

Jesus: The Incarnation of the Word by David C. Mitchell can be found at Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Incarnation-David-C-Mitchell/dp/1916619134>

The following is a transcription of a discussion with the author about the book from <https://newbooksnetwork.com/jesus> The transcription has slight paraphrases/edits for easier flow/reading in this document (apologies for any typos/misspellings).

As we read the discussion here it is important to recall and apply the following qualification from the author regarding the level of detail possible in a twenty minute discussion:

“...I've been thinking and puzzling over Psalm 110 for the last 30 years and some people ask me if my views have changed since I published the message of the Psalter back in 1997 and I reply really only one thing, my interpretation of Psalm 110. Now in this book I think I've finally got to the bottom of what Psalm 110 is saying and I spend some 20,000 words explaining it. So it's not easy to summarize in a few words....”

Begin Transcription:

Did the prophets foretell a priestly Messiah who was the mysterious figure of Melchizedek? In his new book, *Jesus: The Incarnation of the Word*, David Mitchell uses exegetical acumen and his expertise in ancient sources to offer intriguing answers to these and other questions. Join us as we speak with David about his latest book on the Messiah.

Michael Morales (“MM” moving forward) ~ You're listening to New Books and Biblical Studies, a channel of the New Books Network. And I'm your host, Michael Morales. David C. Mitchell, biblical scholar and musicologist is director of music in Holy Trinity Pro Cathedral, Brussels. His other books include *The Message of the Psalter* and *Messiah Ben Joseph*. David, welcome to New Books and Biblical Studies.

David C. Mitchell (“DCM” moving forward) ~ Thank you. Pleasure to be here.

MM: In a previous show we spoke about your earlier work, *Messiah Ben Joseph*, published in 2016. What's the relationship of that work to this new book, *Jesus, the Incarnation of the Word*?

DCM: The two books are related, although the titles don't seem very similar, I call them sibling volumes. They're related in so far as both books look at the doctrine of the Messiah from an Old Testament and Jewish perspective but there are important differences too. *Messiah Ben Joseph* examines the ancient origins of the suffering and sacrificial Messiah promised to Joseph, but *Jesus The Incarnation of the Word* looks at the priestly Messiah promised to the Levites.

Messiah Ben Joseph is a more academic work, it's also a more Jewish work. It depends heavily on rabbinic texts, with only one chapter on New Testament and patristic literature. But Jesus the Incarnation is both more popular and more Christian. There's much more discussion of the New Testament and patristic literature, but there is also a lot of rabbinic [content] too, and there is a lot of discussion of the genealogy of Jesus. It's something that's fascinated me for years and I decided to really get to grips with it and that's something that does not appear at all in Messiah Ben Joseph.

MM: Curiously you start your book on the incarnation with Melchizedek, a figure mentioned all the way back in the first book of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis. Tell us about Melchizedek and why you chose to start with him.

DCM: I like to start at the beginning and when it comes to the priest Messiah, Melchizedek is the beginning. And we first meet Melchizedek of course in Genesis 14. There he is the priest king of Shalim that is Jerusalem in the time of Abraham, and he blesses Abraham after Abraham returns victorious from his battle with the kings of the East. And I look at the various historical views of the figure, Jewish views and Christian views. Some Jews and Christians think he was mortal, and others, also Jews and also Christians think he was an immortal, an Angel, or perhaps something greater.

Having looked at the evidence I weighed it up and the first thing that is clear is that the oldest interpretive traditions like the Dead Sea Melchizedek text, which dates from before 100 BC, they see Melchizedek as definitely not a mortal. He is a high and exalted figure who seems to be both the Messiah and the God of Israel and other early Christians held such a view as well. The most prominent among the fathers would be Ambrose of Milan, who said God is Melchizedek.

But there were whole groups of early Christians called the Melchizedekians who said Melchizedek was the son of God. Yet later rabbinic tradition tries to put down Melchizedek and said he is the son of Noah, and that he was a priest but he lost his priesthood to Abraham and this view was followed by some Christians too.

The most prominent among them was Jerome. Jerome as you know had bought heavily into rabbinic interpretation. And Jerome is opposed to the Melchizedekians and he brands them as heretics.

Now the next thing is that all through Genesis we meet this figure called the Angel of the Lord, or the Word of the Lord, who speaks with Abraham and others face to face. And as most listening will probably know, the Angel of the Lord is no ordinary Angel. He is Jehovah himself. And this Angel of Jehovah keeps merging in and out of the character of the God of

Israel. And as we compare the Angel of the Lord to Melchizedek, I conclude that the two figures look so similar that they could be the same person. However, there is no solid evidence for that in Genesis. For solid evidence, we need to turn to Psalm 110 and this is where I get back to the Psalms.

MM: All right, let's go back to the Psalms. Melchizedek is also referenced in Psalm 110. Can you explain for us that connection?

DCM: Well, as anybody who's read my work knows, I'm very much a Psalm scholar. And I have to say I've been thinking and puzzling over Psalm 110 for the last 30 years and some people ask me if my views have changed since I published the message of the Psalter back in 1997 and I reply really only one thing, my interpretation of Psalm 110. Now in this book I think I've finally got to the bottom of what Psalm 110 is saying and I spend some 20,000 words explaining it. So it's not easy to summarize in a few words but let me try.

There are two main things here. The first is Jesus' interpretation in Matthew 22 and the second is the person of Melchizedek within Psalm 110 itself. Now Jesus' interpretation of the Psalm in Matthew 22 and his parallel is a crucial text. Jesus asked the Pharisees: "Whose son is the Messiah?" The Pharisees say: "He's David's son." Jesus says: "Why then does David speaking by the Spirit call him Lord?" And then Jesus quotes the first verse of the Psalm: "The Lord says to my Lord sit in my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." And then Jesus says: "If David calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" And most modern interpreters, including many evangelical Christians, unwittingly follow the view of Abraham Ebenezer, who sees two people in the heading of this Psalm. That is the Lord Jehovah who makes the promise, and David who is the psalmist, and who is also my Lord, who receives the promise. So the Ebenezer view sees two people, Jehovah the Promiser and David the Promisee and the Psalmist. And that is the popular view nowadays.

But Jesus sees it quite differently.

And I was always disturbed that the common evangelical tradition had basically left Jesus behind. Everybody was all agreeing and forgetting what Jesus said but Jesus sees it quite differently. He sees three people in the heading of the Psalm, namely David the Psalmist, Jehovah who makes the promise, and my Lord who receives the promise, who, for Jesus is the Messiah. So three people, Jehovah the Promisor, David the Psalmist, and Messiah, my Lord the Promisee. And I suggest that Jesus's interpretation is the only possible correct one. And there's a couple of reasons for this.

First, it is the most ancient interpretation. This is exactly the same interpretation we find implied in Daniel 7 and in 11 Q Melchizedek and in the Similitudes of Enoch, where there is one sitting

at the right hand of God who is a heavenly figure who is to come to earth as the Messiah. And second this interpretation is the only one that really makes sense. For the figure in Psalm 110 is made an eternal priest and the ruler of all the nations, and David was neither eternal nor a priest, nor the ruler of all the nations.

So then, having looked at Jesus's interpretation, we turn our attention to the Psalm, and I suggest that there is something badly wrong with the usual translation of verse 4. It says you're a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek, and from this we should conclude that someone is made a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. And when we see this, we have to ask, okay then, is Melchizedek a priest forever? If we reply no, Melchizedek was mortal, then it makes no sense at all. How can someone become an eternal priest in the order of a mortal? That's like saying I make you Archbishop of Canterbury forever and ever, just like Thomas A. Becket. That really makes no sense at all. But if on the other hand, we say, okay, then Melchizedek's an Immortal, he's a priest forever, then we must conclude that someone else is also being made an Eternal priest, just like Melchizedek who is also an eternal Priest. In that case, we have two eternal High Priests, both offering rival access to the one God, and that makes no sense either.

So there is a problem, and in the end there is only one solution, which is that our common English Bible translation of Psalm 110 verse 4 is the mother of all mistranslations for it's a very twisted reading of the Hebrew.

The obvious and clear reading of the Hebrew should say you are a priest forever according to my promise, oh Melchizedek. And that not only makes sense within the Psalm, it is the best translation of the Hebrew. And then everything makes sense. The figure at the beginning of the Psalm, the person David calls my Lord, the person that Jesus says is the Messiah, is Melchizedek. In other words, Melchizedek is the Son of God, is the Messiah, who is Jesus. So there is a fairly short summary of my 20,000-word discussion of the Psalm in the book. There is no other possible way to reasonably understand the Psalm. In any other way there are basic logical issues in trying to understand it.

MM: David would you also tell us about how the New Testament develops Psalm 110 in the figure of Melchizedek in relation to the person and work of Jesus?

DCM: I would say we find Melchizedek in two passages in particular in the New Testament, and that is in John chapter 8 and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In John chapter 8 Jesus is debating with the Judeans, probably Pharisees is what John means by Judeans, and they say they are children of Abraham and Jesus says they are seeking to kill him, a man who has spoken to them the truth from God. And then he says Abraham did not do such a thing. Now the implication is that Abraham knew such a man, one who spoke to them the truth from God and Jesus can only be referring to Melchizedek. For Abraham had no other teacher or priest. And

the implication is that Jesus knew all about this, so that the conversation goes on and 10 verses later the Judeans asked Jesus if he thinks he is greater than Abraham. And Jesus replies: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, he saw and was glad."

Now we shouldn't resort to paraphrase here, as if to say that Jesus meant that Abraham foresaw the time of the Messiah but didn't actually see him. Jesus's words seem quite clear, your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He seems to be claiming that Abraham in his lifetime saw him, and the Judeans grasp exactly that meaning, they reply: "But you're not 50 and you have seen Abraham." So they thought that Jesus was saying that he'd seen Abraham. Jesus then was claiming to have seen Abraham in the flesh and the question is, when did Jesus see Abraham in the flesh?

Well, the words Abraham rejoiced to see my day suggests Abraham met Jesus during a period of time of Jesus's appearance on earth. So I don't think we can limit the meaning of these words to simply one appearance to Abraham in Genesis 18. It seems to point to a time period when Jesus and Abraham overlapped that is when Melchizedek was the king of Priest king of Shalim and he met Abraham in Genesis 14, but probably also in Genesis 18 and probably also in Genesis 22 and perhaps at other times as well.

And then just look at Jesus's words. He says: "Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day." Now the usual Jewish expression is Abraham our father. When Jesus says Abraham your father, he's saying that he's not a descendant of Abraham and this leads to the following verse with the famous claim before Abraham was I am. Jesus here is claiming to be, well, it's too trite to say he's claiming to be God because I think it's more exact than that: He's claiming to be the Angel of the Lord, who is Melchizedek.

I propose to that exactly the same view is found in the description of Melchizedek in the book of Hebrews. The writer of Hebrews says Melchizedek is without father, without mother, without genealogy, without beginning or end of days. These words do not describe a mortal, although some people would like to take it that way, they do not describe a mortal, they describe an uncreated deity. And then the writer of Hebrews says that Melchizedek, like the Son of God, became a priest forever on the basis of an indestructible life. So Melchizedek has an indestructible life and the Son of God has an indestructible life. So it is perfectly clear that either we are back to the conundrum of two eternal priests offering eternal access to the one God, or else Melchizedek and the Son of God are one and the same. And that, surely, is the obvious answer. The two priests are one, Jesus is Melchizedek is the Son of God.

MM: Well, Melchizedek is just one strand in your book on Jesus. Before we let you go, can you give us a hint of some of the other lines you pursued?

DCM: I'm interested in Jesus before Bethlehem, but I'm also interested in Jesus on how he comes to Bethlehem. And so I spend four chapters on the genealogies of Jesus and Matthew and Luke and the background to them and of Mary's genealogy, which is not recorded in the New Testament but we have information on it in the Church Fathers. I draw a lot of supportive evidence from an old Jewish genealogy, ancient Jewish genealogy preserved by the Loeb family called the Loeb Tree. And I argue that there is no contradiction bringing the Loeb genealogy and it gives us extra insights. There was a French writer called Jacques Masson who wrote a huge treatise on the two genealogies and he concluded that the only way to harmonize them was that there was a bridge female from the line of Nathan and the line of Solomon who joined the two lines together in the person of Zerubbabel. And the Lobe genealogy not only confirms this, it gives us the name of this woman who was Tamar, the granddaughter of Josiah. She was the daughter of Josiah's first-born son who died before he came to the throne.

So in the end we find there is no contradiction between Matthew and Luke. Both are genuine genealogies preserved by the family of Jesus. Matthew traces the king list, the line of royal succession from Solomon, but since Solomon's descendants, that is Jehoiakim and his son Jeconiah were cursed by Jeremiah, the Messiah could not be a genetic descendant of that royal line. And so Luke traces the line of genetic descent from Nathan through the marriage of Mary and Josiah's granddaughter Tamar. And after Mary's death, Mary's children were adopted by Jeconiah as their stepfather. Because Jeconiah was childless, in accordance with Jeremiah's curse, his only son died, and so the genetic line of Nathan became the line of royal succession, and from this line sprang Joseph of Nazareth and as regards Joseph's two fathers at the end of the the genealogy, Jacob and Haley, I follow the view of Africanus and other church fathers like John of Damascus, who explained Africanus's account and expanded on it a bit.

Mary was also related to Joseph on her father's side. Many, many marriages in ancient Israel were consanguineal, and thus Mary too was of the royal line of David on her father's side. However, her matrilineal descent is quite different. Her mother's family were Zadokites, apparently of Hasmonean descent, and she came from the highest levels of the Zadokites clan. The Talmud calls her the child of rulers and of high priests, and therefore Mary was not a peasant girl as we so frequently hear. She was a Hasmonean Princess, and therefore the bloodline of Jesus through Mary was patrilineal from David and matrilineally from Aaron and Zadok.

And since in Judaism the *mother's mother's line* takes precedence over the *mother's father's line*, I propose that we should perhaps speak of Jesus the Zadokite rather than Jesus the Judahite or Jesus the Jew. Remember, a Jew is a descendant of the Tribe of David, which is not exactly the same as an Israelite. A Zadokite and a Judahite are both Israelites, but a Judahite is not a Zadokite, nor vice versa. And as I say, an Aramaic speaking Galilean who does not observe Judean feasts, whose father is God and whose mother is an Aaronite Princess, is certainly an

Israelite. But I would not be too quick to call him Jewish, so I've called him in the end, Jesus the quarter-Jew.

MM: David, thank you for joining us on the show. All the best.

DCM: Thank you very much.

MM: Friends, you've been listening to New Books and Biblical Studies, a channel of the New Books Network.

End Transcription.

Note: Slight edits/paraphrases to ease flow/reading in this document (apologies for any typos/misspellings).