

Hebrews 7:4-10 "Who Stands As Your Federal Head?"

Our writer of Hebrews has been building a case for how Jesus Christ is the One who is above all, be it angels, Moses, Abraham, the priesthood of Aaron or Melchizedek. And the point has been that in God's love for us He has given us glimpses, through the ministries of these men, of how much Jesus Christ cares for us and what He has accomplished on our behalf, that we might have life eternal.

This was important for Jews in that day to understand. Abraham was the father of their nation. He was a great man in their history. He accomplished wondrous works for Israel. But the Lord never intended for Abraham to be the god of Israel. And yet he received such a prominent role in the hearts of many Jews that they lost sight of what Abraham was pointing to, and this was Jesus Christ our Messiah.

And so, in the process of revealing Jesus Christ as God and Messiah our writer puts Abraham into perspective according to God's purpose. He compares Abraham to Melchizedek.

He is suggesting that as great as Abraham was there was one who was greater. And as great as Melchizedek was there was one who was infinitely greater than him. But let's get to the text and see what the Lord has for us.

Hebrews 7:4-10 ⁴ 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.

The lesser person, in this case, would be Abraham and the greater would be the one who blessed Abraham and that, of course, would be Melchizedek. In fact, our writer calls special attention to this

whole scene of Abraham meeting Melchizedek in the desert and essentially says, 'check this out, as great as Abraham is notice that he gives a tenth to Melchizedek, not the other way around. That can only happen if Melchizedek is greater than Abraham.'

And he uses the tithe as a measuring rod of one's superiority. To give a portion of your increase to someone else is one way of showing subservience and recognition of their special place before God.

And yet he doesn't negate the importance of Abraham but actually calls special attention to him by describing him in verse 4 as "the patriarch". The word patriarch is made up of two Greek words; *patria* and *archo*. *Patria* comes from the root *pater* which means father and *archo* means to rule or to begin.

And so Abraham, as Patriarch, is the father who began the work of bringing Israel into existence and ruling as God gave him this profound office. He was to be ruler of a "called-out" people whom God would use to fulfill His promises of a Messiah. This was no small task for Abraham. In fact, it was a great privilege for him to have been given such an office of awesome proportions in God's economy.

The Jews had every right to bestow on him honor and great respect as they referred to him as father, after all this is the designation God gave him in GEN 17:4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations."

Abraham is regarded highly by the Holy Spirit as he is placed in a position of honor by God as the one through whom Jesus Christ Himself would come.

MAT 1:1 "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:"

But as great as Abraham was, the Jew was not to lose sight of Abraham's role in the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, the Jews did just that. Our Lord Jesus addressed this in MAT 3:9 "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham."

The national pride of Israel, through a misplaced honor of Abraham, among other things, was taking precedence over the King of kings and Lord of lords who brought Israel into existence for His own glory. Yes, Abraham was a great servant of God and

yet our writer of Hebrews reminds us that as great as he was he bowed before another servant, greater than himself, as he gave a tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek.

HEB 7:4 "Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!"

And then in the next verse our writer reminds his readers that this act of giving a tithe was God instructed and that it was a good thing to do as they showed respect and honor for the office of priest before God.

HEB 7:5 "Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people - that is, their brothers -even though their brothers are descended from Abraham."

Here our writer would appear to digress a bit as he explains how tithing works in general, according to God's law. The Priests in Israel were given a mandate by God to collect a tenth from their brothers to provide for their needs since they had no inheritance of their own in the way of land.

Since God is the One who mandated this, it is God who has given the Priests a higher position in Israel which all of Israel was to recognize with their tithes. And yet all Jews, being descended from Abraham, share in the same privileges of belonging to God.

And so in one sense they are all on equal footing. But, by God's choice and declaration, He bestows a greater honor on whom He chooses as Priest. Because it is God's choice, not simply physical lineage that this honor is bestowed, men must bow to God by honoring the choice of God.

This Israel did unto the Levitical Priesthood, not because the Priests were inherently better than the rest of Israel, but because it was God's will that they should do this as unto the Lord.

And if God chooses to bestow a greater honor on someone else that is His prerogative. But as an obedient people we are to honor His choice with thankfulness. The point here in our text is that as great as Abraham was, as God chose him for a special purpose, there was one greater than Abraham.

That one was Melchizedek who was in no way a descendant of Abraham and in fact doesn't appear to have any lineage that we could check to see if his blood line was a royal line at all.

But it wasn't a particular blood line that gave Melchizedek a greater position. It was God who made the choice. And so we read in HEB 7:6-7 "This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater."

The reason Melchizedek received tithes from Abram is because Melchizedek realized his special place before God and out of obedience to God Melchizedek simply responded as the High Priest he was and took what was due him and then in turn blessed Abram as one giving a blessing from God.

It's really no more complicated than that. Abram realized that Melchizedek was the greater in the sense that God bestowed on Melchizedek a greater position. This does not denigrate Abraham's position, it simply builds the case that there will always be one who is greater than ourselves.

That One, as we will see, is the One whom Melchizedek represented and foreshadowed. But for the sake of argument our writer wants to drive home the point that of the two priesthods the Levitical priesthood was subservient, or inferior, to Melchizedek's.

HEB 7:8 "In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living."

Here again our writer is making a distinction between the inferior and the superior as it relates to God-ordained priesthods. The priesthood of Aaron was a priesthood which was never intended by God to be perpetual. It was designed to be used in Israel as a foreshadowing of the necessity for a sacrificial atonement on behalf of the people.

It accomplished this when Christ came into this world and fulfilled all righteousness and laid down His life as our Sacrificial lamb. He takes away our sin as we come to Him and place our faith in Him for the forgiveness of our sins and bow to Him as Lord.

And so the need for the priesthood of Aaron to continue ends with Christ. But the priesthood of Melchizedek was designed by God to show something else of the nature and function of our Savior and that is that His priesthood is everlasting.

And so this contrast is made between the two priesthods and how the one must continue to be seen as greater because it represents an eternal work in a living Priest.

HEB 7:8 "In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living."

The one who is declared to be living is Melchizedek. But again, this is not to suggest that Melchizedek is a super-human Priest who never had a beginning or died. The narrative of Scripture is vague on purpose concerning where Melchizedek came from and where he went, because it was intended to convey a truth of the One he represented, who is the only One who can claim to be the Alpha and Omega.

F.F. Bruce in his commentary makes this same point when he say's, "The tithe prescribed by Israelite law is paid to mortal men; the tithe which Abraham gave to Melchizedek was received by one who, as far as the record goes, has no "end of life." As far as the record goes, for our author is not interested in anything that might be known or inferred about Melchizedek outside the Biblical narrative. 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."

The point our writer makes is not that Melchizedek is currently serving as Priest, but rather, just as Melchizedek never had his priesthood taken from him in this world, unlike the priests of Israel according to the law, Jesus Christ's Priesthood on our behalf lives on and is presently being employed on our behalf.

Our Lord continually intercedes on our behalf and is constantly bearing witness before the Father as our High Priest that His blood has covered us and we are clean before Him. Paul touches on this aspect of Christ's priesthood and how our Lord keeps us and protects us.

ROM 8:33-35, 37 "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died -more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding [*present tense*] for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Jesus Christ is our eternal High Priest and His intercession on our behalf will never end. Neither will our standing before Him as His children called out by His name. Even our writer of Hebrews speaks of this. And though we'll look at it in more depth when we get there it's worth noting here.

HEB 7:25-26 "Therefore he is able to save completely [*Or forever*] those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. 26 Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens."

This is who the High Priest Melchizedek represents and foreshadows. But to show that the priesthood of Israel was inferior to the priesthood of Melchizedek, our writer adds, HEB 7:9 "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."

Whoa! Now we're getting into some bizarre philosophical issues here. This could be the beginning of a script for the "Twilight Zone". I mean, what is all of this stuff about Levi paying a tithe to Melchizedek, when Levi wasn't even born until many years later.

Did Levi somehow mysteriously trans-migrate back into time and pay a tithe to Melchizedek? Of course not. Our writer is not stating a fact of an actual event, he's simply stating a fact of logic and reason.

Levi's ancestral priesthood is in contrast to Melchizedek's. The priesthood through Levi was temporal and has arguably been shown to be inferior to that of Melchizedek's on-going priesthood, as far as the biblical narrative is concerned. Levi came from the loins of Abraham who submitted to the Priesthood of Melchizedek, therefore Levi would have, of necessity, been inferior and would therefore, himself, bow in submission to Melchizedek.

This Levi, who by the way was the son of Jacob by his wife Leah, [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob] is the Levi we're talking about. It was through the tribe of Levi in which the priesthood of Aaron was established.

The point our writer is making here is that since Abraham submitted to Melchizedek, then all of his descendants, including Levi, would be inferior to the priesthood of Melchizedek.

He then goes on to make a connection through logic. The connection may seem strange at first, but it should be understood in the light of headship. Abraham is the head of a family in two ways. And we'll look at those two ways in a moment. But first let's take a quick look at headship in the Bible, or federal representation of an entire people.

This truth goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. Adam was our federal representative. What he did, we did through him representing us. The penalty he received and deserved, is the penalty we receive and deserve. He stands as our Head in that sense.

This is why Paul writes in ROM 5:12 "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned-..."

Adam represented you and me. However he faired, we faired. Through his sin we become sinners with a nature that is inherited through our father, our head, Adam. It's similar in some ways to being citizens of the United States of America. As the country goes, so go we. If the United States declares war on a nation, each citizen in this country is seen to be at war with that nation. Each person in this country is represented under the federal headship of this nation.

This is the way God views us. In Adam we all are born into this world in a state of enmity against God. Not that we sinned coming out of the womb but that our federal head, Adam, gave us his sin nature along with its penalty. And because of that we choose to sin. We are held accountable not simply because of what we inherit from Adam, but because we personally rebel against a God who still extends mercy.

Because we are identified with Adam in this sense it can be said of us that we sinned in the garden. No, we did not trans-migrate back in time to the garden, we are simply seen to be in Adam, in the same way Levi is seen to be in Abraham. Therefore Levi, in a sense, paid tithes to Melchizedek even when he wasn't yet born.

This is why our writer opens verse 9 with "One might even say", which is to suggest that even he realizes that this is not in a literal sense that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek, but it could be said in the sense that Levi was being represented in Abraham who actually did the give tithes to Melchizedek. There is a union there which can't be broken.

But how is Abraham the federal head or representative of the nation Israel? God made a covenant not only with Abraham, but also to his seed, according to GEN 17:7 "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come as an everlasting covenant, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

There are two ways in which Abraham has offspring: Physical descendants and spiritual descendants. We know that the nation of Israel came through the seed of Abraham. Abraham had a son named Isaac, who had a son named Jacob whose name was changed by God to Israel. He had twelve sons which we know as the 12 tribes of Israel.

But this was not the only sense in which Abraham was a father or representative for many others. You see the covenant God made with Abraham had to be received by faith. "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." (Rom.4:3) Those who have faith in the promises of God share in the covenant of life. And only those who place their faith in Jesus Christ can say of Abraham that he is my spiritual father, whether Jew or Gentile.

In fact Paul makes a distinction between a true child of Abraham even from among Jews.

ROM 4:12-13 "And he is also the father of the circumcised [Jews] who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. 13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."

He is speaking of Jews, who have embraced the Messiah, as being true descendants of Abraham. But Paul wouldn't limit this covenant promise to only Israel. We are included in this as well.

ROM 4:16 "Therefore, the promise [to Abraham] comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law [Jews] but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all."

Paul again includes all people, both Jew and Gentile, who place their faith in Christ as true children of Abraham.

GAL 3:6-7 "Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham."

He drives this point home to the Gentiles by making it abundantly clear.

GAL 3:8-9 "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

Abraham represented all men who would place their faith in the Covenant-keeping God. God announces the promises of a Savior and keeps His word to Abraham, and all men, as they trust Him and place their faith in His Son alone for their salvation.

But is that all that our writer of Hebrews infers from this idea of federal headship? If Abraham can be a federal head and yet be inferior to Melchizedek, then in what sense is Melchizedek our representative and head? In the sense that he represents a greater High Priest, Jesus Christ.

And here is the beauty of Melchizedek's role in describing Christ. If we are "in" Adam and bear his penalty because he is our representative, how much more is Christ our righteousness if we are "in" Him by faith.

A.W. Pink makes the comment: "The all important and inexpressibly blessed truth for us to lay hold of is that in verses 9-10 we have an illustration of the most soul-satisfying truth revealed in Holy Writ. Just as Levi was "in" Abraham, not only seminally but representatively, so every one of God's children was "in" Christ when He wrought out that glorious work which has honored and pleased God high above everything else.....

..... When the death sentence of the law fell upon Christ, it fell upon the believer, so that he can unhesitatingly say, "I was crucified with Christ" (Gal.2:20). So too when Christ arose in triumph from the tomb, all His people shared His victory. When He ascended on high, they ascended too. Let all Christian readers pray earnestly that God may be pleased to reveal to them the meaning, blessing and fullness of those words, "In Christ."

You and I, in Christ, are no longer in Adam, though we still share in his sin nature. Our penalty has been paid and we are now in a peace relationship with God which will never end. We are new

creatures in Christ. Melchizedek had nothing on Jesus, nor did Moses or Abraham and they all knew it and gloried in the grace of God.

Their federal representative was no longer Adam either. They placed their lives in the hand of God as they trusted Him and all His promises. You and I must place our entire lives in the hand of God and live as members of His household and not Adam's.

Christ represented us and now bids us to go out into this world and represent Him faithfully in the power of His Spirit. We are "in" Christ. May we live in that reality.

EPH 2:4-7 "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."