vary widely. The more important question concerns the meaning of the statements that Melchizedek lacks parentage, a genealogy, and both temporal origin and terminus. Clearly the ultimate purpose of this language is to describe the Son of God by extension, yet the statements are made about Melchizedek, who thus resembles Jesus. Two major approaches are common today.

Fred Horton is a major spokesman for the view that the author of Hebrews understood Melchizedek as a mere mortal priest, and his argument was followed by William Lane in his Word commentary. Horton notes that numerous interpreters have argued that the affirmations

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10 Josephus denies Solomon credit for the Temple altogether. He dates the Babylonian destruction of the Temple to 1468 years, six 6 months after its foundation (War 6.437), clearly associating its construction with Melchizedek rather than Solomon.

11 Fred 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:
about Melchizedek in Heb 7:3 were derived from the ancient Jewish interpretative principle that what is not specified in the biblical text does not exist. Most interpreters have then argued that the author of Hebrews declares Melchizedek to be without parentage, etc., because no data for any of these things can be found in Genesis, hence the silence there actually speaks loudly. Horton rejects this particular exegetical move, noting that numerous figures appear in Scripture without such information being discussed, yet they are not regarded as otherworldly. Instead, Horton uses this assumption from silence in a different way. He notes that both Josephus and Philo seem to derive the idea that Melchizedek was the first priest of God from the silence about any prior priests in Genesis. He then asserts that Hebrews has done a similar thing, so that the issue in 7:3 is the lack of a Levitical priestly genealogy, not a lack of ordinary human ancestry. Melchizedek’s priesthood is a model for understanding Jesus’ priesthood because both lack this Levitical heritage. This for Horton is clear because Jesus is said to share that quality with Melchizedek, yet just a few verses later Jesus is identified by the author of Hebrews as a descendent of the tribe of Judah (7:14). Jesus is not a successor to Melchizedek; instead “every feature of significance in Melchizedek’s priesthood is recapitulated on a grander scale in Christ’s priesthood.”

A very different approach maintains that the author of Hebrews was indeed addressing Melchizedek’s ontology in 7:3 and thus considered him to be a heavenly figure, perhaps even angelic. Such arguments have appeared in various forms, including a seminal article by Marinus de Jonge and Adam S. van der Woude and more recently in Harold Attridge’s commentary in the


12 Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 153-54.
13 Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 156-60.
14 Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 162-63.
15 Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 161.
Hermeneia series.\(^{16}\) Paul Kobelski also took up this position in his book *Melchizedek and Melchireša‘*.\(^{17}\)

Kobelski opposes Horton’s interpretation head-on, flatly rejecting the view that Heb 7:3 addresses only Melchizedek’s lack of priestly credentials. Whereas Horton asserted that both Josephus and Philo understood Melchizedek as the first priest—and the author of Hebrews likely did the same—Kobelski argues that Horton has misread Philo, who is more concerned with allegorical notions of Melchizedek’s perfection than his supposed status as the original priest.\(^{18}\) Instead of basing his interpretation of Heb 7:3 on any argument from silence Gen 14, Kobelski links Hebrews’ ideas of Melchizedek’s mysterious qualities with Ps 110:4.\(^{19}\) Thus the divine oath directed to the Son, “you are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek,” must also demand that Melchizedek is eternal.\(^{20}\) Kobelski adds that speculation on an otherworldly Melchizedek in the Second Temple period confirms and even contributes to Hebrews’ thought, which already is saturated by Ps 110:4. This understanding of an eternal Melchizedek is supported internally by the statement in Heb 7:8 that Melchizedek is “one of whom it is testified that he lives.”\(^{21}\)

Kobelski appeals to extrabiblical traditions of a heavenly Melchizedek while rejecting the idea that the author of Hebrews drew upon particular texts like 11QMelchizedek.\(^{22}\) Attridge takes a similar position, stating that the author probably knew contemporary traditions of


\(^{19}\) Kobelski, *Melchizedek*, 123.


\(^{21}\) Kobelski, *Melchizedek*, 123.

\(^{22}\) Kobelski, *Melchizedek*, 127.
“Melchizedek as a divine or heavenly being” and surveys numerous texts (including Philo’s allegorical and psychological interpretations, the Dead Sea Scrolls, 2 Enoch, and manifold rabbinic, patristic, and Gnostic treatments of the figure) without specifying the tradition most likely shared with Hebrews.23 Craig Koester goes further and rejects all notions that Hebrews reflects extrabiblical traditions about Melchizedek, allowing only that Hebrews uses language for Melchizedek that would affirm true divinity in Greco-Roman contexts.24

My own position is similar to that of Kobelski, though I am even more willing than he to admit similar conceptions of Melchizedek at Qumran and in Hebrews. Melchizedek’s eternal nature likely is influenced by the author’s meditation on Ps 110:4, but the silence of Gen 14 may also contribute to Hebrews’ thought; such connections likely were already made in the Melchizedek traditions available to the author of Hebrews, leaving his original contributions as the clever association of Melchizedek and Jesus and his novel interpretation that Melchizedek received tithes from the Levites through their ancestor Abraham. Clearly Hebrews presents both Melchizedek and Jesus as lacking Levitical credentials, but more must be at stake because Heb 7:15-17 calls “the power of an indestructable life” a common element in the priesthoods of Melchizedek and Jesus.25

Many scholars assert that Hebrews drew upon extrabiblical Melchizedek traditions yet are hesitant to identify the most logical extant sources with which such traditions are shared. To his credit, Kobelski says much to affirm the significance of Qumran traditions for understanding Hebrews, yet he too places great emphasis on the differences between these portraits of

23 Attridge, Hebrews, 191-92.
25 Kobelski, Melchizedek, 118.
Melchizedek. Almost always left unsaid by those who suggest extracanonical influences on Hebrews without specifying where such are found, however, is the fact that the only Second Temple reflections on a heavenly Melchizedek that can be dated confidently before the authorship of Hebrews (likely in the late first century C.E.) are those at Qumran. Similarly, the only Second Temple discussion of Melchizedek outside of Hebrews that appears to draw on Ps 110:4 is found at Qumran. It behooves us, then, to take yet another look at those materials.

*Melchizedek in the Dead Sea Scrolls*

Theories of conceptual links between Qumran and Hebrews admittedly have a sordid history. Within a decade of the discovery of the first Dead Sea Scrolls, several scholars (including Otto Michel, Yigael Yadin, David Flusser, Jean Daniélou, Ceslas Spicq, and Hans Kosmala) were proposing numerous similarities of thought with Hebrews, some even identifying its recipients as Essenes. Yigael Yadin, for example, in 1957 boldly called the Dead Sea


Scrolls sect “the missing link” for understanding the issues addressed in Hebrews, proposing that the recipients were Christian converts who had left Qumran but retained some of their sectarian beliefs. He surveyed Hebrews’ comparisons of Jesus with the prophets, angels, Moses, and Levitical priesthood and concluded that Hebrews’ presentation of Jesus as high priest was necessary because the letter’s formerly-Essene readers assumed the priority of an Aaronic priestly messiah over a Davidic Messiah. Thus they could only recognize the unique authority of Jesus if he too were a priest, one whose own sacrifice rendered unnecessary the continuing cultic liturgies in the End of Days as expected at Qumran. After examining other common motifs and the mutually heavy dependence of Hebrews and the Scrolls on the Pentateuch, Yadin concluded, “There could be no stronger appeal to the hearts and minds of people descending from the DSS Sect than in those metaphors which are abundant and characteristic in the Epistle to the Hebrew [sic].”

Similar conclusions were reached by other scholars of the era, but such views soon fell out of favor when others in the 1960s, including F. F. Bruce and Herbert Braun, penned forceful critiques questioning the nature of the proposed parallels. For all practical purposes, these responses ended attempts to correlate Qumran’s expectation of a messiah of Aaron with Jesus as

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“L’Épître aux Hébreux, Apollos, Jean-Baptiste, les Hellénistes et Qumrán,” RevQ 3 (1958-59): 365-90; and Hans Kosmala, Hebräer-Essener-Christen (StPB 1; Leiden: Brill, 1959), who proposed that the recipients held views midway on a continuum between Essenism and Christianity and hailed from the community responsible for the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Joseph Coppens, Les affinités qumrâniennes de l’Épître aux Hébreux (ALBO 6/1; Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1962), 6-14, provides a survey of early research on the topic (and ultimately rejects the position).


high priest in Hebrews. Soon, however, claims arose that yet another Qumran text offered a possible point of contact with Hebrews. Discovered in 1956, the fragmentary text of 11QMelchizedek was first published in 1965 by van der Woude in German.\textsuperscript{32} An expanded English edition appeared the following year in an article co-written with de Jonge.\textsuperscript{33} The classic understanding of Melchizedek as an angelic warrior figure in God’s service in 11QMelchizedek was first articulated here, and in the latter article the authors asserted a conceptual relationship between Qumran and Hebrews apart from the earlier appeals to priestly messianism. Instead, they argued that similar heavenly understandings of Melchizedek were present at Qumran and in Hebrews. This was most evident in the interpretation of Gen 14:18-20 in Heb 7, where the author of Hebrews apparently assumed that it was an angelic Melchizedek who had appeared to Abraham as the king of Sodom.

Before turning to examine 11QMelchizedek more closely, it is important first to consider other references to Melchizedek in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Unfortunately the Qumran texts that discuss Melchizedek tend to be in poor states of preservation, yet enough material has survived to reveal their stance toward him.\textsuperscript{34}

The name “Melchizedek” is a proposed reading in three small fragments from the cave 4 and 11 manuscripts of \textit{Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice}. These scrolls date to the first century


\textsuperscript{34} Obviously the \textit{Genesis Apocryphon} was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, but it seems not to be a Qumran sectarian text. Its presence there, however, is significant, as discussed below. For a brief overview of critical issues concerning the text, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Genesis Apocryphon,” \textit{Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls} (ed. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1:302-04.
B.C.E., though the songs likely originated outside of Qumran. As the title implies, these texts are songs to accompany thirteen Sabbath offerings, and the officiants are angels with priestly roles. The songs chiefly describe the glories of God and the heavenly sanctuary. Relatively little text has survived concerning the nature of the sacrifices themselves; one fragmentary line implies burnt offerings by the mention of aroma (יַרְדּוֹן; 11Q13 IX, 4).

A מֶלֶךְ element is clearly preserved in two lines of 4Q401, and in the DJD edition Carol Newsom reads 4Q401 11 3 as מַלְכִּיָּזֶדֶק, priest in the assembly of God. If this reading is correct, it is very significant in light of the context of Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice—Melchizedek is here presented as priest in a text “largely concerned with invoking and describing the praise of angelic priests in the heavenly temple.” Melchizedek then would be a heavenly, angelic priest in the service of God.

Newsom notes that it would be the only place in the text where an angel is named, and use of the word priest in the singular (ֹלֹהַ) itself is unusual in Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. James Davila further notes that this section of 4Q401 appears to be part of the fifth song, “which describes an eschatological ‘war in heaven.’” This would be consistent with the presentation of Melchizedek in other Qumran texts.

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36 For the text of the cave 11 manuscripts, see Florentino García Martínez, Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, and Adam S. van der Woude, Qumran Cave 11, II:11Q2-18, 11Q20-31 (DJD XXIII; Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 291.
While additional references to Melchizedek in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifices* have been proposed by some, it will suffice to say that at least one passage in the *Songs* appears to identify Melchizedek as an angelic priest serving in God’s heavenly temple court and the context *may* be a discussion of eschatological warfare. This differs significantly from contemporary traditions about Melchizedek outside of Qumran.

Melchizedek seems also to be mentioned in 4Q Visions of Amram. This text from the second century B.C.E. takes the form of a testament and recounts a vision of its namesake, the grandson of Levi. Amram dreams that two watchers are fighting over him, one evil and the other good, and he inquires about their identities (and presumably their spheres of influence). Though no letters of Melchizedek’s name are preserved, Józef Milik and several subsequent scholars have proposed that 4Q544 3 IV, 2-3 reads: “[My] three names [are Michael, Prince of Light, and Melchizedek].” This is proposed based on a reconstruction of parallel opposites in 4Q544 2 III, 3: “[And these are his three names: Belial, Prince of Darkness], and Melchireša‘.”

Assuming this widely-accepted reconstruction is correct, Melchizedek is identified with or as the angel Michael and the “Prince of Light.” Michael often appears in Qumran texts as the opponent of Belial and is invoked in the war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness in the *War Scroll*, a text that may also describe Michael as “Prince of Light” (1QM XIII, 10-

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40 Davila, for example, finds other references to Melchizedek in 4Q401 22 3 and 11Q17 II, 7. See Davila, *Liturgical Works*, 133, 162.
11). Melchizedek then would be an angelic opponent of Belial in the eschatological war on behalf of God’s people.

This portrait of Melchizedek at Qumran is consistent with what most scholars have found in 11QMelchizedek. Admittedly this interpretation has not been unanimous. Milik considered Melchizedek in 11QMelchizedek to be simply a hypothesis of God, akin to the ‘angel of the LORD’ in the Pentateuch. Paul Rainbow argued that Melchizedek is the Davidic Messiah, not any sort of heavenly figure, and he likewise rejected the readings of Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Visions of Amram discussed earlier. Gareth Cockerill argued that ‘Melchizedek’ in 11QMelchizedek must be understood not as a name but as the descriptive

43 For a survey of Michael traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Erik W. Larson, “Michael,” EDSS 1:546-48. Larsen asserts that some Gnostic texts identify Michael with Melchizedek. This is not explicit in the texts, though they do correlate Melchizedek and Christ. See Birger A. Pearson, “Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism,” in Biblical Figures Outside the Bible (ed. Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 1998), 176-202; and Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 131-51. Two medieval rabbinic texts identify Michael with Melchizedek, a point sometimes raised in support of reconstructing a similar correlation in 4Q544; see van der Woude, “Melchizedek,” 370-71; and de Jonge and van der Woude, “11Q Melchizedek,” 305. Horton wisely cautions against this, stating that “the medieval evidence . . . cannot be taken seriously in the form in which De Jonge and Van der Woude [sic] present it” and that “there is no more justification for quoting short [rabbinic] texts out of context . . . than there is for similar quotations from Christian writers” (Melchizedek Tradition, 81-82).

44 Van der Woude, “Melchizedek,” 354-73. The text was published (reflecting minor changes from the editio princeps) with an English translation by de Jonge and van der Woude, “11Q Melchizedek,” 301-26. Van der Woude’s editio princeps also served as the base text in Joseph Fitzmyer’s article “Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11,” in The Semitic Background of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 245-67; repr. from JBL 86 (1967). The DJD edition, on which this discussion depends, is that of Florentino García Martínez, Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, and Adam S. van der Woude, Qumran Cave 11, II:11Q2-18, 11Q20-31 (DJD XXIII; Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 221-41, Pl. XXVII.

45 For further discussion of the approaches briefly surveyed here, see Mason, ‘You Are a Priest Forever,’ 185-90.


phrase “king of righteousness” applied to Yahweh.\(^\text{48}\) This assumes that a writer in the Hebrew language would utilize a questionable etymological interpretation otherwise evidenced only by writers of Greek. The most significant dissenting voice has been that of Franco Manzi, who argued for a complex development of thought at Qumran from which the king-priest Melchizedek of Gen 14 and Genesis Apocryphon was reinterpreted in light of Ps 110, alternately as the angel Michael in Visions of Amram, where Aaron also is set aside as priest and called “the angel of God,” and later as an angelic priest in Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. Through this process the figure Melchizedek becomes so synonymous with the function of deliverance that that the name “king of justice” somehow comes to be used of Yahweh directly in 11QMelchizedek.\(^\text{49}\)

Time does not allow here a thorough review of each of these ideas, and it will suffice to say that none of these has attracted a large following among Qumran scholars. Most remain convinced that Melchizedek is a heavenly, angelic figure in 11QMelchizedek as in the two other scroll texts cited above.

The extant portions of 11QMelchizedek—like the scrolls mentioned earlier—do not overtly draw upon Gen 14:18-20 or Ps 110:4. Equally clear, though, is that the authors of Qumran who do or may mention Melchizedek have a well-developed understanding of the figure with biblical roots. This understanding seems to have been derived in some manner from Ps 110:4 rather than from Gen 14, the text favored by other Second Temple Jewish interpreters.

Most readers (ancient and modern) seem to have understood Ps 110:4 as addressed to someone receiving a eternal priesthood like that of Melchizedek apart from the Levitical order,


\(^{49}\) Franco Manzi, Melchisedek e l’angelologia nell’Epistola agli Ebrei e a Qumran (AnBib 136; Rome: Editrice Pontifico Instituto Biblico, 1997).
hence the common translation “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.” David Flusser, followed by James VanderKam and James Kugel, argues that the ambiguity of the Hebrew statement may have allowed it to be read in antiquity as directed to Melchizedek himself, thus “You are a priest forever by my decree, O Melchizedek.” Assuming the author of 11QMelchizedek read Ps 110:4 as stating that Melchizedek possessed an eternal priesthood, he must also be the figure addressed elsewhere in the psalm as enthroned at God’s right hand (Ps 110:1), having dominion over his enemies (Ps 110:1-2), and bringing judgment (Ps 110:5-6). This judgment theme then prompted the author to read Ps 82 (with its similar emphasis) as also about Melchizedek. Melchizedek seems clearly to be understood as מַלְכֵי יָהּ when Ps 82 is quoted in 11QMelch II, 10, and the text relates this final judgment with periods of Jubilee, sabbatical legislation, and the Day of Atonement. This pastiche of themes is justifiable: according to Lev 25:8-10, Jubilees (with their accompanying restoration of land and liberty) began on the Day of Atonement, and a significant feature of Gen 14 is Abram’s return of persons and property in the context of his encounter with Melchizedek. As VanderKam notes, “it seems that the writer of 11QMelchizedek used a series of biblical passages and themes that allowed him to connect Melchizedek, the day of atonement, and sabbatical and jubilee periods.”

Portions of at least three columns of the text have been preserved, but only bits of columns I and III remain. As for col. II, no complete lines among its 25 remain, but enough

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52 VanderKam, “Sabbatical Chronologies,” 175.
material has survived to allow significant reconstruction of this section of the document. The text likely was written in the late 2nd century B.C.E, with the manuscript 11Q13 dating to the mid-first century B.C.E. The text essentially is a midrash—or perhaps a thematic pesher—providing an eschatological interpretation of several passages of Scripture, including materials from Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15:2, Pss 7 and 82, Daniel 9, and Isaiah 52 and 61.

Much has been written about how the author quotes and uses Scripture. A comprehensive treatment is not appropriate here, and admittedly the author’s practices are not entirely consistent. But in general, God is לָוָי or הַיָּהָנָה in 11QMelchizedek while Melchizedek is מֵלכִּזְדֵק, even in quoted passages like Ps 82 in which מֵלכִּזְדֵק clearly is God in the original context. This use of citations is similar to Hebrews’ practice of applying quotations originally about God or the Davidic king to the Son, i.e. Jesus, in Heb 1:5-14.

Indeed, Melchizedek appears here as the figure carrying out both God’s deliverance and judgment. Deliverance is the theme at the beginning and end of col. II. The author understands history as consisting of ten Jubilee units concluding with an eschatological Day of Atonement (line 7). In lines 2-9, Melchizedek acts to deliver the “captives” (line 4), presumably the same

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54 See Annette Steudel, “Melchizedek,” EDSS 1:535-37, esp. 536, for a brief summary of dating issues for 11QMelchizedek.
55 On 11QMelchizedek as pesher and midrash with a schematic outline of col. II, see Mason, “Hebrews 7:3,” 54-55.
56 See Mason, ‘You Are a Priest Forever,’ 177-83, for an examination of the use of these terms in col. II.
57 See Kobelski, Melchizedek, 49-50, for a brief survey of other Second Temple Jewish literature in which time is divided into Jubilees or weeks of years. The division of time into Jubilee periods in 11QMelchizedek differs from that in the book of Jubilees as the latter envisions many more Jubilee periods; Jubilees narrates events into a fiftieth Jubilee period, which spans only the time from creation to the early exodus period, and an unspecified number of future Jubilees are envisioned (Jub. 50:4-6).

VanderKam implies that a connection between the Day of Atonement and Jubilee years may already be present in Lev 25:9, where a trumpet call on the tenth day of the seventh month (i.e., the Day of Atonement) announces the beginning of a Jubilee year. See his article “Yom
persons elsewhere called “the inheritance of Melchizedek” (line 5); he proclaims liberty to them and frees them “from the debt of all their iniquities” (line 6). This last phrase has cultic overtones, and the next line mentions the Day of Atonement. Melchizedek also appears to be the agent executing God’s pronouncement of Jubilee (lines 3-4). Melchizedek announces liberty in the first week of the tenth Jubilee (line 6), but it is unclear if liberation actually occurs at that time or if this is a proleptic announcement of liberation that will come in conjunction with the eschatological Day of Atonement at the end of the tenth Jubilee, when “atonement shall be made for all the sons of light and for the men of the lot of Melchizedek” (line 8). This Day of Atonement appears to be the “year of grace of Melchizedek” (line 9). Melchizedek is the active figure thus far in the passage; since he is presented as a priest in Gen 14; Ps 110:4; and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, it seems clear that the author of 11QMelchizedek envisions him as the high priest of this eschatological Day of Atonement.58

The theme of justice and judgment is developed chiefly with interpretations of Ps 82 and Ps 7 (Ps 82:1; Ps 7:8-9; and Ps 82:2) in lines 10-11. In short, the overall impression is that

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58 See a similar suggestion in Kobelski, Melchizedek, 57-59, though his understanding of Melchizedek as priest is based in part on a very different rendering of II, 5 than that adopted in DJD. See Kobelski, Melchizedek, 5, 13, for his transcription and textual notes. Unfortunately it seems impossible to verify either Kobelski’s or the DJD reading of the first several words of line 5 using the photographs in DJD XXIII or electronic editions such as The Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library, Revised Edition 2006 (ed. E. Tov; Leiden: Brill). Van der Woude proposed לֶבֶן in a lacuna in 11QMelch II, 6, which would make the priestly action of Melchizedek explicit (“Melchisedek,” 358; also de Jonge and van der Woude, “11Q Melchizedek,” 302) and was followed by Fitzmyer, “Further Light,” 259. The reading in DJD agrees with that of Kobelski, Melchizedek, 5. For a rejection of the identification of Melchizedek as priest in 11QMelchizedek, see Franz Laub, Bekenntnis und Auslegung: Die paränetische Funktion der Christologie im Hebräerbrief (Biblische Untersuchungen 15; Regensburg: Pustet, 1980), 39. See also an overview of the issue in Anders Aschim, “Melchizedek and Jesus: 11QMelchizedek and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus (ed. C. C. Newman, J. R. Davila, and G. S. Lewis; JSJSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 128-47, esp. 139-40.
Melchizedek is an angelic רוחוֹת in the heavenly court of ה' who administers justice (with the aid of other members of the heavenly court, so line 14’s assertion that “all the gods of justice are to his help”). Melchizedek acts on behalf of ה' against Belial and those of his lot.59

Deliverance is again stressed in lines 15-25. The major text under consideration is Isa 52:7, where a messenger announces peace and salvation and speaks of the kingship of the רוחוֹת of Zion. Time does not allow for elaboration here, but Melchizedek seems to be the רוחוֹת rather than the messenger.

We see then the portrait of Melchizedek as an angelic priest in the eschatological service of God, confirming the early assessment of de Jonge and van der Woude. Interestingly, there is no hint at Qumran of tensions between this angelic priesthood and that of the Levites. Indeed, the conviction expressed in several Dead Sea Scrolls was that their earthly liturgies were offered alongside those of the angelic priests.60

The Significance of the Qumran Portrait of Melchizedek for Interpreting Hebrews 7:3

As noted earlier, the discovery of the Qumran texts prompted a flurry of interest in the possible relationship of those traditions with Hebrews. Viewed from hindsight, one easily can admit that several early proponents of Qumran-Hebrews ties zealously claimed too much. But recently Anders Aschim has argued that the examination concerning Melchizedek should be reopened, and the conclusions here also affirm that need.61

59 For similar interpretations, see Kobelski, Melchizedek, 72; and Aschim, “Melchizedek and Jesus,” 132-35. As noted above, some scholars propose alternate identifications.  
Likewise, others recently have argued that the Qumran materials should no longer be treated as representative of (in the words of Charlotte Hempel) “a small group on the fringes of late Second Temple society.” If, for example, such diverse ancient writers as Pliny the Elder could discuss the Qumran sect and Josephus and Philo could praise the virtues of the distinctive practices of Essenes with reasonable—but certainly not total—accuracy, might that not also imply that theological tenets of the Qumran community and their fellow Essenes could be known and even shared to an extent in wider Judaism and early Christianity?

Admittedly no textual dependence of Hebrews on a Qumran document can be claimed. What can be considered are hints of shared views in the Qumran texts and Hebrews. Most intriguing is that both traditions discuss Melchizedek in a context much concerned with the Day of Atonement. Some common stream of thought must be present to explain this. Nothing on the surface in Gen 14 or Ps 110 points to the Day of Atonement, yet the author of Hebrews can go so far as to call Jesus “high” priest in the order of Melchizedek. The fact that the Qumran texts also associate Melchizedek with the Day of Atonement implies that a shared tradition undergirds both.

Can one reconcile the portrayals of Melchizedek as an angelic, eschatological warrior figure at Qumran with that of the priest who encountered Abraham in Hebrews? It has long been traditional to compare presentations of Melchizedek in 11QMelchizedek and in Hebrews with the conclusion that the figures vary greatly. The most that is conceded typically is that the

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64 Anders Aschim, “Melchizedek and Jesus,” 139-40, makes a similar point.
portrait in 11QMelchizedek bears more similarities to Hebrews’ presentation of Jesus than to the latter’s discussion of Melchizedek.⁶⁵ It is true that the differing emphases at Qumran and in Hebrews cannot be ignored. The portrait we have seen at Qumran is of a heavenly, eschatological figure who is also an angelic priest. Nothing is said in these texts about his kingship in Sodom and encounter with Abram, i.e., the very elements from Gen 14 that fascinated other Second Temple period interpreters. Certainly these features are discussed in Hebrews, but there the author combines them with his angelic notion of Melchizedek, something not explicit in Gen 14 but certainly not foreign to that book.

That, though, does not mean that Qumran and Hebrews have contradictory conceptions. Obviously the Genesis account was known at Qumran, and one must not ignore the portraits of Melchizedek in other texts the Qumran community prized, including the Genesis Apocryphon and Jubilees (presuming their copies of the latter predated the haplography that plagued later manuscripts).⁶⁶ One is correct to note a distinction between texts composed at Qumran and those simply read there, but many scrolls scholars note that Jubilees was esteemed at Qumran on a

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⁶⁵ See, for example, the comparisons offered by Horton, Melchizedek Tradition, 167; and Kobelski, Melchizedek, 128.

⁶⁶ Unfortunately the relevant passage is not extant in the Qumran manuscripts of Jubilees. Also, most extant Ethiopic manuscripts of Jubilees lack mention of Melchizedek and have a lacuna at 13:25 where his encounter with Abram is expected. Context, though, makes it clear that such once stood in the text, and a few minor manuscripts of Jubilees do have some remaining reference to the figure, even if only in marginal notes. It has sometimes been argued that mention of Melchizedek was suppressed in the scribal tradition; for discussion of this view, see Richard Longenecker, “The Melchizedek Argument of Hebrews: A Study in the Development and Circumstantial Expression of New Testament Thought,” in Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd (ed. R. A. Guelich; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 161-85, esp. 164-65; followed by Lane, Hebrews 1-8, 160; a similar theory is implied by James L. Kugel, Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 293. On the other hand, James VanderKam, editor of the most recent critical edition of the Ethiopic Jubilees, argues instead that haplography occurred in the Hebrew textual tradition of Jubilees that predated its translation into Ethiopic. See James C. VanderKam, The Book of Jubilees (2 vols.; CSCO 510-11; Scriptores Aethiopici 87-88; Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 1:82; 2:81-82.
level comparable with Scripture. Both of these texts have relatively tame retellings of Gen 14. Thus at Qumran one could find very different presentations of Melchizedek in very significant non-biblical texts.

As for the judgment role of Melchizedek in 11QMelchizedek, admittedly this is missing in Hebrews. Qumran’s presentation of the angelic Melchizedek had two emphases—he is a heavenly priest, and he is an eschatological warrior akin to the archangel Michael. Clearly the judgment activity is absent from Hebrews’ portrayal of Melchizedek, but neither is that an emphasis for Hebrews’ presentation of Jesus, and other early Christian texts (including Revelation and Jude) could maintain a role for the archangel Michael—with whom Melchizedek was assimilated at Qumran and later in Jewish tradition—alongside their obvious understanding of Jesus as the ultimate envoy of God. Similarly, the author of Hebrews could have shared certain aspects of thought concerning Melchizedek with the Qumran community without accepting their portrait in toto.

In the end, both Hebrews and the Qumran texts present an angelic, priestly Melchizedek whose status is inferred from Ps 110:4. Both also interweave Melchizedek traditions with Day of Atonement imagery. Further (and at the risk of oversimplification), the texts share a cosmology that includes a heavenly Temple with liturgical services, though Jesus’ ministry there (rather than Melchizedek’s) is emphasized in Hebrews. The author of Hebrews certainly shares some traditions and interpretations with other Second Temple texts, but those lack a heavenly Melchizedek and the Day of Atonement imagery. The correspondences between Qumran and

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67 Note, for example, the evaluation of James C. VanderKam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2002), 199: “Jubilees was most likely viewed as Scripture by the Qumran community.”

Hebrews are not exact—nor should that be expected given Hebrews’ commitment to present Jesus as the messiah—but they are similar enough to indicate shared views. No other Second Temple texts fit the bill, and this relationship can be affirmed without embracing the old, overzealous theories of an Essene readership for Hebrews.

The exegetical payoff is that Heb 7:3 can clearly be read as affirming that Jesus—like Melchizedek—is a heavenly figure. This then allows the author to stress the significance and advantages of Jesus’ abiding priesthood. The author affirms much more than the simple fact that both lack a Levitical priestly genealogy. That is true, but the author is also saying something very important about the nature of Jesus. Melchizedek and Jesus are not identical—they are said to resemble each other (7:3, 15)—and the Son’s superiority over other heavenly beings was duly emphasized in Heb 1. Yet, in the mind of the author of Hebrews, both are eternal figures.