

Text: Heb 7.4-7

We aren't going to cover any new ideas in our message today. Last week, we began talking about Melchizedek. We emphasized how he sets the precedent for Christ's priesthood and that his priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

This week, we are going to talk about the same ideas, repeated over again in our text. I've given our message this title:

Greatness Underscored

The author repeats some of the key points from vv. 1-3 and will repeat one of them again in vv.8-10.

Read Heb 7.4-10

He is emphasizing the greatness of Melchizedek, and by doing this is emphasizing the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the point. That is what he "underscores."

Why do we need this emphasis?

First, the world doesn't make Jesus big, it tries to pull him down (that's why they've made him a curse word)

Second, our hearts are fickle, easily distracted by the next "shiny new thing" — we need constant reminders about our Lord and how great he is

Third, greatness of this kind inspires mission — if Jesus is great in our eyes, we will more gladly serve him

We can't make Jesus too great — we can't appreciate fully the greatness of his greatness.

Proposition: The greatness of Melchizedek establishes the greatness of Christ.

I. Pay close attention to Melchizedek (4)

A. The command to pay attention

1. The repeated emphasis begins with an imperative: "now observe"

a. Behold, Look carefully, Consider deeply

- b. “oratorical imperative”¹ Lane
- c. “*Now contemplate spiritually.*”²

2. The priestly facts about Melchizedek come before us again
 - a. The few facts known make him a suitable type for Christ
 - b. The special emphasis of Heb. is on his priestly role, creating a precedent for Christ as priest

B. The greatness of Melchizedek is the point

1. We are to look at his greatness; “how great” is key word here
2. Studying human greatness
 - a. Poring over sports statistics of some great athlete
 - b. Detailed research going into a biography of some famous person

The emphasis on Melchizedek is meant to point us to Christ.

II. See the significance of the tithe (4b-6a)

A. Abraham’s act emphatically described

1. Literal word order: “to whom a tenth Abraham gave out of the spoils – the patriarch [himself]”
2. The word “tenth” is emphasized at the beginning
3. The designation patriarch is set off at the end

“There is great rhetorical force in the order of the original, ‘to whom even Abraham gave a tithe out of his best spoils—he the patriarch.’”³

B. The custom of the tithe

1. Would later be a significant feature of the OT Law

¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 167.

² F. W. Farrar, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, With Notes and Introduction.*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 97.

³ Farrar, 97.

2. Abraham is prior to the law
3. Practice not unknown in other cultures: Gks would offer 1/10 of the spoils to their gods (though not normally the practice in Israel)

However, note the “first fruits” of the conquest: everything in Jericho, first conquest in the land, devoted to God

4. The religious significance would resonate with Hebrew Christians (5a)

“In Israel agricultural produce was tithed year by year and the tithe was allocated to the tribe of Levi ‘for an inheritance’ (Lev. 18:21, the ‘commandment’ of v. 5), and one tenth of that tithe was further earmarked for the priesthood (Num. 18:26). In Nehemiah’s time the Levites received the tithes under the supervision of the priests and brought the ‘tithe of the tithes’ to the temple to be handed over to the priests (Neh. 10:38f.).”⁴

- a. The Lord designated this privilege as Levi’s inheritance in the land
- b. The Levites in turn tithed the tithe to the priests
- c. The Levitical tithe:
 - 1) By commandment (Num 18.21-24)
 - 2) From their brethren (equal except for the commandment)
- d. Abraham volunteers the tithe to a priest of God
 - 1) By free will (no legal obligation)
 - 2) To one from another nation (no familial tie) (6a)

The implication to be drawn from this comparison is that since the Levitical priests as well as those from whom they exacted the tithe were descendants of Abraham, Melchizedek must be superior to the Levitical priests (cf. vv 9–10).”⁵

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 162–63.

⁵ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 168–69.

5. The depth of the tithe (8-10)

More on this passage next week

- a. Note again the emphasis: Melchizedek lives on (8)
- b. Note that Levi, who receives tithes, also paid tithes (9-10)
 - 1) There is a theological point here, but that will be next week
 - 2) The thing to note again is Melchizedek's stature

C. Sidenote on the verb tenses

1. Sons of Levi *receiving* priest's office (5)
2. [they] *are having* a commandment in the Law (5)
3. Levi, the one *receiving* tithes (9) "paid" = perfect tense

All present tense, as if this is ongoing as the author is writing (another little hint that Hebrews is written *before* the destruction of the temple)

III. Grasp the significance of the blessing (6b-7)

A. The significance, first, of Abraham: he is the one having the promises (6)

1. Present tense: he *has* the promises

Remember Jesus on the present tense: since God at the burning bush said, I AM the God of Abraham, that means there is a resurrection, Abraham still lives.

2. The promises are sweeping

- a. We usually summarize in three points

- 1) Land
- 2) People
- 3) Blessing

- b. The Davidic covenant (promise) of the King is a subset of the promise

- c. The point is: Abraham is a significant figure in God's plan for the world

- 1) He has the promises

2) God's whole agenda of history is wrapped up in him

In other words, Abraham looms large in the Scriptures

B. The significance of the blessing (7)

1. The blessing comes from greater to lesser
2. Despite Abraham's significance, Melchizedek has more significance
3. He offers a blessing: a priestly act (compare Aaron's blessing to the people)

Num 6.23-26 "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: ²⁴ The LORD bless you, and keep you; ²⁵ The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; ²⁶ The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.'

- a. When Isaac blessed Jacob (and Esau) he functioned as a priest to his sons [an intermediary between them and God]
 - b. When Jacob blessed his twelve sons (and Ephraim & Manasseh), he functioned as a priest to them
 - c. When Melchizedek blessed Abraham, he functions as a priest: becomes the voice of God to him
4. Abraham received the blessing, creating the picture God intended the author of Hebrews to discern and teach
- a. It is "without any dispute" (7)
 - b. Dispute = ἀντιλογίας, "anti-word" — without any anti-word, without any contradiction

C. The significance for us

1. We covered this ground already last week – the author has us cover it again, with greater emphasis
2. The point is the position of Jesus — he is our Great High Priest

3. The goal of Christian ministry is to magnify Christ to the people
 - a. To so make Christ great in their eyes that they can't take their eyes off him
 - 1) Our text says "now observe how great this man was"
 - 2) That is to teach us how great this other man is, Jesus Christ
 - b. Our goal is to make Jesus large in your eyes, but not as a matter of majesty so much as a matter of awe, love, and worship

Conclusion:

Proposition: The greatness of Melchizedek establishes the greatness of Christ.

Melchizedek was great relative to Abraham and to Israel.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. He is greater than Melchizedek, who models him. He is greater than all.

Everyone should bow to him, and serve him.