

• Consider this great man

1. Melchizedek is great as a receiver of tithes

• An immense honour

• The Levites – the priestly tribe very important

• We must view Jesus in the same way as Melchizedek – greater than the Mosaic law

2. Melchizedek is great as a giver of blessing

3. Melchizedek is vastly superior to the Levites

⁴Now consider how great this man was. When we read of Melchizedek in the Old Testament we might easily pass over his story quite quickly, but our writer asks us to stop to ponder what a great person he actually was.

1. **Melchizedek is great as the receiver of tithes.** *It was to him that Abraham, the great father, gave a tenth of what he had taken in battle.* This in itself is immensely significant. Tithing is a form of honouring someone immensely. Sometimes it is a form of worship. We have to honour someone very greatly if we ever are to be willing to give him our possessions. Money and possessions are things most people hold on to tightly! ⁵Now the priests, who are descendants of Levi, are commanded in the law of Moses to collect a tithe from all the people, their brothers and sisters, even though they are their own relatives descending from Abraham. The Mosaic law treated the people of the priestly tribe as worthy of being financially supported by the rest of the nation. Their brother-Israelites treated them with honour by supporting them financially. This is striking because most of us would not like to take money from our own family! We prefer to get our support from elsewhere without seeing our own people being financially burdened. The people of Israel were related to the priests but despite the fact that Levites would not want to burden their own relatives, the nation nevertheless supported the priests materially. It was a way of recognizing the great importance of the Levitical priests in the kingdom of God.

⁶But Melchizedek who did not trace his descent from the people of Levi, collected a tenth from Abraham... Melchizedek received Abraham's tithes, but Melchizedek did not do so because he was a Levite! He was a great man in the kingdom of God and yet his greatness had nothing to do with his being a Levite. The same is true of Jesus! He is a great Saviour and he brings 'such a great salvation', but it all comes to us apart from the law of Moses, and apart from the system of worship that was administered by the tribe of the Levites. Abraham recognized Melchizedek because he knew that he was of great significance in the kingdom of God – even greater than Abraham himself. Melchizedek did not tithe to Abraham. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek! Abraham himself is described as 'the great father'. He is the ancestor and model of all believers, and one of the greatest figures in world history. Yet Abraham regarded Melchizedek as the greater person in the kingdom of God. We must view Jesus in the same way. He is greater than anything we find in the Mosaic law. He is unique and directly appointed by God.

2. **Melchizedek is great as the giver of blessing.** *And Melchizedek blessed Abraham, the one who had the promises.* Abraham himself was a great man. He 'had the promises'. They had not yet been completely obtained (the translation 'the one who had already received the promises' is mistaken, for you **have** the promises when God first tells you about them, but you **obtain** the promises when God gives an oath). Yet Melchizedek blessed Abraham; it was not Abraham who blessed Melchizedek. ⁷And it is beyond dispute that the less important person is blessed by the greater person [the one who has the greater power to bless others].

3. **Melchizedek is vastly superior to the Levites. In Abraham the Levites paid him tithes.** The Levites were ordinary human beings; eventually each Levite died. ⁸And, in the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die [the Levites], but, in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. The Levites were mortals, but Melchizedek is never said to die. Of course he did die, but **in the Old Testament** there is no record of his death. This is what made him a good picture of the Lord

Jesus Christ. The Levites ministered as priests but then their ministry ended in their retirement at the age of fifty and in the death of each Levite. In the case of Jesus his ministry began with his death (or maybe even earlier) and it goes on for ever in the resurrection power of One who sits at the right hand of the Father.

Melchizedek is vastly superior to the Levites.⁹ *One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham,*¹⁰ *because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.* There is a sense in which when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, it was also Levi paying tithes to Melchizedek. Because Levi descended from Abraham and our ancestors do things that represent us! Maybe a man's grandfather bought a house and then the son inherited it and eventually it passed to the grandson and is now his. The grandfather bought it, but it is as if the grandson bought it for it is now his! The grandson was 'in' his ancestor when he bought the house. Physically you came out of the body of your father and he came out of the body of your grandfather – and so on back to Adam! Adam represents the entire human race, but even some lesser ancestors did some things which have been inherited by you. So Levi paid tithes 'in' Abraham.

The importance of all of this is that our writer is amazingly criticizing and putting down the Mosaic law and the entire sacrificial system. Anything which you find in the Mosaic system that is **distinctive** of the Mosaic system is temporary and has been fulfilled by Jesus at a higher level altogether. The priests are fulfilled in Jesus. The high priest is fulfilled in Jesus. The sacrifices are fulfilled in Jesus. The holy days are fulfilled in Jesus. No longer do we have a 'holy building' like the tabernacle. Modern church buildings are not tabernacles or temples. There is no 'holy of holies' in them. There is nothing in them which we should call 'the altar'! Almost everything distinctively **Mosaic** has gone. We are not children of Moses; we are children of Abraham. Our high priest is not someone killing animals in a holy building. Our high priest is Jesus presenting his blood in heaven.

These arguments were needed because 'the Hebrews' were tempted to be as Jewish as possible to avoid persecution. They found it hard to break away from the Mosaic regulations. Presumably our letter was written before the temple was destroyed in AD 70. But there are still Christians who are very 'Mosaic'. They talk about priests and they love 'holy buildings'. Their idea of state-churches resembles the Mosaic law more than it resembles the New Testament. But 'Mosaism' [to coin a new word!] is finished. We are not under anything specially Mosaic. We are under Jesus, our great high priest who shed his blood on the 'altar' of the cross and now presents his blood in the 'holy of holies' – heaven itself – and ever lives to make intercession for us!

• *There is a sense in which Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek*

• *The Mosaic system – temporarily fulfilled in Jesus and superceded*

• *The temptation to avoid persecution by holding on to Mosaic regulations*



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