

“Tithes Of Levi”

“... and, so to say, through Abraham even Levi, who receiveth tithes, hath paid tithes; for he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him” (Heb. 7:9-10).

Levi was the third son of Jacob and Leah and from him sprang many great and honorable men, the greatest perhaps was Moses. Through the direction of God, this tribe was set aside to function as priests for the nation of Israel, and although the actual functioning in priestly capacities was confined to Aaron’s descendants, all Levites served in various religious duties incumbent upon Israelites: slaying of animals and other items related to religious service. The sustaining of this tribe was the responsibility of the other eleven tribes. This provision was made in a number of different ways: a portion of sacrificed animals belonged to the officiating priest (Lev. 5:13, 16). Tithes of all their produce and flocks were also the Levites (Lev. 18:21-24). The Levites had no tract of land given to them (they were God’s heritage, Deut. 10:9f), but each of the other tribes were to set aside cities in their midst for the Levites. All in all, 48 cities were given to the Levites from the other eleven tribes (Num. 35:6), although not each tribe was required to allocate the same number of cities to them. Thus, the tribe was scattered throughout the whole nation, which was the fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy about his sons, when he blessed them shortly before he died. *“Simeon and Levi are brethren; Weapons of violence are their swords. O my soul, come not thou into their council; Unto their assembly, my glory, be not thou united; For in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hocked an ox. Cursed by their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel” (Gen. 49:5-7).* The cruelty of which Jacob spoke, was the massacre of the Shechemites through the hands of Levi and Simeon (See Genesis 34).

Yet, while Levi was designated to receive tithes, symbolically speaking, he *“paid tithes”* representatively through his father Abraham for he was not yet born. Of this truth the Hebrew write dwelt upon when he wrote, *“Now consider how great this man was, unto whom Abraham gave a tenth out of the chief spoils, and they indeed of the sons of Levi that receive the priests’ office have commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though these have come out of the loins of Abraham: but he whose genealogy is not counted from them that hath taken tithes of Abraham, and hath blessed him that hath the promises. But without any dispute the less of blessed of the better” (Heb. 7:4-7).*

The writers' argument is this: Melchizedek met Abraham and blessed him. The less (Abraham) is blessed of the greater (Melchizedek). Since Levi was yet unborn, he likewise paid tithes to Melchizedek. When Melchizedek blessed Abraham, he blessed Abraham's descendants. The less (Levi and his priesthood) is blessed of the better (the priesthoods of Melchizedek and of Christ).

As was noted in an earlier article, Christ was designated as a priest early on in the letter. He was called a "*merciful and faithful high priest*" in 2:17. He was called the "*Apostle and High Priest of our confession*" in 3:1. Two references are made of Jesus' priesthood in 4:1, 5. Only when we reach the fifth chapter is Jesus' priesthood identified with the priesthood of Melchizedek and His being priest is shown to be the fulfillment of David's prophecy in Psalms 110:4: "*Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.*" In this sixth chapter the writer's aim was to prove the superior nature of Christ's priesthood over that of Levi. In the first three verses he has shown that Christ has an unchanging priesthood versus the changing priesthood of Aaron; and in verses four through ten his design was to show that because of "*less is blessed of the better;*" Melchizedek (thus Christ) was "*better*" than Levi. In the chapters which follow (7:1-10:23), the writer will show just how and why the priesthood of Christ was greater than the priesthood of Levi and why that priesthood was removed by God.

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