

XV. Melchizedek, King of Salem

April 17/18/19, 2018

Hebrews 7:1-10

Aim: To see the typological relationship between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ, and to understand that Jesus is our eternal King of righteousness and King of peace.

Schreiner: The writer's desire has been to explicate the significance of Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood, for the hope and confidence of the readers is based on Jesus' entering the presence of God for them. Before unfolding the significance of such a priesthood, he warns the readers about the danger of spiritual sluggishness (5:11-6:12). If they fall away, they will not receive the blessings God has promised. Now that he has given the warning, he is ready to unpack Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood for them. The discussion on Melchizedek seems foreign to contemporary readers, but it is designed for a pastoral purpose. Since the Melchizedekian priesthood is clearly superior to the Levitical one, the readers must not abandon or forsake Jesus.

Hughes: Genesis 14:18-20 is the *only* historical mention of Melchizedek in the Old Testament. That was around 2000 BC, and for a millennium there is no mention at all of Melchizedek, not even in retrospect. But in the tenth century BC, when the psalmist David was King of Israel, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write this prophetic word: 'The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek"' (Ps. 110:4). There God declared that He was going to do something *new*. His intention was to bring into history one that would be a priest like Melchizedek. In the likeness of Melchizedek, he would be both priest and king (cp. Ps. 110:1). Also, the priesthood would last forever. And like Melchizedek, He would be appointed directly by God.

Phillips: The Book of Hebrews describes the high-priestly office of our Lord Jesus Christ by comparing Him to a historical figure, one of the most mysterious and obscure figures in all the Old Testament. He writes in Hebrews 6:20 that Christ has 'become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.' This comparison has been made three times already in the Book of Hebrews. It has been lingering, awaiting explanation, since it first occurred in 5:6. The writer draws this comparison from Psalm 110:4, where David used it to describe the coming Messiah: 'The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."'

Phillips: The question that has puzzled interpreters through the centuries and still perplexes today is: 'Who was Melchizedek?' Given the godless depravity of the Canaanites in the time of Abraham, how did this great spiritual figure arise? And why is nothing more said about him? As to Melchizedek's identity there have been various views. Some have said that he was Shem, the son of Noah and Abraham's ancestor, and others that he was an angelic or otherwise celestial being. The problem with both of these views is that there is nothing in the text to support them. Still others argue that Melchizedek is the preincarnate Christ. But the description in Hebrews 7 rules this out. If this great figure were Christ Himself in preincarnate appearance (and this happened at various times in the Old Testament), then it is hard to see how he can be described as '*resembling* the Son of God,' as he is in verse 3. Nor would it make sense for Jesus' priesthood to be described as the 'order of Melchizedek.' Melchizedek is set forth as a type of Christ, and a type is *some other* person who symbolizes and anticipates the one who is to come. We must conclude, therefore, that we know very little about the person of Melchizedek, except that, apart from the line of Abraham, he kept pure religion as he had received it handed down

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from the time of the flood. He was a most extraordinary man, but a man nonetheless, and one of whom the Bible intentionally tells us only what it wants us to know. The writer of Hebrews highlights four things for us to note about this Melchizedek.

A. The History of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-3)

1. His Offices (7:1a)

¹For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God...

MacArthur: In biblical study, a type refers to an Old Testament person, practice, or ceremony that had a counterpart, an antitype, in the New Testament. In that sense types are predictive. The type pictures, or prefigures, the antitype. The type, though it is historical, real, and of God, is nonetheless imperfect and temporary. The antitype, on the other hand, is perfect and eternal. The study of types and antitypes is called, as one might expect, typology. Melchizedek is a type of Christ.

Schreiner: He identifies Melchizedek as the king of Salem and the priest of the Most High God.

Phillips: The first is that Melchizedek was both king and priest. In Old Testament Israel, the kingly and priestly offices were kept strictly separate. Because of this separation, no man could utterly dominate Israel's civic life. Yet Melchizedek not only combines these vital offices, but is manifestly worthy of both.

Hughes: For starters, the author of Hebrews has noted that Melchizedek's title foreshadows the character of Christ. Melchizedek bore the title of 'king,' and this is mentioned four times in verses 1-2. Jesus is, of course, the ultimate 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev. 19:16). Significantly, Melchizedek was a priest-king, something that by law no Levitical priest could ever be. But Jesus became the ultimate priest-king, fulfilling to the letter what was promised through Zechariah regarding the Messiah (Zech. 6:13).

MacArthur: Melchizedek was 'priest of the Most High God (*El Elyon*, a more universal name for God). It represents God as possessor of heaven and earth. The Most High God is over both Jew and Gentile, and is first mentioned in Scripture in relation to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18). The significance is this: Jesus is not just the Messiah of Israel, but of the world. His priesthood is universal, just as Melchizedek's.

MacArthur: Melchizedek was himself a king. Four times in two verses (vv. 1-2) he is referred to as a king. Rulership of any sort was totally foreign to the Levitical priesthood. Melchizedek's universal priesthood and his royal office beautifully typify Jesus' saviorhood and lordship, as perfect Priest and perfect King. Though never known in Israel, the dual role of priest-king was predicted by her prophets (Zech. 6:13; cp. Ps. 110:1, 4). Because 'Salem' was an ancient name for Jerusalem, Melchizedek ruled over God's special city, His holy city that was always close to His heart. We are not told when God first considered Jerusalem to be His holy city, but He had a faithful king who was a faithful priest there even in the time of Abraham—many centuries before Israel's priests ministered there or Israel's kings ruled there.

2. His History (7:1b-2a)

...met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ²and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything.

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Bruce: Our author goes back from his text in Psalm 110:4 to the only other place in the Bible where Melchizedek appears, the story of Abraham's rout of the for invading kings. According to that narrative, Chedorlaomer, an Elamite king, with three allied rulers, raided Transjordan and the Negev, defeated the city-states of the 'circuit of Jordan'—Sodom and her neighbors—and carried off a large number of captives, including Lot, Abraham's nephew. When news of this came to Abraham at Mamre, near Hebron, he armed his own retainers, enlisted the aid of his neighbors, and set off in pursuit of the invaders. He overtook them near Damascus, launched a surprise attack on them, put them to flight, and recovered the captives and the plunder. On his homeward progress he was met by the grateful king of Sodom, who proposed that Abraham should return the captives to him but retain the material plunder as his proper spoils of war. Abraham declined to retain anything because of an oath he had just sworn to 'God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.' For immediately before the king of Sodom made his proposal to Abraham, Abraham had been greeted by another local ruler, Melchizedek. Their interaction is recorded in Genesis 14:18-20.

Schreiner: After Abraham defeated the kings who captured Lot and rescued him, Abraham returned to the King's Valley (Gen. 14:17). Without any explanation Melchizedek suddenly appears in the story as 'a priest of God Most High' (Gen. 14:18), bringing out bread and wine in celebration of Abraham's victory. He proceeds to bless Abraham, proclaiming that he was blessed 'by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth' (Gen. 14:19). In response, Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), and the name Melchizedek vanishes from the scene in the OT until he appears in Psalm 110:4. The only place Melchizedek is mentioned in the NT is in Hebrews. Here the author introduces Melchizedek in accord with what was written about him and Abraham in Genesis 14:17-20. As a king-priest he met Abraham and blessed him when he returned victorious from his battle with the kings. Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of his victory to Melchizedek.

Bruce: Our author finds as much significance in what is not said about Melchizedek as he does in what is said about him. It is indeed noteworthy that one of the things which is said about Melchizedek in the Genesis narrative is passed over by our author without mention—his bringing forth bread and wine for Abraham's refreshment. Few typologists of early Christian or more recent days could have resisted so tempting an opportunity of drawing a Eucharistic inference from these words!

Phillips: Second, Melchizedek met Abraham when he returned from his victory, and he blessed him. We remember that God had long promised blessing to Abraham, although to the eyes of the world he must not have seemed very important. But here we see this priestly figure confirming his blessedness in the most public manner after the great victory over the kings of the east, a time when Abraham was probably more in the limelight than at any other during his entire life.

Phillips: One thing that stands out in the Genesis account but does not explicitly appear in Hebrews is that Melchizedek brought bread and wine to Abraham. This is part of what the writer of Hebrews intended when he noted that Melchizedek blessed Abraham. He not only spoke the blessing, but he also spiritually ministered to Abraham's need. Jonathan Edwards puts it well: 'The bread and the wine signified the same blessings of the covenant of grace that the bread and wine do in the sacrament of the Lord's supper.... Melchizedek's coming to meet him with such a seal of the covenant of grace on the occasion of this victory, evinces, that it was a pledge of God's fulfillment of the same covenant.'

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3. His Titles (7:2b)

He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

Phillips: Third, the writer of Hebrews considers Melchizedek's name and title. The name Melchizedek consists of the Hebrew word *melek*, which means 'king,' combined with *tsedeq*, which means 'righteous.' Such a name speaks volumes about the man. In the midst of the extreme depravity of the Canaanites, in contrast with the despicable worship and gross immorality of men like the king of Sodom, this man exercised his kingly rule for the extension of righteousness. This indicates an upright and holy life, sharply in contrast with the unrighteous kings all around him.

Schreiner: The significance of Melchizedek's name is then unfolded. In explicating the meaning of Melchizedek's name, the author continues to draw literally on the Genesis account. The author introduces Melchizedek and translates the meaning of his name for his readers. He is 'king of righteousness' (*βασιλεύς δικαιοσύνης, basileus diakiosunēs*). The genitive should be understood as attributive, meaning that he was a righteous king. Of course, Melchizedek points to one greater than he, and the author has already told us that Jesus is a righteous king (1:9). Most kings don't rule righteously, but Melchizedek did, and his reign anticipated the righteous reign of a better king (Jesus), who will secure 'a kingdom that cannot be shaken' (12:28).

Phillips: Melchizedek's title was 'king of Salem.' Traditionally Salem has been identified with Jerusalem, and with good reason. For one thing, Jerusalem, means 'city of Salem,' so it would be natural for this title to signify its king. For another, we know from Psalm 76:2 that Salem and Zion are linked in the Old Testament. What is particularly striking is that Salem comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means peace, indeed, divine and comprehensive peace. In a godless, warring region, here was a king of righteousness who ruled the city of peace.

Schreiner: Melchizedek is also 'king of Salem' (Gen. 14:18; *βασιλεύς Σαλήμ, basileus Salēm*). The author of Hebrews does not tie the name specifically to Jerusalem but translates it as 'king of peace.' Surely for the author of Hebrews the significance of 'Salem' points to Jesus: the king of peace who brings peace between human beings and God through His priestly work. We think of Isaiah where the Davidic ruler is the 'Prince of Peace' (Is. 9:6; cp. 32:1, 7).

Bruce: Our author connects *zedek*, the second element in Melchizedek's name, with the Hebrew word commonly translated 'righteousness'; and he also relates the name of his city to Hebrew *shalom*, 'peace.' There is a fitness in this collocation of righteousness and peace both in the natural order and preeminently in our author's explanation of Melchizedek in terms of the gospel, where peace with God is based upon the righteousness of God.

MacArthur: There was no permanent righteousness or peace related to Aaron's priesthood. Melchizedek, however, was king both 'of righteousness' and 'of peace.' His very name means 'king of righteousness.' Although we have no historical record of his monarchy, we are told that he ruled righteously and peacefully.

Hughes: The title Melchizedek, our author explains, means 'king of righteousness,' and the title 'king of Salem' (i.e., Jerusalem, cp. Psalm 76:2) means 'king of peace.' Significantly here we should note that both the qualities of righteousness and peace were prophesied of the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6-7, where His fourth title is 'Prince of Peace,' and He goes on to rule with 'righteousness.' So Jesus brings righteousness and peace together in His person. As the psalmist

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so magnificently indicates, in the Lord ‘righteousness and peace kiss each other’ (Ps. 85:10). Righteousness and peace are the telltale kiss of His character. He is the *King*, the sovereign, of righteousness and peace. He is the sovereign giver of the kisses of peace and righteousness. As we shall see, He is the only one in whom peace and righteousness can be found. So as we begin we see that Melchizedek foreshadowed the *character* of Christ—His kingship, His priesthood, His righteousness, His peace.

4. His Origins (7:3)

a) Type (7:3a)

³*He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life...*

Phillips: Fourth, Melchizedek’s appearance has one especially noteworthy feature. The statement in verse 3 leads many to suppose Melchizedek to be some sort of celestial being, or even the preincarnate Christ. But what is in view here is not Melchizedek himself as being without beginning or end, but Melchizedek as presented in Scripture. Quite in contrast to nearly everybody else of consequence in the Book of Genesis, Melchizedek is not accompanied by a genealogy, but appears without any introduction or conclusion. He has no mother or father. The writer of Hebrews, following a long rabbinic tradition of interpreting passages like this, sees as much significance in what the text omits as in what it says.

Bruce: The words of this verse present an outstanding example of the argument from silence in a typological setting. When Melchizedek is described as having ‘neither father or mother, without a genealogy,’ and having ‘neither beginning of days nor end of life,’ it is not suggested that he was a biological anomaly, or an angel in human guise. Historically Melchizedek appears to have belonged to a dynasty of priest-kings in which he had both predecessors and successors. If this point had been put to our author, he would have agreed at once, no doubt; but this consideration was foreign to his purpose. The important consideration was the account given of Melchizedek in holy writ; to him the silences of Scripture were as much due to divine inspiration as were its statements. In the only record which Scripture provides of Melchizedek—Gen. 14:18-20—nothing is said of his parentage, nothing is said of his ancestry or progeny, nothing is said of his birth, nothing is said of his death. He appears as a living man, king of Salem and priest of God Most High; and as such he disappears.

Schreiner: What is left unsaid about Melchizedek in Genesis is mined for meaning. He served as a priest, but nothing is said about his father, mother, or genealogy. The omission of his genealogy doesn’t mean he wasn’t a human being. The author detects significance in the silence of Genesis, for Genesis identifies Melchizedek as a priest but says nothing about his genealogical qualifications to serve as a priest. In other words, Melchizedek stands out as a priest in that there is no genealogy relative to his priesthood. One could not serve as Levitical priest, on the other hand, unless one could demonstrate that one was genealogically qualified (cp. Neh. 7:64-65). Melchizedek, on the other hand, appears on the scene not as one who was born or as one who dies. The author is not suggesting that he didn’t have human origins. His point is that, according to the text of Genesis, such things were irrelevant, for he is constituted as a priest without any mention of his paternity. Indeed, his birth and death are not recorded, signifying that ‘he remains a priest forever,’ like Jesus the Son of God.

Hughes: The writer also sees a distinct foreshadowing of Christ’s *qualifications* in verse 3. Some have inferred from these words that Melchizedek must have been an angel who took on

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human form for Abraham, or even a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Himself. But such interpretations are unnecessary, because the writer is simply using a rabbinical method of interpretation from silence. His point is that the Genesis account does not mention Melchizedek's parents or genealogy or when he was born or died, thereby providing a fitting type of what would be fleshed out in the qualifications of Christ.

MacArthur: The writer does not mean that he came from nowhere. It simply means that in the Old Testament *record* nothing is said of his parents or origin. It is interesting that the single Greek word (*agenealogētos*) translated 'without genealogy' is found nowhere else in Scripture—in fact nowhere else in Greek literature. The reason, no doubt, is that it would have had no use because it would have made no sense. Everyone had a genealogy, whether he can trace it or not. The point in Hebrews is that Melchizedek's parentage and origin are irrelevant to his priesthood. Whereas to the Aaronic priesthood genealogy was everything, to the Melchizedek priesthood it was nothing. In this, Melchizedek was a type of Christ, not because Jesus had no genealogy but because Jesus' genealogy was not significant in regard to His priesthood. To be sure, Jesus' royal genealogy is important (Mt. 1:1-17; Lk. 3:23-38). His lineage is not traced back to Aaron or Levi, but to Judah. Jesus Christ, though God's own Son, was not qualified for the Levitical priesthood. Like Melchizedek, as far as His priesthood was concerned, He had no priestly genealogy and He needed none.

Hughes: All Levitical priests had to have a priestly genealogy that could be traced all the way back to Aaron. But Melchizedek was 'without father or mother or genealogy.' He had no priestly genealogy through Levi or Aaron. While Jesus' royal bloodline could be traced to Judah, He had no priestly genealogy. He was, in effect, without genealogy. The point is, Jesus' priesthood, like Melchizedek's, was based solely on the call of God, not on heredity. Jesus and Melchizedek were both appointed as priest of God Most high.

b) Antitype (7:3b)

...but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

Schreiner: Some interpreters adopt a different perspective, arguing that Melchizedek was actually a preincarnate appearance of Jesus as the Son of God. Despite the popularity of this reading, it should be rejected for a number of reasons. First, the author of Hebrews regularly argues typologically, seeing Jesus as the greater David, the greater Moses, the greater Joshua, and the greater priest. So too, Melchizedek's priesthood foreshadows and anticipates Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood. Second, the author describes Melchizedek as 'resembling the Son of God.' The author doesn't say that Melchizedek *is* the Son of God but that He was *like* him. The two are compared, not identified.

Bruce: In all this—in the silences as well as in the statements—he is a fitting type of Christ. Melchizedek remains a priest continually for the duration of his appearance in the biblical narrative; but in the antitype Christ remains a priest continually without qualification. And it is not the type which determines the antitype, but the antitype which determines the type; Jesus is not portrayed after the pattern of Melchizedek, but Melchizedek is 'made conformable to the Son of God.'

Schreiner: Jesus also serves as a Melchizedekian priest. It is not the case that His genealogy is unknown. In fact, the author is keenly aware that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (7:13-14). The point is that Jesus' priesthood, like Melchizedek's, is not established on the basis of His genealogy. Instead, the focus is on His eternal priesthood (anticipating Ps. 110:4) as the Son of

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God. By virtue of His resurrection from the dead, He continues as a priest forever, in contrast to the Levitical priests whose priesthood ends upon death.

MacArthur: Melchizedek's priesthood had no time or dispensational bounds, unlike that of the Levitical priesthood. 'He abides a priest perpetually.' It is not that he lived forever, but that the order of priesthood in which he ministered was forever. If he had lived forever, he would not be a type but a part of the reality. The fact that we have no biblical or other record of the beginning or end of Melchizedek's personal priesthood simply symbolizes the eternity of his priestly order. It is a type of Christ's truly eternal priesthood. Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek. His priesthood is universal, royal, righteous and peaceful, personal, and eternal.

Hughes: Secondly, all Levitical priests served limited terms of office. But with Melchizedek, there was no set beginning or end of his life. What was foreshadowed in Melchizedek's having no beginning or end was fully realized in Christ's eternal priesthood. The silence of the Biblical record regarding Melchizedek's days suggests a continuous priesthood for Melchizedek that foreshadows what perfectly was, and is, fulfilled in Christ, who ministered continually, without interruption. The big picture the writer wants us to see is that Jesus perfectly fulfills what was foreshadowed in the Genesis account of Melchizedek. Melchizedek's *character* type regarding king, priest, righteousness, and peace was fulfilled to perfection in Christ. Melchizedek's *qualifications*, being without genealogy, and without beginning or end, prefigured Jesus who had no priestly genealogy or priestly term of service but was appointed by God and ministers eternally.

5. His Typology

Phillips: When we consider this whole description, we see how well Melchizedek serves as a type for the high-priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we look at the four emphases in our passage about Melchizedek, we see how wonderfully they depict Christ as high priest over the church.

Phillips: First, we noted that Melchizedek was both king and priest. Since earthly kings were righteous only in part, and often were not righteous at all, they were not entrusted with the priestly office. But Jesus Christ, who like Melchizedek is a king of righteousness and peace, is thoroughly qualified for such a trust. Exalted in heaven, He is both king and priest for us, and therefore the one mediator for our whole salvation.

Phillips: Second, in Melchizedek's going out to bless Abraham in the presence of the Canaanites, we see a wonderful type of Christ's ministry to us. When our battle is over, the risen Jesus Christ will bless us before the eyes of the world. Indeed, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, He proclaims us blessed even now from the throne of heaven. Like Abraham, we are despised by the world. Our blessing is hidden to sight, and no one realizes that we hold the promises of God. But Christ acknowledges us as God's own, and the day will come when every eye will see it.

Phillips: Third, we saw the meaning of Melchizedek's name and titles, 'king of righteousness' and 'king of peace.' How well these apply to our Lord Jesus, and how important it is for us to note the order in which they come. It is only as Jesus achieved righteousness by His life, and secured that righteousness for us by death on the cross, that peace with God is available to sinners. He offers us peace because He first achieved the righteousness we lack and need.

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Phillips: Fourth, Melchizedek shows us that when Christ was raised from the dead and ascended on high, He took up an eternal priesthood, becoming a priest for our salvation forever. Because He lives forever, there will never be a time when this great high priest cannot show forth His blood that was shed for you, when His prayers will not pour forth effectual blessings upon your life. His priesthood is eternal, never-ending, securing eternal life to give to you.

B. The Greatness of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4-10)

Hughes: Melchizedek's superiority is presented through two occurrences in his meeting with Abraham—tithing and blessing.

MacArthur: In these verses we are given three reasons, or proofs, as to how and why Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical.

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews had a pressing concern to show the supremacy of Christ's priesthood over that of Aaron and the Levites under the old covenant. In vv. 4-10 he proceeds to the priesthood of Melchizedek, which is such a model of Christ's to make this point. The writer presents three arguments related to Melchizedek to show the supremacy of Christ's priesthood.

1. Tithes (7:4-6a, 9-10)

a) Melchizedek Received Tithes from Abraham (7:4)

⁴*See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!*

Bruce: The surpassing dignity of Melchizedek's priestly order will be appreciated the more if one considers the tokens of Melchizedek's greatness. Abraham was a great man indeed—'a prince of God' to his neighbors, called 'my friend' by God Himself—but in the account of his interview with Melchizedek, it is Melchizedek who appears as the greater of the two. And if Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, his priesthood (our author argues) must be greater than a priesthood which traces its descent from Abraham. The superior greatness of Melchizedek appears in two important respects: he accepted titles from Abraham and bestowed his blessing on Abraham.

Schreiner: The author wants the readers to rivet their eyes on Melchizedek. With an imperative verb he summons them to 'consider (*Θεωρεῖτε*, *Theōreite*) how great this man was.' Most readers would concentrate on Abraham since the narrative focuses on him, and he was the progenitor and patriarch of Israel. Still, Abraham was clearly not as great as Melchizedek since he gave him one-tenth of his plunder.

MacArthur: Abraham, father of the Jewish people gave tithes (a tenth) of his war spoils—his 'choicest spoils'—to Melchizedek. Though Melchizedek was a king, he had not fought with Abraham against Chedorlaomer. Nor do we have any record, or reason to believe, that Melchizedek had ever performed any priestly service for Abraham. Abraham simply recognized Melchizedek as a deserving and faithful priest of God Most High and consequently gave him a tithe from the best of his spoils. It was a voluntary act revealing thanks to God.

Hughes: In the ancient world, paying tithes to another was recognition of the other's superiority and a sign of subjection to that person. In the case of Abraham's rending his tithe, we must remember that when Abraham returned from the slaughter of the kings, he was on a personal mountaintop. He had proven himself a man of great courage and of considerable capability. Moreover, in the eyes of succeeding generations of Jews he would be considered to be the

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greatest of men. He was called the ‘friend’ of God’ (2 Chr. 20:7; Is. 41:8; James 2:23). He was the father of the nation of Israel—the patriarch. But when he met Melchizedek, he recognized that personage’s superior greatness and paid him ‘a tenth of the spoils’ (literally, ‘the top of the heap’), the choicest spoils of war. This was a calculated recognition by Abraham that he was in the presence of one greater than himself. Our writer expresses proper astonishment in verse 4. This Melchizedek was a person of transcending superiority!

b) Levites Received Tithes from Israelites (7:5-6a)

⁵*And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham...*

Schreiner: The previous verse features the greatness of Melchizedek. He is exalted above Abraham, the founder of the Jewish people. On the other hand, the priesthood was bequeathed to the sons of Levi. The Lord specially set them apart to serve and minister to Him, and in particular the Aaronic priesthood derived from the Levites. The Lord instructed the Levites to collect a tithe in Israel (Num. 18:21; cp. Num. 18:26; 2 Chr. 31:4-5; Neh. 10:37-38). The tenth collected by the Levites was from fellow Israelites, their brothers and sisters. Like the Levites, the rest of Israel, which gave a tenth to the Levites, descended from Abraham. In turn, the Levites were to give a tenth of what they collected to the Aaronic priests (cp. Num. 3:5-9; 18:1-32; Neh. 10:37-39).

Hughes: The author has made a powerful point, but he realizes that some may diminish it in their minds by saying, ‘What’s so great about that? Levitical priests collect tithes too!’ So in anticipation he further argues in vv. 5-6a. His point is that the Levites’ ability to collect tithes came from the provision made by the Law, and not from any natural superiority. But Melchizedek was different. He did ‘not have his descent from them [Levities],’ and yet, as a figure of immense superiority, he collected tithes not from the people *but from Abraham!*

Bruce: Our author’s argument rests upon the fact that the members of the tribe of Levi received tithes from their fellow-Israelites, who were children of Abraham like themselves. Abraham—ancestor alike of the Levites and of their kinfolk who paid them tithes—recognized the superiority of Melchizedek by paying tithes to *him*. The priesthood of Melchizedek’s order is thus shown to enjoy higher status than the Levitical priesthood; Melchizedek, like Christ, who has been acclaimed high priest after his order, does not have His genealogy reckoned among the sons of Levi.

c) Melchizedek Received Tithes from Levi (7:9-10)

⁹*One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, ¹⁰for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.*

Phillips: The first argument is that Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek (v. 4). A few verses later, the writer employs customary Old Testament logic to observe that ‘one might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.’ If the Levite, through Abraham, paid a tithe to Melchizedek, then his must be the superior priesthood.

Schreiner: The superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood is the author’s aim, so he continues to pursue his argument, recognizing that what he is about to say isn’t literally true. Still,

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Abraham's paying a tenth to Melchizedek has implications for the Levitical priesthood, for the Levites 'through Abraham' paid a tenth to Melchizedek. And if they paid Melchizedek a tenth, then Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to the Levitical one. It follows, then, that they should not revert to the Levitical priesthood when they enjoyed a better priesthood. But in what sense can it be said that Levi paid a tenth to Melchizedek? The author explains that when Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek, Levi was, so to speak, in his body. As a descendant of Abraham, Levi through Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek. If this is true, then all the arguments relative to Abraham also apply to Levi. The lesser (Levi) paid a tenth to the greater (Melchizedek).

Hughes: For the final expression of the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over the Levitical priesthood as seen in Abraham's tithing to Melchizedek, the writer appeals to the common belief that an ancestor contains all his descendants within himself. Even the Levitical priesthood acknowledges the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood—because it paid tithes to Melchizedek in advance! Our writer has taken the common Hebrew understanding that tithing to another establishes the recipient's superiority and has demonstrated from every angle that Melchizedek is superior.

Bruce: Reverting for a moment to the tithe-receiving tribe of Levi, our author points out that Levi, the ancestor of that priestly tribe and the embodiment of its corporate personality, may be said himself to have paid tithes to Melchizedek (thus conceding the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood) in the person of his ancestor Abraham. Levi was Abraham's great-grandson, and was yet unborn when Abraham met Melchizedek; but an ancestor is regarded in biblical thought as containing within himself all his descendants (cp. Gen. 25:23; Mal. 1:2ff.; Rom. 9:11ff.; and predominantly Rom. 5:12). That Levi may be thought of thus as paying tithes to Melchizedek is an afterthought to what has already been said about the significance of this particular payment of tithes; lest it should be criticized as farfetched, our author qualifies it with the phrase 'one might almost say.'

MacArthur: The Holy Spirit demonstrates that Melchizedek is greater than Levi and Aaron, progenitors of the Levitical priesthood, by showing that this priest-king is better than Abraham, the progenitor of both Levi and Aaron. The point of vv. 4-10 is that because Abraham, their common and supreme ancestor, had paid tithes to Melchizedek, even the Levites, 'in advance,' so to speak, also paid tithes to Melchizedek. Even before they existed, those to whom tithes were paid had themselves paid a tithe to another priesthood, proving that this priesthood was superior to theirs.

2. Blessing (7:6b-7)

a) *Melchizedek Blessed Abraham (7:6b)*

...and blessed him who had the promises.

Bruce: The tithes which Melchizedek received from Abraham evidently amounted to one tenth of all the spoils of war which Abraham had recovered from the invading kings. Moreover, great as Abraham's privileges were by virtue of the promises which he received from God, he recognized the superiority of Melchizedek by accepting a blessing at his hands—'and beyond all dispute the lesser is always blessed by the greater' (v. 7).

Schreiner: Melchizedek's receiving a tithe from Abraham wasn't comparable to the Levites receiving tithes from fellow Israelites. In the case of Melchizedek, there is a completely

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different category as one who stands outside of Israel. And yet he collected a tenth from Abraham. Not only that; he blessed Abraham. The author underscores the significance of Melchizedek's blessing Abraham, for he 'blessed the one who had the promises.' As noted in 6:14, there is a close relationship between 'blessing' and 'the promises.' The promises pledged to Abraham were dependent, at least in part, on Melchizedek's blessing. Such statements confirm Melchizedek's greatness.

Hughes: The other principle he uses to establish Melchizedek's superiority is that in a formal Bible blessing the superior always blesses the inferior (v. 7). Just as Abraham knew he should present a tithe to Melchizedek, he also knew he must bow and receive his prayer of blessing. What a stupendous act on Abraham's part! Remember, God had told Abraham that 'in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Gen. 12:3). But he sees himself as inferior to Melchizedek—who towers about with mysterious grandeur—and receives his blessing.

MacArthur: One of the first things we learn in Scripture about Abraham, and that Abraham learned about himself from God, is that through him and his descendants all the world was to be blessed. It was a staggering, awesome, and marvelous promise. Just as we have no idea how much Abraham knew about Melchizedek, we have no idea how much Melchizedek knew about Abraham. We are told only of the brief encounter described in three verses of Genesis 14. Yet, just as Abraham knew he should tithe to Melchizedek, Melchizedek knew he should bless Abraham.

b) The Principle of Blessing (7:7)

⁷*It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.*

Phillips: Second, Melchizedek's priesthood must be greater because he blessed Abraham and 'it is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.' On that basis, the priesthood represented by Melchizedek must be greater than the one to come from Abraham.

MacArthur: In doing so, 'without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater.' As the blesser, Melchizedek indisputably was superior to Abraham. If Melchizedek was superior to Abraham, then he must also be superior to the Levites, Abraham's descendants. Consequently, his priesthood is superior to theirs.

Schreiner: In case we miss the point, the author makes it explicit. The one who blesses is greater than the one receiving the blessing. Since Melchizedek blessed Abraham, he is greater than Abraham. The wording of Gen. 14:19 is significant: 'He [Melchizedek] blessed him and said: Abram is blessed by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.' Melchizedek as priest mediated the blessing of 'God Most High.' His blessing had the imprimatur and the authority of heaven, of the maker of all things.

3. Eternal (7:8)

⁸*In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives.*

Hughes: The author builds on Melchizedek's established superiority through tithing by noting that since the Scriptures do not list his end, he represents a living superior priesthood.

Phillips: Third, as he symbolized immortal life, Melchizedek represented a better priesthood than did the mortal Levites. To be a priest in Israel one had to demonstrate the proper lineage; in books like Chronicles and Ezra we see just how carefully such records were kept. The reason for

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this was that it was a priesthood of dying men, none of whom were able to secure salvation, so proper succession was essential. Melchizedek, however, stands for a greater priesthood—that of the living priest Jesus Christ, who, according to 7:16, ‘has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.’

MacArthur: The Levitical priesthood was temporary and those priests were temporary. The Jews paid tithes to priests who all died. Abraham paid tithes to a priest who, in type, ‘lives on.’ Since no death is recorded of Melchizedek, his priesthood typically is eternal. In this his priesthood is clearly superior to that of Aaron.

Schreiner: The author shifts from Abraham to the Levites, from the fount of Israel to his descendants. He returns to their role, adumbrated in verse 5, of receiving tithes from fellow Israelites. But he latches on to another matter in which they are distinguished from Melchizedek. Previously, it was noted that Levites collected a tenth from fellow Israelites. But he latches on to another matter in which they are distinguished from Melchizedek. Previously, it was noted that Levites collected a tenth from fellow Israelites, while Melchizedek was not a descendant of Abraham. Now he picks up on a matter that will receive sustained attention as the argument progresses. The Levites who collected a tenth from their brothers eventually died. Their priesthood concluded with their death, for they were mortal men. But the text says nothing about Melchizedek’s death. Nothing is said about priests succeeding him. The text testifies, then, to a living priesthood: for the writer, Melchizedek points to Jesus Christ as the resurrected one.

Bruce: Another token of Melchizedek’s superiority to the Levitical priesthood is this: nowhere is it related that Melchizedek lost his priestly office by death, whereas we have the record, generation after generation, of Levitical priests who died and had to hand on their dignity and duty to their heirs. The tithe prescribed by Israelite law is paid to mortal men; the tithe which Abraham gave Melchizedek was received by one who, as far as the record goes, has no end of life. But what was true of Melchizedek in this limited and ‘literary’ sense is true absolutely of Him who serves His people as high priest in the presence of God. Melchizedek ‘is attested as being alive’ in the sense that we never read of him otherwise than as a living man; Christ can be said to live in the sense that, having died once for all and risen from the dead, He is alive forever more.

C. The Summary on Melchizedek

1. Schreiner

Schreiner: What concerns the author is that the readers might fall away, inclined to revert to the Mosaic cult. The author argues here that such a move would be senseless. After all, the Melchizedekian priesthood is clearly superior to the Levitical one. Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, for he blessed Abraham and collected a tenth from him. Furthermore, his priesthood had a different character. It doesn’t depend on a particularly genealogy. It is a living and permanent priesthood. Levitical priests die, but Melchizedek’s priesthood is endless. Indeed, even Levi paid a tenth to Melchizedek through Abraham. Melchizedek anticipates and corresponds to Jesus Christ. He is the ever-living one, the priest whose priesthood never ends. If the readers desire life and true forgiveness of sins, they must continue to hold fast to the confession that proclaims Jesus as the Melchizedekian priest.

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2. Phillips

Phillips: One of the great concerns of this letter is that these Hebrew Christians under persecution not renounce Christianity in favor of a return to Judaism. The point, therefore, is that Christ is superior to Judaism. Indeed, the law of Moses with its priesthood stands upon the greater foundation of the gospel of Christ, represented by Melchizedek who blessed Abraham. To renounce Christ, therefore, is to renounce all that the old covenant stood upon, the source from which even Abraham received his blessing.

Phillips: This passage also proclaims great reasons to us today, reasons why we must honor Jesus Christ, turn to Him, and trust Him for our salvation. The first of these is the excellency of Christ. If you want to see righteousness portrayed, then read the story of Jesus' life. If you want to see peace, then look at the effect of His presence. Look at those who received His grace. Look at the storm He calmed and the demons He cast out and the sicknesses He healed. Jesus is our righteousness and our peace.

Phillips: The second reason to turn to Jesus Christ is His ministry as portrayed in these verses. He is the One who offers the blessings of God, the One who distributes spiritual nourishment, as Melchizedek did in blessing and feeding Abraham. True blessing, both now and forever, comes only through acknowledging Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Phillips: Finally, you must come to Jesus Christ, because apart from His righteousness, there will never be peace for you. Peace is what you are seeking, the comprehensive peace that comes only from God. But without righteousness there is never peace; not in our homes, not in our workplaces, not in our hearts. Where sin reigns there never is and never can be peace.

Phillips: Jesus is our Melchizedek. He is our King of Righteousness, cleansing us from our sin by His blood and clothing us in the royal robes of His perfect obedience. That is why His is the city of peace, where those who find righteousness in Him shall dwell forever in peace with Him. He is our righteousness, and He gives us peace. Forever and ever He will reign as the righteous king over His eternal city of peace.

3. Hughes

Hughes: So we must conclude that Melchizedek's priesthood, though it has only brief mention in Scripture, is superior in every Biblical and logical way to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. Yet, realizing that, we note that it was only a type of the ultimate superior priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is 'a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.' And as the antitype to the type, Christ supersedes it, just as living reality supersedes a photograph!

Hughes: Though Melchizedek was 'king of righteousness' and 'king of peace,' he could never make men righteous or give them peace. He was only a type. But Jesus, the grand, true, eternal Melchizedekian priest/king, gives righteousness and peace! As to righteousness, we understand that, first, Christ *is* righteousness incarnate—'Jesus Christ the righteous' (1 Jn. 2:1). He is intrinsically righteous, the essence of righteousness, the sum of righteousness, the source of righteousness. Second, Jesus is the *bestower* of righteousness (cp. Rom. 3:21-22; 1:17; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 3:9). Third, He is the priestly *mediator* of righteousness. In bestowing it, He becomes our personal Melchizedekian priest who prays for the working out of His righteousness in every area of our lives. He remains forever our King and priest of righteousness!

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Hughes: But Christ is also the King of Peace. His peace follows the gift of righteousness—and never comes before it. The sequence is always righteousness then peace. We understand, first that He *is* peace—the ‘Prince of Peace’ (Is. 9:6)—that He is the essence and sum and source of peace—that there is no peace without Him. We understand too, that He is the *bestower* of peace (cp. Lk. 2:14; Jn. 14:27; 20:19). And finally, now as our eternal priest He *mediates* our growth in peace as He prays for us. Jesus is praying for our *shalom*—our wholeness and well-being. He is praying for it right now! Righteousness and peace have kissed in Christ—and it is this kiss that the King repeatedly bestows on His bride.

For next time: Read Hebrews 7:11-19.