

Prayer

It is wonderful, heavenly Father, to know that You have surrounded us with thousands of witnesses to Your faithfulness and Your love. You have given us thousands of angels who stand guard to protect us, and thousands of fellow believers with a testimony of Your love and grace to inspire us and motivate us. Heavenly Father, You have given us all we need for fellowship, support or protection, and we praise You!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Food

Pray about the way in which food is produced. Mass production is important, yet the methods may be controversial; pray that we can both feed people and care for our planet.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for your security and peace
- Pray for world health authorities dealing with 'swine flu'
- Pray about Christian work amongst ethnic minorities

Meditation

If, for a moment, we stand in peace and quietness
And let our Saviour come near to us,
Will not the Holy Spirit like a wind
Engulf us with the inspiration of His eternal word?

If, for a moment, we give our time to a personal friend
And allow the love of Christ to fill us,
Will we not feel the touch of His hand
That ministers through our weakness to bless another?

If, for a moment, we stop to gaze at the Cross of Christ
And see the Father weep for the Son;
Will we weep too, and know the passion
Of His glorious victory over evil, suffering and death?

If, for a moment, we refrain all the distractions of life,
And wait for the voice of God to speak;
Might we hear a whisper in the world
That tells us God is love and never ceases giving it?

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 (5:6f.). In Hebrews 5, Jesus' priesthood was described in this way: 'You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek' (5:6). This quote was from psalm 110:4, 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 description of how God both had already worked in Christ and would also work again through Him in glory. The incident in Genesis to which this refers happened when Abraham accepted the authority of Melchizedek as a priest of God after the battle he fought to free Lot shortly after he arrived in Canaan (Gen 14).

The only way we can make sense of what Hebrews says in this passage is to accept that ultimately, 'priesthood' is defined ultimately not by the descendants of Levi, but by God Himself. The people of Israel used priests according to the tribe of Levi and especially the descendants of Aaron, but Hebrews goes further back in history to find the origins of priesthood in the story of Melchizedek and Abraham, in book of Genesis. By using this argument, Hebrews freed the early Christian church from the need to follow the rites of the ancient Levitical priesthood, which involved giving Levites tithes (7:5). The second half of our passage (7:5-10) says a great deal about tithes, but concludes that Christians do not have to give them to priests, according to Old Testament law. Consequently, all we are required to do is to make our offerings (our tithes) to the community of the church, as if to God Himself (Christians have long since lost any sense of financial duty towards the Jewish priesthood but this was an issue for the early church). The wording of this whole passage reminds us, however, that if we fail to offer our tithes to God, then we show a diminishing regard for Jesus' priesthood. That is, we show disregard for Christ's unique work which gives us the right to come before the throne of God by faith and worship Him! Giving our offering of money to the church 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 evil kings rampaging in the lower Jordan valley. Melchizedek appeared as if he were out of nowhere, as God's priestly agent. As a priest he enabled Abraham to offer praise and worship to Almighty God after this important symbolic event. Abraham gave an offering of one tenth of the 'plunder' of the battle as an offering, 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

Melchizedek was king of a city called 'Salem', the name of which meant 'peace' (the Hebrew word 'salem' is close to the well known word for peace; 'shalom').

What can we make of all this? The logic of our reading is straightforward once we know the relevant Old Testament texts, and this passage tells us that just as Melchizedek was a priest to Abraham, so Jesus is a 'priest' to us. If we are willing to meet with Jesus in the course of what happens in our lives (including the battles!), if we are willing to give Him a tithe of what we have as a token representing everything God has done for us; then as our priest, Jesus will minister to us His peace and righteousness. This is both a profound comfort and a challenge.

It is tempting to read this passage 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 defining the priesthood of Jesus. It says much more.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read through Genesis 14 and check that you understand what this passage says about Abraham and Melchizedek.
2. Discuss in your group the many ways in which Jesus is greater than Melchizedek.
3. How does Jesus exercise a ministry of priesthood to you, whether as an individual or as part of a church?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

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 an offering less than our due service. Each of us must assess our giving accordingly.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Assess your own tithing, and consider whether what you give to your church is indeed a proper reflection of what you believe God requires. Remember, tithing is just one form of giving suggested in the New Testament.
- Pray for the church, that it may demonstrate the ministry of Christ and His priesthood, both to individuals and to the world as a whole. Pray that God's people will be open to receive Biblical teaching about all areas of life.

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 family event. We praise You and we bless You; AMEN