

Prayer

How wonderful it is, heavenly Father, to know that You have surrounded us with thousands of witnesses to Your faithfulness and love; with thousands of angels standing guard to protect us, and thousands of fellow believers with a keen sense of Your Gospel motivation. Heavenly Father, in You we are never without fellowship, support or protection! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Church Triumphant

In this coming week, we will pray about all the good things done for us by generations of God's people who have died and gone before us. Christians who have passed on 'to glory' are sometimes called 'the church triumphant', hence the title of these prayers. Today, pray for those who have laid the foundations of the church you attend, and give thanks for them.

Meditation *(In worship)*

If, for a few moments, we draw aside in silence
And let the breeze of the Holy Spirit
Engulf us like a gust of wind;
Will not our Lord and Master speak to us His Word?
If, for a few moments, we stand close to a friend
And allow the love of Christ to fill us,
Will we feel the touch of the hand
Of the One who healed the sick and raised the dead?
If, for a moment, we stand to look at the Cross
And see the Father weep for the Son;
Will we weep too, and know His passion
And the victory of His Glory, Love and Power?
If, for a moment, we refrain from singing our hymns,
And listen for the voice of God to speak;
Might we hear, like a whisper in the words
The very message of the Lord we need to hear?
Take the time, my soul; yes, take the time.

Bible Study - Hebrews 7:1-10

¹ This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham as he was returning from defeating the kings, and he 'blessed him'; ² then Abraham gave him 'one-tenth of everything.' Firstly, His name means 'righteous king'; then he is also king of Salem, that is, 'king of peace.'³ He is without father, mother or genealogy, having no record of the beginning of his days or an end of his life; but just like the Son of God, his priesthood remains forever. ⁴ See how great he is! Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder.

⁵ The descendants of Levi who inherit the priestly office are required by the law to collect tithes (one tenth) from the people, that is, from their own race even though they are also descended from Abraham. ⁶ But this man, who has no connection with their ancestry, collected tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had received the promises. ⁷ It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. ⁸ In the one case, tithes are received by people who are mortal; in the other, by someone who is stated as continuing to live on. ⁹ One might even say that Levi, the collector of tithes, was tithed through Abraham, ¹⁰ for he was still 'within' his ancestor when Melchizedek met him.

Review

At this point in the letter, Hebrews launches into a full description of the person of King Melchizedek. He was the king and priest of Salem, mentioned in Genesis 14, already used in this letter as an example of the priesthood of Jesus. In Hebrews 5, Jesus' priesthood was

described: 'You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek' (5:6) This quote from psalm 110:4 was a well known Messianic psalm which spoke about the coming of the Messiah according to God's sovereign will, and early Christians saw in the story of Melchizedek a foretaste of how God would one day work through Christ. The Genesis incident to which this all referred happened when Abraham accepted the priestly authority of Melchizedek after the first battle he fought in Canaan, where he had just arrived (Gen 14).

The only way we can make sense of what Hebrews says is to agree that 'priesthood' is God's to define, and not what was previously made of it in the Old Testament through the tribe of Levi and the priestly offices of the Jewish people. By using this argument, Hebrews freed the early Christian church from any need to follow the rites of the ancient Levitical priesthood which involved giving them tithes. The second half of the passage (vv5-10) says a great deal about tithes, but comes to the conclusion that Christians do not have to give them to Levitical priests. Therefore, all we are required to do is to give our tithes to the community of the church, as if to God Himself. This may sound very simple, for most Christians have long since lost any sense of financial duty towards the Jewish people. However, the wording of this whole passage reminds us that if we fail to offer our tithes to God within the church, then we show a diminishing regard even for Jesus' priesthood; that is, His unique and essential work which gives us the right to come before the throne of God by faith! It is a serious matter.

In this passage, we are reminded that Melchizedek the High Priest, and Abraham the patriarch who represents all people who have 'faith', met after Abraham had won a famous victory over some evil kings rampaging in the lower Jordan valley. Melchizedek appeared out of nowhere as God's priestly agent, enabling Abraham to offer praise and worship to Almighty God after this important event. Abraham gave an offering of one tenth of the 'plunder' of the battle and Melchizedek offered Abraham 'bread and wine' to celebrate his victory (Gen 14:18). This highly evocative event, as Hebrews clearly reminds us, was a sign of 'righteousness' and a sign of 'peace' (7:2). 'Righteousness' because the king's name meant 'king of righteousness' in Hebrew (the word 'melech' means 'king'; and 'zedek' means 'righteous'); and also 'peace' because this Melchizedek was king of a place called 'Salem' which meant 'peace' ('salem' is close to the well known Hebrew word for peace which is 'shalom').

How do we put all this together? Firstly, the logic of the passage is straightforward once we know the relevant Old Testament passages. However secondly, this passage tells us that just as there was a connection between Abraham and Melchizedek, there is a real life connection between ourselves and Jesus Christ. If we are willing to meet with Jesus in the course of the events of our lives (including the battles!) and give Him a tithe of what we have as a token which represents everything; then Jesus ministers to us with His peace and righteousness. This is a profound comfort and challenge.

It is easy to read this passage of Hebrews about Jesus and the priesthood of Melchizedek rather quickly, and think it is nothing more than an exercise in understanding how the Old Testament connects with the New in order to define Jesus' priesthood. It says much more.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read through Genesis 14 and check you understand what this passage says about Abraham and Melchizedek, and how it connects with this passage.
2. Discuss in your group the ways in which Jesus is greater than Melchizedek.
3. What spiritual principles can you find within this passage of Scripture?

Discipleship

How important is tithing to you? Is it the amount that you give, or the meaning of it, for example? For centuries, Christians have debated whether they should slavishly follow the principle of 'one tenth' as the true measure of a tithe; a figure not in doubt in this passage. However, of equal importance to this is the principle that the proportion given represents the whole. So, unless we give our all to Christ, then tithing can become a religious sham, and something less than proper service and faith. Each of us must assess our giving accordingly.

Final Prayer

We praise You and we bless You, Lord God most High. You are our all sufficient means of grace, our all-powerful ally in times of trial, You are our all knowing guide on the journey of life, and You are our all-important guest at every meal and special event. Without You, we would be lost. We praise You and we bless You; AMEN