

Why Did Abraham Give A Tithe To Melchizedek?

By Denise Bostic

Fact or Fiction? *How do you explain (that since Melchizedek was a type of Christ, that Abraham paid the tithe to a type of “Jesus” when he paid it to Melchizedek), that this wasn’t symbolic or prophetic of a command to the New Testament Church to pay tithes? The pastor of the church we were attending referred to this passage of scripture to justify tithing.*

The only reference made about tithing *after the cross* and to the Church under the New Covenant is mentioned in Hebrews chapter 7. Of course 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 release them from it.

This act of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek did not point to or was not connected to the New Testament Church but instead was connected directly to the giving of the tithe 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. We find that tithing was a command to Abraham’s descendents of the flesh under the Law, but nowhere in scripture do we find that it was a command for the New Testament Church. Those who came out of the loins of Abraham were the tribe of Levi and the physical nation of Israel. The Law of Moses was temporarily imposed upon them until the coming of the Messiah and the New Covenant. (*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)

There have been many today who have used verse 8 to teach believers that we are still commanded to tithe under the New Covenant but as we will find out, this is not true.

The words in this text, *“receiveth them”* in *Hebrews 7:8* has been used by certain Bible teachers today to try and prove that Jesus is receiving tithes today because it is in the present tense but this phrase has been added by the translators of the King James Version and is not found in the original Greek. If we take this out 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 their (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.”

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 at the time of this writing and the Levitical

priesthood was still officiating at the altar of that Temple. Those Jews who had not yet received Christ or the Gospel were still adherents to the religion of Judaism and therefore obligated to tithe under the Mosaic Law.

Interestingly, we find that this requirement to tithe was not placed upon the New Testament Church. Those Jews who received Christ 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 not 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)

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 (the order of Melchizedek). The fact that the word witnessed is in the past tense means that Abraham witnessed Him *in his day*. Abraham witnessed the existence of the One who is “like the Son of God” and then gave a tithe to Him *back then*, not because he was commanded to by Law (Abraham was not under the Law because it had not yet been given) but because He was showing that this Priest-King was greater than or *superior* to him. We find that this was the true purpose for Abraham giving the tithe to Melchizedek as conveyed by the writer of Hebrews: “**And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.**” (v. 7) By Abraham’s act of giving the tithe of the **spoils of war** to Melchizedek instead of the King of Sodom, he was in fact proving God to be origin or source of His blessings, not man and that He is greater or superior also to the kings of the earth as well.

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. Since Levi (or the Levitical priesthood) 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. 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. Under the New Covenant, Jesus is the High Priest forever after the eternal order of Melchizedek. The fact that Jesus is of this eternal order makes Him superior to all others who have come before Him.

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, pure and has been given a name above every name and exalted above the heavens. 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 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.*

We need to keep this passage of scripture in context with the rest of the New Testament scriptures.

1. Jesus did not give the Church a command to tithe.
2. The Apostles didn't teach it as a command from Christ.
3. It is not recorded that the Church practiced tithing.
4. Tithing was a command or ordinance under the Law, not the New Covenant. (*Malachi 3:7-8*)
5. Believers are not under Law but grace. (*Romans 6:14*)
6. God made Abraham wealthy before he ever tithed. (*Genesis 13:1-2*)
7. Abraham tithed off the spoils of war, not his own wealth. (*Genesis 14:20*)
8. Melchizedek gave Abraham the blessing before he gave the tithe and not after. (*Genesis 14:18-20*)
9. 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*)
10. 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, 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.