

## Grace Giving Part V

### What about Hebrews Chapter 7?

By Denise Bostic

In this whole series on Grace Giving, I would be remiss to not teach on Hebrews chapter 7 because it has been misunderstood by so many in the body of Christ. Today, those that teach that tithing is an eternal law that still applies to the Church today will not be able to substantiate their claims by direct command or teaching from the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles or the doctrines of the Church in the New Testament. This statement may shock those who read it but in fact, we do not find any proof at all in the New Testament scriptures that *the Church* taught or practiced the law of tithing at all but rather believers gave completely by freewill offerings and according to God's grace.

In order to impose the law of tithing on the modern day Church, some preachers and teachers point to Hebrews chapter 7 as proof that believers are still supposed to tithe today. The reason that many do this is because this is the only reference to tithing after the cross. But is this what the writer of the book of Hebrews is actually teaching? When read in its proper context, we will find that the author is conveying a much more important message that has often been over shadowed entirely by the subject of tithing.

#### Hebrews 7 Is Not About Tithing

Many believers are searching for the answer to this question. "Why did Abraham give tithes to Melchizedek?" This question has been asked so often because tithing is such a huge issue in the body of Christ today. There are many sincere Christians that really want to understand the truth of this matter but find themselves confused when listening to the teachings of strong proponents of tithing. We will find that there are answers to this question in Hebrews seven but we will also find however, that the major focus of this chapter is not really about tithing but the supremacy of Christ! Many today miss the real message of Hebrews because they major on the minors and miss the most important point. Hebrews chapter 7 does give us an explanation as to why Abraham tithed to Melchizedek but many make the mistake of connecting Abraham's tithe with the New Covenant. In actuality, the author, under divine inspiration, teaches that tithing was really connected to the Old Covenant Law.

In chapter seven the writer speaks of this priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek and gives insight as to who He was. In verses two and three, He is identified as a King of righteousness and peace. He is eternal and it is stated that He abides as a Priest continually. Melchizedek is clearly a type of Christ and many believe that He was Jesus Christ pre-incarnate. According to the Genesis account, Melchizedek met Abraham when he was returning from winning a great battle against many kings and then blessed him. After Abraham received the blessing, he gave a tenth to this mighty King of Peace. (**Genesis 14:17-20, Hebrews 7:1-4**)

Again, we find that the only reference made about tithing *after the cross* and to the Church under the New Covenant is mentioned in Hebrews chapter 7. Some say that Jesus commanded tithing in the Gospels but understand that this was before Jesus went to the cross. The New Covenant had not yet been ratified because Jesus had not yet shed His blood. Jews under the Law in Jesus' day were still obligated to keep the commandment to pay tithes until Jesus would fulfill the Law and set men free from it.

According to the divinely inspired author of Hebrews, this act of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek did not point to or was not connected to Abraham's descendents in the faith *or the New Testament Church* but instead was connected directly to his descendents of the flesh under the Mosaic Law, according to the author of Hebrews. We read in *Hebrews 7:4-5*:

**“Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a COMMANDMENT TO TAKE TITHES OF THE PEOPLE ACCORDING TO THE LAW, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham.”**

“According to the law” establishes the connection between tithing and the Mosaic Law.

“Though they come out of the loins of Abraham” defines those who are his descendents in the flesh *or the nation of Israel*. Here, the writer is clearly speaking of the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant. We find that tithing was a command under the Law, but nowhere in scripture do we find that it is a command for the New Testament Church. The Law of Moses was only meant to be a temporary system and for the express purpose of leading the nation of Israel to Christ. (*Galatians 3:19-25, Colossians 2:16-17, Hebrews 10:1*)

Continuing on to verse 7: **“But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises... v. 8...And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.” (KJV)**

Since this phrase uses the present tense “*receiveth them*” in the KJV, there have been some that have tried to use this as proof that the Church is still supposed to tithe in the New Covenant, but as we will find, this is not true. The words in this text, “*receiveth them*” has been added by the translators of the King James Version and is not found in the original Greek. When this is removed however, we see the meaning of these scriptures in an entirely new context. Let’s take a look at verse 7 in the literal Greek translation and continue on to verses 8 and 9 as well.

**“And here dying men indeed receive tithes, but there it having been witnessed that he lives; and as a word to say through Abraham Levi also, the one receiving tithes, has been tithed. For he was yet in his father’s loins when Melchizedek met him.” (*Hebrews 7:8-10 Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*)**

Let’s gain understanding of what these scriptures are really saying and the overall context of what the writer is trying to convey to the Church. The phrase, “**and here dying men indeed receive tithes**” is referring to the Levitical priesthood that was still in existence at the time that the author was writing this letter to the Hebrews. The Jewish Temple was still standing and the Levitical priesthood was still officiating at the altar of that Temple. Those Jews who had not yet received the Gospel of Christ were still adherents to the religion of Judaism and therefore obligated to tithe under the Mosaic Law.

Jews who had received Christ however were no longer bound to the terms and conditions of the Mosaic Law because they had been set free from the Law by the sacrifice of Christ. (*Romans 7:1-7, Galatians 3:19-25, 4:4-7, 5:1*) We also find that the Mosaic Law was never imposed upon the Gentiles either *due to the fact that salvation and the inheritance blessings given to Abraham do not come by performing works of the Law but are received by grace and having faith in Christ and what He has already obtained for us through His vicarious sacrifice.* (*Acts 15, Romans 4:13-16, Galatians 3:6-18*)

Abraham’s tithe was also akin to paying *tribute*. This was customary in those days to pay tribute to the King or nation that conquered in battle. Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of war to this King of Salem and in so doing he was declaring that He was greater than (or King over) all other kings present that day on the battlefield. The reason that they paid tribute in those days is defined clearly by these definitions:

A payment in money or other valuables made by one ruler or nation to another in acknowledgment of submission or as the price of protection or security.

A tax imposed for such payment.

Any payment exacted for protection.

A payment or tax given by a feudal vassal to an overlord.

Clearly, Abraham was not only proving his submission to this eternal Priest/King but also showing that he looked only to God Most High for his protection and blessings instead of man. (*Genesis 14*)

The next phrase, “**but there (it) having been witnessed that he lives**” refers to the fact that Abraham **witnessed** the existence of this eternal priesthood *in his day*. Abraham witnessed the existence of the One

who is “like the Son of God”. Abraham gave Melchizedek tithes of his own free will and not because he was commanded to by law because the law had not yet been given. Melchizedek also **received** these tithes, not in a legalistic way, but as One who had the power to bless Abraham. The writer of Hebrews sums up the superiority of this eternal order of Melchizedek over Abraham by stating:

**“And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.” (v. 7)**

Let’s look at the last part of this passage, **“and as a word to say, through Abraham Levi also, the (one) receiving tithes, has been tithed. For he was yet in his father’s loins when Melchizedek met him.”**

Since tithing is connected to the Mosaic Law, we find that Abraham’s act was actually prophetic in nature, pointing to the time of the Levitical Priesthood serving under the Mosaic Law. (*Abraham was a prophet, Genesis 20:7*) Since the priesthood of the Levites would be coming out of Abraham’s loins, those who would be receiving tithes under the law were in effect being tithed well in advance to the coming of the Law. (That’s a deep thought!) The writer was going through great lengths to prove a point here. In tithing Levi, Abraham was proving that the eternal order of Melchizedek was and would always be superior to the Levitical Priesthood, since they were in effect, tithing to One greater than themselves and would continue to do so under the Law. (*Leviticus 18:25-29*) Again, **“And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.” (v.7)**

The Jewish Christians of that day needed to understand that there was One greater than even their great patriarch Abraham. The author wisely used Abraham’s example of acknowledging and receiving the priesthood of Melchizedek so that the Hebrew Christians would acknowledge and receive the superiority of Christ, who was made the New Covenant High Priest after this same eternal order of Melchizedek. Since Abraham looked to One who was greater than him, so should all those Jews who had become believers in Christ. Now that they had come to Christ, they must not go back under the inferior system of the Law but instead look to Christ.

In this same chapter we learn that our perfection could not be obtained through the Levitical Priesthood (also called the order of Aaron). Why? It is because the Levites were *fallible* men who were weak. Weak and sinful men are not able to perfect other weak and sinful men. Jesus’ priesthood, however, was after another order, the order of Melchizedek. The first one is based on regulations of the Mosaic Law and their human ancestry but the second on the basis of a New Covenant and an indestructible life. God has sworn an oath and made Jesus a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Because of this oath, Jesus is our guarantee of a better covenant. Jesus is holy, blameless, and pure and has been given a name above every name and exalted above the heavens.

Under the New Covenant, Jesus has been made our High Priest after the eternal order of Melchizedek. It is interesting to note that Jesus was also born a *King* and bears the title of *King of Kings!* Only Jesus’ permanent priesthood is able to perfect us because He is *infallible* or perfect. Men die but Jesus lives forever. Because there was a change in the priesthood (from the order of Aaron to Jesus, God’s Son) of necessity, there was also a change in the law (from the Old Covenant Mosaic Law to the New Covenant Law of Christ). Jesus had been given the power to change the law because He was appointed by God and by virtue of His once and for all sacrifice for the sins of mankind. (*Hebrews 7:11-28*)

### **The Real Message of Hebrews**

The theme of the entire Book of Hebrews is to teach those Jewish believers who had come to Christ that Jesus is superior to Judaism so they would not go back under its religion. The writer goes above and beyond Judaism however because he goes on to prove Jesus’ superiority over *all* of those who have come before Him, even those before the Law. The author gives a pretty impressive list to look at. Jesus is greater than all the patriarchs or forefathers, prophets and priests of the Old Testament such as Moses, Abraham and the Levitical priesthood. Jesus is also greater than the angels because He created them. And lastly, His sacrificial atonement was better than the fleshly ordinances of the Law and the blood of animals. (*Hebrews 1:1-2, 5-14, 3:1-6, 7:1-4,7, 9:8-14*) We find that the writer settles every argument that could or would ever exalt itself against the eternal Priesthood of Jesus.

Some do not understand the real message of Hebrews chapter 7. Some cannot see the “forest for the trees”. They “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel” as Jesus said. The writer is not imposing the law of tithing on the New Testament Church but rather he was proving the superiority of Christ over Abraham, Moses, the Levitical

Priesthood and the Law. *Since the writer of Hebrews is warning them of the dangers of reversion to the Law or Judaism, it is not possible that he would be teaching them to tithe, since tithing was connected to the Law of Moses.* The author could never have been imposing the law of tithing on the Church, because this would be contrary to Christ's gospel of *grace*. If we truly believe that the New Testament scriptures were written under divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will receive this vital truth.

### **Keep Scripture in Context**

A rule of biblical study is to always keep scripture in context with the rest of scripture. Likewise, we need to keep Hebrews chapter 7 in line with the gospel of Christ and all scripture.

Jesus did not give the Church a command to tithe.

The Apostles didn't teach it as a command from Christ.

It is not recorded that the Church practiced tithing.

Tithing was a command or ordinance under the Law, not the New Covenant. (*Malachi 3:7-8*)

Believers are not under Law but grace. (*Romans 6:14*)

God made Abraham wealthy before he ever tithed. (*Genesis 13:1-2*)

Abraham tithed off the spoils of war, not his own wealth. (*Genesis 14:20*)

Melchizedek gave Abraham the blessing before he gave the tithe and not after. (*Genesis 14:18-20*)

By giving Melchizedek the tithe, Abraham was showing that the eternal priesthood of Melchizedek was greater than himself and the Levitical priesthood that would come out of his loins. (*Hebrews 7*)

We receive the blessings of Abraham by faith in Christ (not works of the law) so it may be by grace. (*Romans 4:13-16, II Corinthians 8:9, 9:8-11, Galatians 3:18*)

These scriptural facts go contrary to so many teachings today such as: that it is a command of God for the New Testament Church to tithe or that we must perform tithing or other works of the law before we can be blessed by God. Even the life of Abraham proves that he was blessed by faith, not works. (*Romans 4*)

We cannot take one scripture out of context and teach it as a doctrine or impose it as a law on the Church. Now that believers are under a New Covenant, this means we are now under the *Law of Christ* and therefore we must look to Jesus for what we are to do and not do. We must also know that one scripture or passage of scripture must be in unity with the rest in the New Testament and also be received in the context and Spirit in which it was written. The Book of Hebrews also teaches us that since Jesus is superior over all that we are to listen to Him as our final authority. (*Luke 9:35, Hebrews 1:1-3*) So, if we truly want to know about how we are to give as the Church, we must look to Jesus and the New Covenant. Here, we will find the will of God.

The writer was going to great lengths to prove this point because this letter was being written to believers in Christ that had previously been under the Mosaic Law. At that time they were being pressured by their brethren of the flesh (Jews) to come back under the old Levitical priesthood and return to Judaism completely. A lie was being perpetuated that the atonement of Christ was not sufficient enough and that they had to add works of the law. The writer combats this false doctrine by teaching the Church of the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant. If they could grasp the importance of this vital message however, they could understand the superiority of Jesus' priesthood and not fall away from the faith. The writer later warns the Hebrews of the serious consequences of falling away from the faith and completely rejecting the perfect sacrifice of Christ. (***Hebrews 10:26-31***)

Unfortunately the same old false teaching has resurfaced with a vengeance in these last days. There are many today that are falling for the same lie and caving into the demands and pressures of modern day Judaizers. These false teachers will tell those in the Church that believers today are still under law although God's word plainly declares that we are not under law but grace. (*Romans 6:14*) Realize also dear brother or sister in Christ that what they are really teaching is that Christ's atonement and grace is not all sufficient although God's Word says that it is! (*Hebrews*)

The real message of Hebrews is about the supremacy of Christ over all and His all-sufficient sacrifice. The Father has given Him a name above every name. God has spoken to us in these last days through His Son and wants us to listen to Him above all else. Jesus was given the authority to preach Gospel or Good News of the Kingdom of God directly by the Father. Now we have also been given that authority through Jesus. *It is so important that our message line up with Gospel of Christ.* His message is one of grace and not works. If we preach and teach works of the law, we are not preaching and teaching grace. If we try to justify ourselves through tithing or any other works of the law, we will find that we are actually alienating ourselves from Christ and falling further and further from His grace. If we receive His grace however, we will be justified by it because it will have been based upon Jesus' perfect work instead of our own. Our works are insufficient, Jesus' works are all-sufficient- which one will you choose?