

The Greatness of Melchizedek
Hebrews 7:4-10
Part 2

This morning we will be considering certain references to specific incidences of tithing, as recorded for us in the Old Testament, both prior to the Law and subsequent to the giving of the Law.

So, what is tithing? Tithing is the practice of materially giving back to God 10% of what we believe we have materially received from God as we receive it.

So why am I sharing this with you? I am sharing this with you to make this point. Though we will this morning be considering certain references to specific incidences of tithing, as recorded for us in the Old Testament, we as a church do not believe that tithing, based on the teachings of the New Testament, is a commanded giving practice for us today based on the teaching of the New Testament.

Rather we believe that the New Testament is very clear that our present giving should not be based on a percentage but rather upon how the Lord is materially blessing us, always striving in our giving not only to be cheerful but also regular, generous and sacrificial. Our beliefs on this particular topic are all thoroughly spelled out in a position paper on tithing that you can find on our website (www.valleybible.net).

So, having said this I will now repeat what I said earlier. Though this morning we will be considering certain references to specific incidences of tithing as recorded for us in the Old Testament, we as a church do not believe, based on New Testament teaching, that tithing is a commanded giving practice for us today. We are now ready to return to our study of the Book of Hebrews.

This book was written by an unknown author to a group of struggling Hebrew Christians living in Rome, who under a great persecution were considering leaving the Christian faith in order to return to Judaism.

The author in response to this struggle wrote this particular book in order to strengthen their faith so that they, in having their faith strengthened, might be able to persevere.

And what was at stake? Their souls, for if they did not persevere it would demonstrate that they never truly possessed genuine, living saving faith, that kind of faith that is given by God and is protected by God. So obviously there was a lot at stake in the mind of this author as he wrote this book.

So how did this author go about strengthening the faith of his readers? He focused on Christ's superiority.

So in regards to Christ's superiority, what have we seen so far in our ongoing study? We have seen that Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets in **Hebrews 1:1-4**. We have seen that Christ is superior to the angels in **Hebrews 1:5-2:18**. We have seen that Christ is superior to Moses in **Hebrews 3:1-4:13**. And now we are seeing in our ongoing examination of this book that Christ's priesthood is superior to all other **priesthoods**. This section began in **Hebrews 4:14** and will continue all the way down through **Hebrews 10:18**.

So, what have we seen so far within this particular very lengthy section? First of all, we have seen the author in **Hebrews 4:14-16** challenging his readers to hold fast their confession based on the fact that Christ was indeed their great heavenly high priest, a fact that he had already introduced earlier in **Hebrews 2:17**.

So after he had challenged them to hold fast their confession, based on the fact that Christ was their great heavenly high priest, what then did the author do? The author in **Hebrews 5:1-10** quickly pointed out to his readers, by way of introduction, that Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry was according to the order of Melchizedek.

Now, as this author introduced this thought, he wanted to say far more to his readers about Melchizedek and his priestly minister but he knew because of their dullness of hearing that they would in fact have difficulty processing what he wanted to say to them.

So, what did he do? He exhorted them to pursue maturity and then warned them about the potential consequences if they failed to heed his particular exhortation. This warning section went from **Hebrews 5:11-6:12**.

Once he completed this warning section he returned to the theme of Melchizedek. So, what did the author do as he returned to this theme?

The author in Hebrews 7:1-10 highlighted the greatness of Melchizedek. And how did he begin this particular section of verses?

The author in Hebrews 7:1-3 began with a foundational summary of Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham, a typological masterpiece that had been recorded earlier in Genesis 14:17-20.

Now just by way of reminder, what is a type? When something in the Old Testament was meant or purposed by God to prophetically prefigure or picture something that would later be fulfilled in the New Testament, that is called a "type" and the New Testament prophetic fulfillment of the Old Testament type is called an "anti-type." The New Testament anti-type being the more complete and perfect reality of the Old Testament type since the Old Testament type was only meant to speak of something that was coming rather than to reveal the fullness of what was coming.

And this is how this author viewed Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham in **Genesis 14:17-20**. He viewed it as a typological masterpiece. In other words, when he, under the inspiration of the Spirit, considered what had been recorded in **Genesis 14:17-20**, he did not simply see a meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek he saw much more than that. He saw a typological masterpiece that had not only pre-figured Christ, the more complete and perfect reality, but also more to the point had actually pre-figured the more complete and perfect reality of Christ's priesthood and thus its superiority over all other priesthoods.

And this is why this author chose to record what he did in the way that he did in his summation in **Hebrews 7:1-3**, which we considered the last time we were together, but we are now ready to move on. So after his summation what did the author do next?

The author after his summation of God's typological masterpiece then exhorted his readers to consider the greatness of Melchizedek and his priesthood based on his summation (Hebrews 7:4-10).

So now let me read for you **Hebrews 7:4-10** and see if this is not so. **“Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. (5) And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. (6) But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. (7) But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. (8) In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. (9) And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, (10) for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.”** So did the author after his summation of God's typological masterpiece then exhort his readers to consider the greatness of Melchizedek as well as the greatness of his priesthood based on the verses we just read?

Yes, I believe he did. And what was the basis of his argumentation within these verses? The basis of his argumentation within these verses for the greatness of Melchizedek and his priesthood was the tithe that Abraham gave to Melchizedek. And why did he argue for the greatness of Melchizedek and his priesthood in this way? It was because he believed certain things. And what were those certain things that he believed?

First of all, the author believed that the tithe given by Abraham to Melchizedek highlighted the greatness of Melchizedek, or in other words he believed that the tithe given by Abraham to Melchizedek highlighted the greatness of the person Melchizedek.

We see this in **Hebrews 7:4-7**. So let us begin with **verse 4** and see if this is not so. **“Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.”** So did the author in this verse communicate to his readers that the tithe that Abraham gave to Melchizedek highlighted the greatness of Melchizedek or in other words highlighted the greatness of Melchizedek as a person? Absolutely!

This author believed that when Abraham gave a “**tenth**” or in other words a “**tithe**” of the choicest spoils of his God given victory over the five kings from the east as recorded for us in **Genesis 14**, that Abraham the patriarch of all Jewish people was in fact acknowledging that Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God, enjoyed a position or standing before God that was greater than his own position or standing before God, which thus in turn highlighted what? The greatness of Melchizedek, not only in the sight of Abraham but also in the sight of every person descended from Abraham, the highly esteemed patriarch of Israel.

This is what the author believed and this is what he wanted his readers to consider, as they contemplated the greatness of Melchizedek, who he believed to be a type of Christ, the more perfect and complete reality.

But the author was not satisfied with simply stating the fact of Melchizedek’s greatness and supporting his contention by referencing the fact that Abraham had given a tithe to Melchizedek he wanted to explain it further.

So, what did the author do next? The author continued to develop the theme of Melchizedek’s greatness based on Abraham’s tithe and he did so by drawing a contrast between why the Jewish people gave a tithe to the Levitical priests and why Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek.

So let us first of all consider why the Jewish people, according to this author, gave a tithe to their Levitical priests. And where will we find the answer to this question? We will find the answer to this question in **verse 5**.

So let us now read **verse 5** and what does it say? “**And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.**” So based on this verse, why did the Jewish people give a tithe to their Levitical priests? Was it because they were acknowledging the greatness of their Levitical priests? No! It was because they believed, rightfully so, that they had been commanded under the Mosaic Law to do so. This is why.

So now let us look at verse 5 more carefully and to see if this is not so and we will begin with the very first phrase, **“And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office.”**

When the author referenced **“the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office,”** he was not referring to all Levites but only to those Levites **“who have received the priest’s office”** or in other words only those Levites who were the male descendants of Aaron for it is only the male descendants of Aaron, according to **Exodus 28**, who were permitted under the Law to perform priestly functions. All other Levites according to **Numbers 3:6** were simply set apart in order to serve the Levitical priests in support of their priestly functions. Therefore when the author referenced **“the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office”** he was specifically referring to the Levitical priests of the nation of Israel.

So then what did the author go on to say about these Levitical priests? Let us continue to read **verse 5**. **“And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest’s office [or in other words the Levitical priests] have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people.”**

And where in the Law were the Levitical priests commanded by God to collect a tenth from the people or in other words a tithe from the Jewish people? They were commanded in the Law to collect a tithe or a tenth from the Jewish people in **Numbers 18:21-24**.

And the collecting of this tithe was to be done by these priests even though they, the Levitical priests, as well as those from whom they were collecting the tithe, the children of Israel, were all descendants of Abraham, which the author made clear at the end of **verse 5**.

So why did the Levitical priests collect this particular tithe from the Jewish people? They collected this tithe from the Jewish people because the Mosaic Law commanded them to collect this tithe and the Jewish people under that same law knew that they were to give this tithe.

Thus when they gave their tithe, according to this author, they were not acknowledging the greatness of their Levitical priests, they were simply doing what they believed they had to do under the Law, very much like when we pay our taxes. When we pay our taxes we are doing what we

believe, under our tax law, we are obligated to do but this does not mean that we necessarily believe that the ones to whom we are paying our taxes are particularly great people. And this is the point that the author I believe is seeking to make here in **verse 5** in respect the tithe that was being paid to the Levitical priests. It was being given because it had to be given.

But this was not the case with Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek according to this author. Let us now read **Hebrews 7:6** and what does this verse say? **"But the one [referring to Melchizedek] whose genealogy is not traced from them [or in other words the Levitical priests] collected a tenth from Abraham."**

So why did Melchizedek collect a tenth from Abraham? Was it because he was a Levitical priest and was therefore required to collect a tithe from Abraham under the Law? No! He was not a Levitical priest; in fact he predated Levi and the sons of Levi and therefore every Levitical priest.

So why then did Melchizedek collect a tithe from Abraham? He collected a tithe from Abraham, not because he was obligated under the law to give him a tithe but because Abraham viewed Melchizedek as greater than himself in position and standing as a priest of **"the Most High God."**

If there is any doubt about this let us let us continue to read **verses 6 and 7**. **"But the one [Melchizedek] whose genealogy is not traced from them [the Levitical priests] collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises [Or in other words the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Then the author made this amazing statement]. (7) But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater."**

So according to this author, why did Abraham give a tithe to Melchizedek? Was it because he was commanded to give a tithe to Melchizedek? No! The author said nothing about Abraham as having been commanded. But rather the clear inference of these verses is that he voluntarily gave his tithe to Melchizedek because he viewed Melchizedek as greater in position and standing and himself and as lesser in position and standing. And this author supported this thought in **verse 7** when he stated for his readers what he believed they knew to be true, that **"without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater."**

So did the author based on Hebrews 7:4-7 believe that the tithe given by Abraham to Melchizedek highlighted the greatness of **Melchizedek**? Absolutely!

But we are not done. The author also believed something else about the tithe that Abraham had given Melchizedek and what was that?

The author also believed that the tithe given by Abraham to Melchizedek highlighted the greatness of Melchizedek's priesthood (Hebrews 7:8-10). So now let me now read for you **Hebrews 7:8-10** and see if this is not so. **“In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. (9) And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, (10) for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.”** So based on these verses did the tithe given by Abraham to Melchizedek highlight the greatness of Melchizedek's priesthood? Yes, I believe they did.

In **verse 8** the tithe given by Abraham to Melchizedek highlighted the greatness of Melchizedek's priesthood by making the point that the tithe given to Melchizedek by Abraham, unlike the tithe collected by the Levitical priests who were mortal, was given to a man **“of whom it is witnessed that he lives on”** thus emphasizing the duration of his priesthood versus that of the Levitical priests who were mortal and thus continuously dying.

Now be sure to notice that this author did not say that Melchizedek was in fact “living on.” He simply said, **“Of whom it is witnessed that he lives on.”** And who was the one who had born witness to this? This author in his inspired summation of God's typological masterpiece in **Hebrews 7:1-3** was the one who bore witness to this when he noted that in all of the Scriptures there is no record of either Melchizedek's birth or death.

So after the author used the tithe Abraham gave to Melchizedek to emphasize the greatness of Melchizedek's priesthood by pointing out its enduring nature as a type or in other as picturing Christ's priesthood the more complete and perfect reality, what did the author do next?

The author added to his argument in support of the greatness of Melchizedek's priesthood, based on Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek, by appealing to a belief that was commonly held by the people of that time.

And what was that belief? An ancestor such as Abraham contained all his descendants within himself. And it was upon this commonly held belief that the author went on to say to his readers in **verses 9 and 10**, “**And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, (10) for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.**” In this one fell theological swoop, subordinated the entire Levitical priesthood that was so venerated under the Law, to Melchizedek.

So did the author after his summation of God’s typological masterpiece in **Hebrews 7:1-3** then exhort his readers to **consider** the greatness of Melchizedek and his priesthood based on his summation in Hebrews 7:4-10? And did he in guiding them through that consideration successfully support his contention that Melchizedek both as a person and priest should be considered superior to the Levitical priests? I believe he did.

And what was the importance of this? Melchizedek as a person and as a priest was a type of Christ given to us by God in order to prefigure or to picture Christ and His Priesthood the far more complete and perfect reality. Therefore as our appreciation of Melchizedek and his priesthood grows, our appreciation of Christ and His priesthood should increase exponentially.

May God give us the grace to understand the greatness of Melchizedek and his priesthood so that we might better appreciate the superiority of Christ and His priesthood.