

# Hebrews 7:8-10 Commentary

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CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST

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## The Epistle to the Hebrews

INSTRUCTION Hebrews 1-10:18					EXHORTATION Hebrews 10:19-13:25
Superior Person of Christ Hebrews 1:1-4:13	Superior Priest in Christ Hebrews 4:14-10:18				Superior Life In Christ Hebrews 10:19-13:25
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MAJESTY OF CHRIST	MINISTRY OF CHRIST				MINISTERS FOR CHRIST

DOCTRINE	DUTY
DATE WRITTEN: ca. 64-68AD	

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)  
(See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

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Hebrews 7:8 In [this case mortal men receive tithes](#), but in that [case](#) one receives them, of whom it is [witnessed](#) that he [lives](#) on. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [kai hode men dekatas apothneskontes](#) ([PAPMPN](#)) [anthropoi lambanousin](#). ([3PPAI](#)) [ekei de marturoumenos](#) ([PPPMSN](#)) [hoti ze](#). ([PPPMSN](#))

**Amplified:** Furthermore, here [in the Levitical priesthood] tithes are received by men who are subject to death; while there [in the case of Melchizedek], they are received by one of whom it is testified that he lives [perpetually]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth.

**NLT:** In the case of Jewish priests, tithes are paid to men who will die. But Melchizedek is greater than they are, because we are told that he lives on. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** and here, indeed, men who die do receive tithes, and there he, who is testified to that he was living,

AND IN THIS CASE MORTAL MEN RECEIVE TITHES: [kai hode men dekatas apothneskontes](#) ([PAPMPN](#)) [anthropoi lambanousin](#) ([3PPAI](#)) [ekei](#):

- Heb 7:23; 9:27

**And in this case** - Literally this reads "**and here, indeed...**". The word "**here**" conveys this sense

"**Here**, i.e., in this Levitical system with which we who are Hebrews are familiar, (ekei) **there**" in that system identified with that ancient priest." (Expositor's Greek Testament).

In this verse the writer offers further support regarding the inferiority of the Aaronic order of priesthood compared to the Melchizedekian priesthood.

**Mortal men** - Literally this reads "men who are continually dying". The writer emphasizes that dying men receive tithes which in the present context refers to the Levitical priests who were "continually dying" and passing the baton to the next generation of priests. The point he is that the Levitical order was temporary, but in not so with the order of Melchizedek.

**Leon Morris** makes an interesting observation that...

The present tenses of both dying and receiving coupled with the "here" at the beginning may be held to indicate that the temple system was still in operation at the time the words were written. Thus they support a date before A.D. 70 for the writing of the epistle. ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing](#))

BUT IN THAT CASE ONE RECEIVES THEM, OF WHOM IT IS WITNESSED THAT HE LIVES ON: [de marturoumenos](#) ([PPPMSN](#)) [hoti ze](#) ([3SPAI](#)):

- Heb 3:16; 5:6; 6:20; 9:24,25; John 11:25,26; 14:6,19; Revelation 1:18

In that case (more literally *but there*) - referring to Abraham giving a tenth of his choicest spoils to Melchizedek.

Morris adds that...

"*There*" puts Melchizedek in strong contrast to the Aaronic priests (*here*). He is remote from this scene. The writer does not say that Melchizedek lives on but that the testimony (witness) about him is that he lives. Once more he is emphasizing the silences of Scripture to bring out his point. Scripture records nothing about the death of Melchizedek. This must be borne in mind when estimating the significance of the incident and the way the priest-king prefigures Christ. (*Ibid*)

**One** - That is, Melchizedek. In dramatic contrast to the Levitical priests "who are continually dying" stands the record regarding Melchizedek, "**one...that...lives on**", with not one word about his death. In this sense Melchizedek's office as priest was not passed on to another.

**He lives on** - No death is recorded for Melchizedek, and thus in a "typical" sense his priesthood is viewed as eternal and thus his priesthood was clearly superior to that of Aaron. In other words the Scripture specifies no limit to the authority of his priesthood, but on the contrary there is an intimation of perpetuity ("*he remains a priest perpetually*" see note Hebrews 7:3).

**Spurgeon** - And thus Aaron was greater than the people, being set apart to a high and honorable office, into which none else might intrude. He was God's representative, and so he spoke with the authority of his office. Today our Savior's intercession in the heavenly places rises far higher in power and glory than that of any ordinary intercessor. He blesses in fact, while the greatest saints on earth and in heaven can only bless in desire.

**Calvin** -He takes the silence respecting his death, as I have said, as an evidence of his life. (and then he adds) The type (Melchizedek) is described as having no end; the order of priesthood which it represents is therefore eternal.

**Witnessed** ([3140](#)) (**martureo** from **mártus** = witness, one who has information or knowledge of something & hence can bring to light or confirm something; English ~ martyr) ) means to be a witness, to testify, to give evidence, to give testimony, to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something. To be well reported. It means to provide information about a person or an event concerning which the speaker has direct knowledge. **Martureo** in some contexts is used in the sense of making an important and solemn declaration. It can be used in the sense of confirmation or approval and so to affirm in a supportive manner.

**Expositor's Greek Testament** explains "**witnessed**" as follows...

Giving to the silence of Scripture the force of an assertion, the writer speaks of Melchizedek as "a person of whom it is witnessed" (*martouromenos hoti*)

**Martureo** is a **key word** in Hebrews, comprising 7 of the 81 NT uses (almost 10% of all uses)

- **Hebrews 7:8** (note) - In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom **it is witnessed** that he lives on.
- **Hebrews 7:17** (note) - For **it is attested** of Him, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."
- **Hebrews 10:15** (note) - And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,
- **Hebrews 11:2** (note) - For by it the men of old **gained approval**.
- **Hebrews 11:4** (note) - By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he **obtained the testimony** that he was righteous, God **testifying** about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.
- **Hebrews 11:5** (note) - By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he **obtained the witness** that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.
- **Hebrews 11:39** (note) - And all these, **having gained approval** through their faith, did not receive what was promised

**A W Pink** - Some have stumbled over the statement here made about Melchizedek: '**it is witnessed that he lives on**'. These words have been appealed to in proof that he was a superhuman being. But if this statement be interpreted in the light of its context, there is no difficulty. It was not absolutely and personally that Melchizedek still lived, but typically and as a representation of Christ. Scripture frequently attributes to the type (here, Melchizedek) what is found alone in the antitype (here, Christ). Thus, the paschal lamb was expressly called God's Passover (Ex 12:11), when in reality it was only a pledge and token thereof. So the emblems on the Lord's table are denominated (given the name of) the body and blood of Christ, because they represent such. The blessedness of this detail will come before us in the later verses. ([Hebrews 7:4-10 Melchizedek](#))

Hebrews 7:9 And, **so** \* to **speak, through Abraham even Levi**, who **received tithes, paid tithes**, (**NASB: Lockman**)

**Greek:** [kai os epos eipein](#), (AAN) [di' Abraam kai Leui o dekatas lambanon](#) (PAPMSN) [dedekatotai](#). (3SRPI)

**Amplified:** A person might even say that Levi [the father of the priestly tribe] himself, who received tithes (the tenth), paid tithes through Abraham, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham.

**NLT:** In addition, we might even say that Levi's descendants, the ones who collect the tithe, paid a tithe to Melchizedek through their ancestor Abraham. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** and so to speak, through Abraham even Levi who is receiving tithes, hath paid tithes,

**AND, SO TO SPEAK THROUGH ABRAHAM EVEN LEVI, WHO RECEIVED TITHES PAID TITHES: kai hos epos eipein (AAN) di' Abraam kai leui o dekatas lambanon (PAPMSN) dedekatotai (3SRPI):**

- Heb 7:23; 9:27
- Heb 3:16; 5:6; 6:20; 9:24,25; John 11:25,26; 14:6,19; Revelation 1:18

**So to speak** - Literally "**so to speak a word**" (**epos** = a word + **eipein** = say or speak). The idea of this introductory phrase is "*I might almost say*" this phrase conveying the thought that what follows is not to be taken literally.

This is an idiomatic expression which **Vincent** explains was used to introduce...

an unusual statement, or one which may appear paradoxical or startling to the reader, as this statement certainly is, to a modern reader at least.

To reiterate, such an introduction is calculated to make sure that the statement about to be spoken (*The a sense in which even Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek*) is not to be understood in a literal sense.

**Fausset** paraphrases it this way "*I may say that, virtually, Levi, in the person of his father Abraham, acknowledged Melchisedec's superiority, and paid tithes to him.*"

**Matthew Poole** writes "And as I may so say:" the Spirit now sets this priesthood above the Levitical by instance, an instance which is not so proper or direct, and so his form of introducing it is considerable, as **hos epos eipein**, *as to say the word*, a Greek elegancy of speech, which is used as a preface when something is uttered which is remarkable, and hard to understand and it is not only conclusive to what was spoken before (I will speak a word more, and then end the discourse) but interpretative of what he was about to say concerning Levi, born a hundred and sixty-two years after this transaction; "**As I may so say,**" or, **in some sense it may be said.**

The fact that the Levitical priesthood would pay tithes would have been a rather startling statement to the Jewish readers of the letter because the characteristic of the Levitical priesthood was not that of **paying** but of **receiving** tithes!

**Even Levi** - In context this reference to **Levi** is not speaking so much of him personally as of Levi collectively or as the source of the tribe that sprung from him, especially the priests in the line of Aaron. Remember the author's overall intent in this section is to demonstrate beyond a doubt the superiority of the priesthood of Messiah over the Levitical (Aaronic) priesthood.

**Spurgeon** - Before the foundation of the world, when there was no word concerning a priest of the house of Levi, our Lord Jesus Christ was looked upon by God as priest and sacrifice for men. It is not said, "You will be a priest," but "You, a priest forever." The verb is left out, but the word "are," in the present tense, is correctly enough supplied by the translators. "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psa 110:4). He was a priest before Aaron and his sons were born or thought of. Moreover, consider that the decree registered by the psalmist in Psalm 110 was published by revelation hundreds of years after the law had been given, so that it was not an old decree invalidated by the law of Moses, but a newly published decree abrogating in due time that which had gone before. Even while the law was in its palmy days, and the priest wore the Urim and the Thummim, there was a note struck in the Psalms of David that intimated the ending of it all, because there was another priest, not of the house of Aaron, who surpassed all of them, being made a priest by oath, even while they were priests without an oath. Whatever priesthood there may have been of God's ordaining under the Old Testament, it was evidently all subordinate to the superior Melchizedek-priesthood of Jesus Christ our Savior, and was predestinated to give place to it.

**Through Abraham** - The idea is "by means of Abraham" the payment was made by the Levitical priests to Melchizedek, a concept that the writer elaborates on in the next verse.

**Paid tithes** - As we have already discussed, in the ancient orient, when one paid a tithe to someone, they payer was in essence acknowledging the superiority of the payee (or recipient of the tithe).

Hebrews 7:10 for he was **still** in the **loins** of his **father when Melchizedek met** him ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [eti gar en te osphui tou patros en](#) (3SIAI) [ote sunentesen](#) (3SAAI) [auto Melchisedek.](#)

**Amplified:** For he was still in the loins of his forefather [Abraham] when Melchizedek met him [Abraham].  
([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.

**NLT:** For although Levi wasn't born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham's loins when Melchizedek collected the tithe from him. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Young's Literal:** for he was yet in the loins of the father when Melchisedek met him.

**FOR HE WAS STILL IN THE LOINS OF HIS FATHER WHEN MELCHIZEDEK MET HIM:** eti gar en te osphui tou patros en (3SIAI) hote sunentesen (3SAAI) auto o melchisedek:

- Hebrews 7:5; Genesis 35:11; 46:26; 1 Kings 8:19

**For (gar)** introduces an explanation (see importance of pausing to ponder this **term of explanation**) , in this case the explanation of how it was possible that **through Abraham even Levi...paid tithes**.

**Spurgeon** - Thus the old priesthood, the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood, did homage unto the Melchizedek priesthood, which is greater still.

**He was still in the loins of his father** (compare Hebrews 7:5 "*descended from Abraham*" or more literally "*to come out of, **from the loins** of Abraham*") - Levi was still **in the loins** (in modern terms in the genetic/chromosomal makeup) of Abraham. In addition, the Jewish priesthood was considered as being in Abraham. So if Levi (and the Levitical priests) was in Abraham, when the great patriarch paid a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek, then it is as if Levi (and his descendants) had paid a tithe to Melchizedek. In the same way, when "father Abraham" was blessed by Melchizedek, all of Abraham's progeny were blessed, including the tribe of Levi, whose reception of Melchizedek's blessing equated to their submitting to his greater authority (the greater would bless the lesser figure). And of course in His infinite wisdom the Holy Spirit Who inspired this epistle knew full well that this line of reasoning would be very appealing to the Jews, who placed a strong emphasis on the solidarity (a feeling of unity as in interests, standards, and responsibilities that binds members of a group together) of their race.

The **New Living Translation** tries to help us understand this verse rendering it...

For although Levi wasn't born yet, the seed from which he came was in Abraham's loins when Melchizedek collected the tithe from him.

**Constable** comments that...

In the ancient oriental view of things, people regarded a descendant as in one sense participating in the actions of his ancestors ([Hebrews 7](#))

**Think of Adam the representative head of all mankind** - In Romans 5:12ff Paul uses the same principle of the head representing all the subsequent offspring of all time. Paul explained that the entire human race was considered to be **in Adam**, so that when Adam sinned, I sinned and you sinned, not to mention that we also inherited Adam's "sin virus" which made us "little sinners" even from the womb. Recall Paul's teaching...

Therefore, just as through one man (Adam) sin (the 100% contagious "sin virus") entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned (this is difficult to understand but Paul flatly states it as a fact, and it reflects the principle of imputation - or receiving credit - so that when Adam sinned, every human who was ever born "received credit" for that sin as if they had themselves committed it. Don't ask me to try to explain this further because I cannot. God says it and I believe it regardless of whether I can fully comprehend it or explain it!) (See **note** Romans 5:12) (A W Pink's note below goes into a more

detailed explanation)

In an similar way, the Levitical priesthood was considered to have been present in the patriarch Abraham not when he sinned but when he tithed and was blessed. Specifically the Jewish race in general and the Levitical descendants were present when their great patriarch and father acknowledged the superiority of Melchizedek by his voluntary willingness to tithe to him and receive blessing from him.

Regarding the phrase **in the loins of his father**, Leon Morris explains that...

This is a way of speaking we find here and there in the Bible when the ancestor includes the descendants. So it was said to Rebekah, not two children but "two nations are in your womb" (Gen 25:23). Again, Paul can say, "In Adam all die" (1Cor 15:22). Levi was thus included in the payment of the tithe (and, of course, all the priests who descended from him and whom the Hebrews esteemed so highly). The author wants his readers to be in no doubt about the superiority of Christ to any other priests and sees the mysterious figure of Melchizedek as powerfully illustrating this superiority. ([Ibid](#))

As an aside, someone today might argue that in light of the fact that Christ was the "seed" of Abraham (see Galatians 3:16), and thus "in the loins of" Abraham and so He too paid tithe to Melchizedek. This argument breaks down because Abraham was not Messiah's father. God was His Father and His birth was unique and supernatural. Fausset explains it this way...

Christ did not, in this sense, pay tithes in Abraham, for He never was in the loins of an earthly father [Alford]. Though, in respect to His mother, He was "of the fruit of (David's, and so of) Abraham's loins," yet, being supernaturally, without human father, conceived, as He is above the natural law of birth, so is he above the law of tithes. Only those born in the natural way, and so in sin, being under the curse, needed to pay tithe to the priest, that he might make propitiation for their sin. Not so Christ, who derived only His flesh, not also the taint of the flesh, from Abraham. ([Hebrews 7](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** also addresses this question asking...Since Jesus Christ came "of the seed of Abraham" (see note Hebrews 2:16), does this mean that He too was a part of this experience? No, because Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. His identification with Abraham was for "the days of His flesh" (see note Hebrews 5:7). Since Christ existed before Abraham (John 8:58), He could not have been "in Abraham" as were Aaron and his family. ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

**Let's review the progression in the writer's logic** -- Melchizedek was shown to be greater than Abraham in order to show that Melchizedek was greater than Levi and in turn greater than Aaron from whose lineage came the Levitical priests. From this line of logic, one can then deduce that if Melchizedek is greater than Aaron, then Melchizedek's priesthood must also be greater than Aaron's priesthood and in the final analysis, Messiah's priesthood, since it was of the order of Melchizedek must be greater than the Aaronic Priesthood. This is why the dull of hearing were not ready for for the writer's line of logic!

**A W Pink** has a lengthy explanation on **Hebrews 7:9,10** noting that...

In these verses the (writer) meets the last objection which a carping Jew could make upon the subject. Against what the (writer) had been saying, it might be advanced:

*Granting that Abraham himself paid tithes to Melchizedek, it does not follow that Melchizedek was superior to all Abraham's descendants. Abraham was, in some sense, a priest (Gen. 12:7), yet he was not so by virtue of any office which God had instituted in His "Church: (Ed note: Church does not appear in the OT - perhaps a better word here would be "congregation"). But in the days of Moses, Jehovah did institute an order and office of priesthood in the family of Aaron, and were not they, by Divine appointment, superior, because superceding the earlier order of Melchizedek?*

Many find it difficult to follow (the writer's) line of thought, and that, because they are so ill-acquainted with the most important truth of headship and representation. Let us quote here from F. S. Sampson...

*Abraham was truly the covenant-head of his posterity in the line of Isaac and Jacob, in whose descendants the promises made to him were fulfilled. It was in virtue of this covenant with Abraham, that the Jews inherited their distinguished privileges as a nation. It was the transaction with Abraham which brought them into the relation of a 'peculiar people' to Jehovah; and hence, in his patriarchal character and acts, he stood forth as the representative or federal head of the nation, so far as all the promises, privileges, and institutions of the Judaical were concerned. He was both their natural progenitor and their covenant-head, by the appointment of God. We must remember that He was concerned, through His providence and promises, in all this business. Therefore, when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek as a priest of the most High God, and received a blessing from him, it was a historical fact intentionally introduced by God's providence, with a view to its*



*becoming a feature of the type (so to speak) which Melchizedek, in his history and functions, was foreordained to present, of the supreme and eternal High Priest. This providential incident prefigured and represented, by the Divine intention, the supremacy of the antitype; and in it Abraham acknowledged the official superiority of the type, not only over himself, but over his posterity then in his loins, represented by and acting in him.*

The principle of **federal representation** lies at the very base of all God's dealings with men, as a careful study of Romans 5:12-19 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 reveals. **Adam** stood for and transacted on the behalf of the whole human race, so that what he did, they legally did; hence his sin, guilt and death, are **imputed** (reckoned, credited to the account) to all his posterity, and God deals with them accordingly. So too Christ stood for and transacted on the behalf of all His seed, so that what He did, they legally did; hence, His meeting the demands of the law, His death and resurrection-life, are **imputed to all who believe on Him**.

In like manner, Abraham stood for and transacted on the behalf of all his posterity, so that God's covenanting with him, is to be regarded as His covenanting with them also. Proof of this is found in the title here (and nowhere else) given to Abraham, viz., **the patriarch** (see note Hebrews 7:4), which means

Thus the (writer) here brings to a head his argument by pointing out that, virtually (for all practical purposes, in effect though not in literal fact) and representatively (not personally and actually), Levi himself had paid tithes to Melchizedek. We repeat, that Abraham in Genesis is not to be considered only as a private individual, but also as the head and representative of all his children. When Abraham gave tithes he did so not only in his own name, but also in that of all his descendants. Abraham had been called of God and separated to His service as the head of His elect people. There was more than a natural relation between him and his descendants. Jehovah promised to be a God unto him and to his seed after him, and therefore Abraham covenanted with God in the name of and as the representative of his seed. What God gave unto Abraham He gave unto his children, but he received the grant of it as the representative of his children, who, four hundred years later, took possession of it. (Hebrews 7:4-10 Melchizedek)

**Pink** then draws an application of these great truths to the lives of believers all of whom are **in Christ** in a way similar (but more profound and eternal because of Who Christ is) to Levi's being in Abraham at the time of his transaction with Melchizedek in Genesis 14...

The all-important and inexpressibly blessed truth for us to lay hold of is that in Hebrews 7:9, 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" (see **note** Galatians 2:20). So too when Christ arose in triumph from the tomb, all His people shared His victory (see **notes** Ephesians 2:5; 2:6). 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, blessedness, and fullness of those words "In Christ" (see notes on in Christ and in Christ Jesus). ([Hebrews 7:4-10 Melchizedek](#))

**Now let us briefly summarize what the writer has been saying in Hebrews 7:4-10** as he seeks to convince these professing Jewish brethren that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, the great grandfather of Levi, and so he is also greater than the Levitical priesthood. The writer gives 4 reasons...

**(1) Hebrews 7:5-6:** The Levitical priests also received tithes from their brethren, and yet the fact that they descended from their "father" Abraham indicated that the Levitical priesthood was inferior to Melchizedek's, to whom Abraham paid a tithe.

**(2) Hebrews 7:7:** Abraham the lesser was blessed by Melchizedek the greater.

**(3) Hebrews 7:8:** The Levitical priests eventually died but, Christ Who ministers according to the order of Melchizedek lives forever.

**(4) Hebrews 7:9-10:** Levi, who although the great-grandson of Abraham, was represented by Abraham and in this sense actually also paid tithes to Melchizedek.