

The Talmid



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDED NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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DISCIPLESHIP IN AN EVIL DAY (Part 3)

The Great Announcement

**“All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me.”**

Matthew 28:18

The Great Commission actually begins with a great announcement. Before there can be a mission, there has to be a message. Behind the sending of the church lies the Father’s sending of his Son and Spirit. Before we go, we must stop and hear—really hear—what has happened that we are to take to the world. The evangel comes before

evangelism. We must hear this gospel not just at first, for our own conversion, but every moment of our lives if the Great Commission is to be a joyful delight rather than an intolerable burden with an impossible goal. Hear it again, with all of the supporting evidence of Christ’s incarnation, life, death, and resurrection: **“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”** (**Matthew 28:18**).

Before You Go

Listen to this quick testimony from a friend of mine: “I am a pretty impulsive person. If there is a check I need to take to the bank, I rush out the door, jump in the car, and am halfway to my destination when I realize that I’ve forgotten the check. The most humiliating part of it is that I will have to return home and face my wife greeting me at the door, grinning, holding the check and saying, “Did you forget something?”

Just go. Just do it. “Get ’er done,” as they say. Reflection slows you down.

The same thing can happen with the Great Commission. We think it doesn’t really matter if we don’t get all the details right, as long as we are zealous. It is easy to subordinate the message to the mission, the evangel to evangelism, as if being busy with outreach could trump the content of what we have been given to communicate.

Of course, it can work the other way

too. We can be preoccupied with getting the message **right** without actually getting it **out**. The evangelist **D. L. Moody** once quipped to a critic of his methods, “I like my way of doing it better than your way of *not* doing it.” If “zeal without knowledge” is deadly (see [Romans 10:2–3](#)), then knowledge without zeal is dead. The Great Commission doesn’t give any quarter to either of these extremes.

“Go therefore into all the world and make disciples.” This is the version of the Great Commission that many of us memorized. However, it leaves out a great deal. To begin with, it leaves out the whole rationale for the Commission in the first place. Although it sounds a little corny, a good rule of thumb in reading the Scriptures is that whenever you find a **“Therefore,”** you need to stop and ask **“what it’s there for.”**

When we see an imperative like **“Go therefore,”** we need to go back and look at what has already been said leading up to it. There is no reason for **us** to go into all the world as Christ’s ambassadors apart from the work that **He** has *already* accomplished.

The Great Commission actually begins with the declaration: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”** ([Matthew 28:18](#)). This is the rationale for everything that the church is called to do and to be. The church’s commission is indeed *directed* by a *purpose* (**“making disciples of all nations”**), but it is *driven* by a *promise*.

Grounding Purposes in Promises

Like our own lives, the church is gospel-driven. Every new-covenant command is grounded in the gospel. We love God because he first loved us ([1 John 4:10, 19](#)). We choose Christ because he chose us ([John 15:16](#); [Ephesians 1:4–5, 11](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:13](#)). We are called to holiness because we are already declared to be holy in Christ, clothed in his righteousness ([Colossians 1:22](#); [Colossians 3:12](#); [1 Corinthians 1:30](#)). Because we have been crucified, buried, and raised with Christ, we are no longer under the tyranny of sin and are therefore to offer up ourselves in body and soul to righteousness ([Romans 6:1–14](#)). In view of **“the mercies of God,”** we are called to **“present [our] bodies as a**

living sacrifice” ([Romans 12:1](#)).

Similarly, in our corporate calling as the church, we are always responding to a state of affairs that God has spoken into being rather than creating that reality ourselves. The church’s mission is grounded in God’s mission, which he fulfilled objectively in his Son and whose subjective effects he is bringing about in the world through his Spirit. Because the Father sent the Son and then the Spirit, we are sent into all the world with His gospel. So being **mission-driven** is really the same as being **gospel-driven**. As believers and as churches, we are motivated by the mission of the Triune God, as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit save us and send us with that saving message to our neighbors.

All of our spiritual blessings are found in Christ, not in our individual or collective decisions, experiences, efforts, or ambitions. We confess our faith in **“one holy, catholic [which means universal] and apostolic church”** not because we can see it nor because of any vain confidence that we can build it. Our unity is based on the fact that there is **“one Lord, one faith, one baptism”** ([Ephesians 4:5](#)). Despite all appearances to the contrary, we believe that this church is catholic, because it is not a communion of friends I chose for myself but a family that God has chosen from all of eternity in his Son. We believe that this church is also holy, not because of its empirical piety but because God has made Jesus Christ our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption ([1 Corinthians 1:30](#)). And finally, the church is apostolic not because we can identify living apostles in the world today but because it proclaims the apostolic doctrine in the power of the Spirit.

Far from eliminating our own responsibility, this Good News concerning God’s work in Christ is what liberates and propels the church out into the world. Only because it is in Christ is there an assembly of sinners drawn from every people and language that has been transferred from the kingdom of death to the kingdom of everlasting life.

The Original Missionary

Many of us grew up in the faith with missions conferences where a handful of Great Commission verses were repeated in order to justify the missionary imperative. Sometimes we got the impression that God has done his part (providing the opportunity for salvation)

and now the rest is up to us. *We* become the main subjects of the Great Commission.

However, as **Christopher J. H. Wright** has pointed out in his remarkable book *The Mission of God*, the whole Bible is about *God's* mission, with Christ as the central character. In his post resurrection appearances to the disciples, Jesus not only preached himself as the center of Scripture ([Luke 24:27, 44](#)), but he made their proclamation of him part of that mission as well: “**This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem**” ([Luke 24:46–47 NIV](#)).

So it's not only that there are a few major verses justifying missions. Rather, the whole Bible is about God's mission: sending his Son, then sending his Spirit, and sending his people out as his disciples. In fact, as **Wright** points out, the Bible itself is a missional document, arising out of and keeping up with the history of God's missional activity in the world. The messianic center of Scripture is inseparable from its missional context and thrust.

And this missionary God is not one person but three. Every person of the Trinity is involved in every work—creation, providence, redemption, consummation—yet each in his own way. The Father begets, the Son is eternally begotten, and the Spirit is breathed out by the Father in the Son. Every work of the Godhead is done from the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit. The Father is the origin, the Son is the mediator, and the Spirit is the perfecting agent who ensures that the Word will not return empty-handed from its mission. From eternity, then, God's missions have always been based on an essential unity with a plurality of persons-in-relationship. The character of that relationship is covenantal, with mutual giving and receiving: no debts, just an everlasting exchange of gifts.

We are God's analogy, created in his image to reflect in our own creaturely manner that covenantal relationship of male and female in a mission. Just as God completed all of his work and then entered his Sabbath enthronement, Adam—with Eve at his side—was to lead creation in triumphant procession into the consummation: everlasting confirmation in

immortal glory. Long after the original treason of this royal couple in Paradise, the Last Adam appeared.

Jesus Christ is both the missionary God and the human representative who fulfilled the mission for which we were created. The whole story of the Bible turns on the merciful determination of this Triune God to redeem and to restore sinful creatures and the creation that lies in bondage because of the curse. In spite of every failure, disloyalty, and unfaithfulness of the human partner in the covenant, God will complete his mission. And in the person of Christ, he has also fulfilled the mission that he assigned to humankind in Adam: to lead creation into the everlasting blessing of immortality, forgiveness, righteousness, and peace.

Calling Abram out of a moon-worshipping family, God kept the promise alive even after the fall. Like Jesus's disciples, Abram went to a place about which he knew almost nothing, simply on the basis of God's word. God promised Abram that he would be not only an earthly father of Isaac and his descendants in an earthly land but also a spiritual father of heirs from every nation who would be blessed through his seed. In spite of his people's covenant-breaking, the missionary God kept calling and sending prophets not only to indict Israel on the basis of its violation of the covenant made at Sinai but to renew God's pledge to the Abrahamic promise through a new covenant. God himself would descend in judgment and redemption. The God of Israel would complete the mission that Israel, like Adam, failed to fulfill.

The Gospel-Driven Church

The church in the new covenant is no less “**prone to wander**” than the church in the old covenant. And it is therefore no less dependent entirely on the faithfulness of the Father, in the Son, by his Spirit. The promise of the Savior has always created, sustained, and expanded the kingdom of God. When Israel violated the covenant of law that they swore at Sinai, the prophets nevertheless proclaimed God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant. This divine oath would be realized in the new covenant, when God would forgive their sins and give them a new heart ([Jeremiah 31](#)).

We must never take Christ's work for granted. The gospel is not merely something we take to unbelievers; it is the Word that created and continues to sustain the whole church in its earthly pilgrimage. In addition, we

must never confuse Christ's work with our own. There is a lot of loose talk these days about our **"living the gospel"** or even **"being the gospel,"** as if our lives were the Good News. We even hear it said that the church is an extension of Christ's incarnation and redeeming work, as if Jesus came to provide the moral example or template and we are called to complete his work. But there is one Savior and one head of the church. To him alone all authority is given in heaven and on earth. There is only one incarnation of God in history, and he finished the work of fulfilling all righteousness, bearing the curse, and triumphing over sin and death.

We use the verb **"redeem"** too casually today, as if we (individually or collectively) could be the agent of this sort of action. God has already redeemed the world in his Son, having **"ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation"** ([Revelation 5:9](#)). On this basis, the Spirit is at work applying this redemption, drawing sinners to Christ, justifying and renewing them, in the hope that their bodies will be raised together with an entirely renovated creation ([Romans 8:16–23](#)). The church comes into being not as an extension or further completion of Christ's redeeming work but as a result of his completed work. Heralds *announce* victory; they don't *achieve* it.

Jesus Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth to judge and to save. This great announcement that launches the Great Commission is anticipated throughout the Gospel of John.

Although the Word was made flesh, his own did not receive him. **"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God"** ([John 1:12–13](#)). We do not have the ability or authority to make ourselves children of God, but Jesus exercises his authority to give life in the power of the Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that apart from this new birth from above, no one can enter his kingdom ([John 3:5](#)).

In [John 5](#), Jesus said, **"For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will"** ([v. 21](#)). The Father has given all judgment into the hands of the Son ([vv. 22–23](#)).

Then in [chapter 6](#) Jesus says,

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day" ([vv. 37–39, 44](#)).

In [chapter 10](#), Jesus says,

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" ([vv. 14–15, 27–28](#)).

Again in [chapter 15](#) he reminded his disciples, **"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide"** ([v. 16](#)). Then, on the verge of Good Friday, Jesus prayed,

"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.... I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours" ([John 17:1–3, 9](#)).

So there is a thread running throughout John's Gospel that testifies to the eternal covenant of redemption between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father chose a people in Christ from the mass of fallen humanity, giving them to Christ as their mediator, with the Spirit as the one who will give them faith and keep them in that faith to the end. Not one of those whom the Father gave to the Son will be lost.

Given the unity of the Bible's witness to Christ, this thread of passages in John's Gospel helps us to understand what Jesus meant in the Great Commission. Although this commission is not repeated in the same form

in Luke or in John, the basic substance is found in their concluding chapters as well ([Luke 24:44–53](#); [John 21:15–19](#)). **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”** ([Matthew 28:18](#)). What an announcement! It presupposes everything from our Lord’s conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary to his ascension to the Father’s right hand. And it anticipates his return in glory to judge the living and the dead. He alone has all authority to judge and to save.

In his opening vision in the Apocalypse, John hears these words from the glorified Son: **“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades”** ([Revelation 1:17–18](#)). It is this triumphant indicative that grounds Jesus’s command to John: **“write therefore the things you have seen”** in this remarkable book ([v. 19](#), emphasis added). In the same way, his announcement that all authority is in his hands is the rationale for the Great Commission’s **“Go therefore ...”**!

Given the fact that we—and those to whom we are sent—are **“dead in the trespasses and sins”** ([Ephesians 2:1](#)), we do not have the authority or power to save ourselves or even to respond in faith apart from God’s gracious liberation ([Ephesians 2:5, 8–9](#)). The Great Commission would be a futile task if the ultimate power and authority lay in our hands or in the hands of those to whom we bring the gospel. Jesus Christ did not make it possible for us to be saved. He did not begin a work of redemption. He did not do “his part” so that we could do ours. Rather, Jesus Christ has accomplished everything. He has assumed our flesh. He has fulfilled all righteousness in our place and has borne the judgment for every one of our sins as our substitute. And he has been raised as the first fruits of a whole harvest, the beginning of the resurrection from the dead. There is no more redeeming work to be done!

I’ll never forget when this marvelous truth of Christ’s objective, completed work really gripped me. My well-meaning pastor once asked me, “When were you saved?” Without intending to be clever, I heard myself answer, “Two thousand years ago.” At first, I was as surprised at the remark as my pastor.

A lot of our talk about “getting saved” in evangelical circles focuses on the day that we did something: we invited Jesus into our heart, said a prayer, went forward, or otherwise evidenced a decisive conversion experience. However, this shifts the concentration from the gospel itself (Christ’s saving work) to our experience of the gospel. We are commanded to believe the gospel, but the gospel itself is an announcement concerning Christ’s all-sufficient achievement for us.

Not even the new birth is the result of human decision or effort. We are not given steps for **“How to Be Born Again.”** Jesus’s statement in [John 3](#), that one must be born from above in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, **is not an imperative** (i.e., command) **but an indicative** (i.e., statement of fact). That is, it simply declares the state of affairs. We are not born again by our decision, as John had already indicated in [chapter 1 \(v. 13\)](#). Rather, says Peter, **“you have been born again ... through the living and abiding word of God.... And this word is the good news that was preached to you”** ([1 Peter 1:23, 25](#)). The gospel is *for* us, not *about* us. It isn’t about anything that we do, feel, or choose. It is the Good News about Jesus Christ and what he has accomplished for us.

Of course, the new birth evidences itself in conversion: a lifelong response of repentance and faith. God does not believe for us, but we do so because we have been redeemed already by Christ and are given the gift of faith. All of our salvation is found in union with Christ. It takes a miracle to believe in Christ—and he is still a wonder-working Savior whose miracle of the new birth is greater than all of the signs he performed in his earthly ministry.

Because all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Jesus Christ, we are sent into the world with confidence that God’s mission will be accomplished. Paul preached the gospel to Lydia and **“the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul”** ([Acts 16:14](#)). After explaining that God **“saved us, ... not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began”** ([2 Timothy 1:9](#)), Paul—on the verge of his execution in Rome—assured Timothy, **“Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”** ([2 Timothy 2:10](#)).

The greatest missionary in the history of the church was driven by the gospel indicatives. Because God had chosen sinners from a mass of spiritual death, Christ had saved them, and the Spirit gives them faith through the preaching of the gospel, Paul could go on, enduring persecution, knowing that God's purposes would be realized. Neither Caesar, nor the Jewish leaders, nor the sinners to whom he preached possessed this authority. With the other apostles, Paul was entrusted with the keys of the kingdom—that is, the gospel itself. However, not even he could open the sealed tomb of the fallen heart. The preaching of the gospel seems weak and foolish in the eyes of the world. **“But I am not ashamed,”** he tells Timothy, **“for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me”** ([2 Timothy 1:12](#)).

A missionary friend once said that when his plane approached the Mumbai airport and he saw the masses of people below, he was overwhelmed with the impossibility of his task. Then he remembered that he was not commissioned to save these people, or even to open their hearts to believe the gospel, but simply to proclaim it, and God would gather his people. That made all the difference, he said, and he was liberated to fulfill his calling. There can be no recovery of delight in the Great Commission without a renewal of the church's conviction that it not only came into being but is sustained in every moment by the will and work of the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit. It is this confidence that motivates a missionary in Saudi Arabia to labor for years before witnessing a single conversion. So why do so many of us, as American Christians, measure success in our own churches by other standards, based on what we can accomplish and see on an impressive scale?

Christ's ascension to the right hand of the Father creates the confidence that our going will not be in vain, whether we are sent to China or to our next-door neighbor. The same Word that creates and sustains the church's own existence and growth is proclaimed to the world so that Christ's kingdom expands to the ends of the earth. The Father's decision is irrevocable. Christ's mission is accomplished already, and the Spirit will be just as successful in his labors. Therefore, the Great Commission cannot fail.

Jesus had already prepared the disciples for his departure and the sending of the Spirit ([John 14–16](#)). He had told them, **“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”** ([Matthew 16:18–19](#)). Christ himself has redeemed his church and is now building his church in the power of his Word and Spirit. It is not a kingdom that we are *building* but a kingdom that we are *receiving* ([Hebrews 12:28](#)).

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

With new challenges come new opportunities. In many ways, this is a better time to take the Great Commission more seriously. Once we begin to see ourselves as belonging to a minority within a predominantly pagan society with vestiges of cultural Christianity, we are freed up to reorganize our beliefs and practices in a more distinctly biblical pattern. Discipleship cannot mean going with the flow; it requires swimming against the current not only of contemporary culture but often of contemporary church life and experience.

The central point of this teaching is that there is no mission without the church and no church without the mission. As evangelicals we have tended to see the church and its public ministry of Word, sacrament, and oversight of spiritual and material needs of the body as “maintenance” for those who were evangelized once upon a time. They're already in. But evangelism and mission have to do with going outside the church and its ministry to say and do something else. The cleavage between church and mission is often stated explicitly in evangelistic appeals: “I'm calling you to believe in Jesus, not to join a church.” But what does it mean to make disciples—what does that really look like on the ground? Furthermore, how do we deal with the challenges of religious pluralism and the rising sentiment in evangelical circles that salvation does not require explicit faith in Christ?

The central mandate of the Great Commission—to proclaim the gospel to everyone in the world—used to be taken for granted by Christians, especially by evangelicals. Convinced that salvation comes through hear-

ing and believing the gospel, generations of ordinary Christians left the comfort of kith (acquaintances) and kin (kinsfolk) to hazard unfamiliar and often unwelcoming engagement with those who had not yet heard the Good News



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Hebrews 7 – Overview Part 1

As we move through the remainder of Hebrews, [Hebrews 7](#) and especially [Hebrews 7:1-10](#) will be the most difficult section of Hebrews to both teach and to relate to. Most believers will not relate well to Melchizedek or find a great deal of value in his person or position. For the Old Testament Hebrews, just as for believers today, there were many things that were essential and important for their walk before God. However, most of the time they had ignored them and had failed miserably. In fact, the entire Old Testament is a testimony to the utter failure of the Jewish nation. It is no wonder that the author issues such a strong warning in [Hebrews](#)

[10:26-31](#). The Hebrews in all of their religious superficiality had actually crucified the very Son of God. They were so blinded to their own religious ostentation and hollowness that they actually thought that they were doing God a favor by killing Christ. Peter declared in his sermon in [Acts 2:36](#),

³⁶“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

This is a blazing indictment against Israel and how far they had actually sunk spiritually. To make matters worse, it is not as if this actually ended with the death of Christ, but to the contrary the religionists continued to both persecute and kill Christians after the resurrection. It is so easy to be blinded by the very thing that is so abhorrent to God. At times it seems that the most difficult people in the world to reach are the very religious.

Israel’s spiritual demise had been ongoing for centuries, and in that process God had been more than patient and more than longsuffering with both their rebellion as well as their spiritual indifference to Him. The northern kingdom Israel fell and was taken off into captivity by the Assyrians. There was not one good king in the northern kingdom – not one. Then the southern kingdom of Judah fell. In that process, the temple was destroyed and the people led away into captivity into Babylon, and at that point in time there were no sacrifices being made until a small remnant of Israel returned back to Jerusalem and began a restoration of the temple that had been destroyed. One of the very first things that they did upon returning was to build an altar and to begin to make sacrifices again. After Christ and the destruction of the temple in 70AD, the sacrifices once again ceased and have not yet started back again to this very day.

Now, someone is going to raise the question and say “Well, why do we even need to talk about the priesthood and high priests. We do not function under a priesthood in the New Testament.” Well, believers may not function under a priesthood “system” in the same way that the Jews did, but believers are actually called a “**holy priesthood**” who has a Great High Priest. [1 Peter 2:5 and 9](#) state,

⁵**you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up**

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁹But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Hebrews 4:14 says,

¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession

So, it is critically important that a believer understand some things about the priesthood and specifically the function of the Great High Priest, and that is exactly what Hebrews 7-10 is about to explain in great detail.

Now, the beginning of Hebrews 7 is the largest commentary in the Scriptures on the somewhat mysterious individual called “Melchizedek”. He is first identified in Genesis 14:18-20.

¹⁸Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he *was* the priest of God Most High. ¹⁹And he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” And he gave him a tithe of all.

That is it until Psalms 110:4 where the Psalmist is speaking about the person of Christ,

⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not relent, “You *are* a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Then he is mentioned in Hebrews 5:6, Hebrews 6:20, and Hebrews 7:1-10, and there is no more about Melchizedek except the quote in Hebrews 7:17 and 21. So, whatever can be gleaned from Melchizedek has to be gleaned from these small portions of Scripture, and what is utterly amazing about this individual Melchizedek is that even though he is only mentioned briefly on two occasions in the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews sees him prefiguring the single most important ministry of Christ for His people, both today and in the future. Melchizedek did something for Abraham that prefigures what Christ will do for His people.

So, one of the first things to glean from Hebrews 7:1-10 is that Melchizedek is a type of Christ. Melchizedek is the type and Christ is the anti-type.

There has always been much conjecture and speculation about the person of Melchizedek. Obviously, much of that comes from the simple fact that there is so little information given about him. So, no matter how much one may determine to be true about Melchizedek, there is still much that they will not know. Obviously, if God had wanted believers to know more about Melchizedek, then He would have revealed more about him. Some people suppose him to be an angelic being or even a heavenly being. Some suppose him to actually be a Christophany, or an actual appearance of Jesus Christ in an earthly form. Obviously, he was not an angel simply because the priesthood is not an angelic function. There are no angelic priests. Likewise, it does not appear that he is actually a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ to Abraham simply because Hebrews 7:3 says that he was “**made like the Son of God**”, not that he was the Son of God. So, who was he? Well, we need to simply let Scripture tell us what it wants us to know about him and then leave it at that. Additional speculation would have no meaningful interpretive value whatsoever.

What we initially want to do in this overview process of Hebrews 7 is to simply make some broad and encompassing statements and conclusions about Melchizedek, and then make the parallel to Jesus Christ. Everything that will be learned about Melchizedek is designed to point the believer back to Jesus Christ. The type always points to the anti-type. It is not the intent of this particular study to address all of the details surrounding Melchizedek. In the overall understanding of Hebrews, it must be appreciated that what the author is doing in Hebrews 7 is taking back up his discussion of the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ that he began in Hebrews 5:1-10. He had to digress for a few moments in Hebrews 5:11 – 6:12 and deal with the issue of the Hebrews having become “**dull of hearing**”. So, after having addressed that issue, the author takes back up his discussion of the superior high priestly ministry of Christ.

At a minimal level, Melchizedek is a mysterious figure. The three verses he is mentioned in in Genesis 14 occur around 2000 BC, and then he is not mentioned again for nearly 1000 years when David gives a prophetic word about him in Psalms 110 – and that just one verse. So, in all of the Old Testament there are only four verses

about him – just four verses (which is not really much to go on). Obviously, apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David could not really have known much of anything about Melchizedek, or about what he was actually prefiguring.

In thinking through this, it is important to appreciate that at the time of [Genesis 14](#) that there was no priesthood. There was no Levitical priesthood, there was no temple, and there were no sacrifices. There was no Law. In fact, the nation of Israel did not even exist. There was just Abraham – that was it! However, when David wrote his sentence about Melchizedek, there was a priesthood, but in essence what God was stating in that verse was that He was going to establish a completely new priesthood – which meant that He was going to do away with and abolish the Levitical priesthood. It appears from [Hebrews 7](#) that the author of Hebrews is the first person in history to actually make the mysterious connection between Christ and Melchizedek. In fact, he has “**much to say**” about the connection between Christ and Melchizedek and states this in [Hebrews 5:9-11](#).

⁹And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” ¹¹of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

So, at the point of the narrative in [Genesis 14](#), it should be understood that there were no guidelines for the priesthood – none. The Levitical guidelines and the priesthood simply did not exist. There were no priests, and for the most part there had not even been many godly people. Obviously, Abraham was the exception, not the rule. Whatever godly teachings there may have been were probably passed down through Noah and we know that the end result of that was the tower of Babel in [Genesis 10-11](#) and ultimately God having to confound everyone’s language simply because they still had no idea as to what it really meant to seek or to even know God. Even Abram in [Genesis 12](#) was a godless pagan before God called him.

Now, the primary objective for the author in [Hebrews 7](#) is simple. He is making a comparison of three different entities. He is comparing the Leviti-

cal priesthood with the priesthood of Melchizedek and then with the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and his point is to prove to these Hebrews that Jesus Christ is superior to the other two. In the last teaching what was emphasized was that for the Jews the priesthood was a very critical element of their spiritual life. The priest was the “bridge” between them and God and without the priests there was no way to offer sacrifices for their sins. So, what the author is actually doing in the book of Hebrews is so far-reaching to these Hebrews that it almost defies explanation. In very simple terms, he is telling them to completely discard the very thing that their entire spiritual life was built around – the priesthood and the sacrifices at the temple. It would be similar to someone coming along and asking believers to discard the church, pastors, and elders. The church is all that we have ever known, and for the Hebrews the priesthood and the sacrificial system was all that they had ever known. They received it in the desert at Mt. Sinai. This was no small issue for them. Other portions of Hebrews reveal that one of the problems that was plaguing many of these New Testament believers was that they wanted to go back to their Jewish traditions. They found a kind of false security in their religion. In fact, the actual going back would most likely help alleviate and relieve much of the ongoing persecution they were suffering. It is easy to understand their dilemma. Persecution is never fun, never enjoyable, and never something that an individual would look forward to happening in their life. They just seemed to want some relief.

Now, the author recognizes this dilemma and he understands the spiritual struggle that many of these Hebrews were experiencing, but going back to a dead and superficial system had no value and it was important that he clearly show that to them. From a practical level, many Christians battle the same kind of thing in that after salvation and after the honeymoon period wears off, their tendency is to go back to all of the worldly and earthly endeavors that satisfied them before salvation. As a pastor, I constantly battle the issue of encouraging believers to remain committed to the things of Christ. It almost seems like an oxymoron that Christians would have to be reminded to live as Christians, but the battle is a constant one. Unfortunately, there are many unscriptural and cultural ideas about what it means to be a Christian that have fully infiltrated the Christian church and in many ways changed the entire landscape of what it even means to be a Christian. No matter how much a believer’s personal goals and ambitions and their per-

sonal perspectives come into play, they have no eternal value when divorced from the Word of God – none, and that is very, very difficult to accept. Christians live in the now and not in the future, but Scripture is constantly encouraging them to live with an eternal perspective and not a temporal perspective.

So, based on what has just been stated, it is important to make an observation about Melchizedek. It has to be appreciated that he lived in the land of Canaan which has been well documented for its utter godless depravity. Canaan was as depraved, wicked, decadent, corrupt, immoral, and degenerate as a nation could be. It would not be the place where you sent your children to school. Just the story of Lot and how depraved and wicked Sodom and Gomorrah were clearly identifies the issues that would be faced by Melchizedek. However, the important issue is that Melchizedek was a very godly man who lived in a very ungodly culture. He was surrounded with wickedness and lewdness at every level, but in the very midst of such depravity, he was still a man of great integrity and holiness. That is one of the reasons why [Hebrews 7:4](#) says “**Now consider how great this man was...**”. What the author does is that he clearly reminds his readers that it is more than possible to be godly in an ungodly world, and that it is more than possible to follow and honor God in a godless and depraved culture – one similar to the one in which we live. To me personally, this is the very essence of what it means to be a Christian – to live above the values and the morals and the beliefs of those that surround us. The standard by which we live should never be determined by the world in which we live, but solely by the Word of God. The consequences of not understanding this are very eternal.

It is important to take a quick look at establishing who Melchizedek was based on [Hebrews 7](#). Once again, it must be appreciated that God had to reveal these simple truths to the author because there is nothing else in Scripture that really addresses the details that he provides to us in [Hebrews 7:1-10](#). First, it is important to notice that this Old Testament figure is referred to in [Hebrews 7:3](#) as one who “**remains a priest continually**”. I.e., he is identified as a “**priest**” (which is very significant),

and actually is the first priest mentioned in the Old Testament – whether good or bad. Apparently many of the pagan religions had priests as a part of their religious system. So, the first thing to see about Melchizedek is that God called him to be a priest, but not one who was a priest according to the Levitical priesthood which had not yet been created. Under the Levitical priesthood, the priests had to not only be descended from the tribe of Levi (one of the sons of Jacob), but also from Aaron, Moses’ brother, who was from the tribe of Levi. So, the Levitical priesthood was strictly Jewish, but Melchizedek was not from the tribe of Levi.

In [Hebrews 7:1](#) he is also called the “**king of Salem**” (Salem was an ancient name for Jerusalem), so apparently he was a priest / king in and around the area of present day Jerusalem. What is important about this is simply the fact that under the Levitical priesthood a priest could not be a king. The Levitical priest was subject to the king like everyone else, except that his priestly functions were not under the control of the king. So a man who served as a priest did so, not because he necessarily lived a godly life, but rather because he was born into a particular family. Then lastly, he could only serve as a priest from the age of 25 to the age of 50. The point is that every priest was temporary. Not one of them had any kind of permanent ministry. Even their sacrifices were temporary. They had to keep repeating them over and over and over. The sacrifices never ended simply because they were never sufficient. They were only a type pointing to the antitype. Nothing was permanent about the ministry or its functions. Forgiveness was not permanent, righteousness was not permanent, and peace was not permanent. Everything that the priests did was insufficient. So, the contrast once again is that Melchizedek had a continual ministry (v3). It did not end when he became 51 years old. Keep in mind that what the author is doing is trying to show the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood over the priesthood of the Levites (which is all the Jews knew), and then to show the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood over that of Melchizedek.

Next, Melchizedek is called a “**priest of the Most High God**”. The significance of that phrase is that the title “*El Elyon*” was a more universal name for God who was above all national or dispensational distinctions. I.e., He was God over both Jew and Gentile, whereas

the Levitical priests were priests strictly for Israel. The ultimate significance comes in that Jesus Christ is not just the Messiah for Israel (as they thought), but He is the Messiah for the world. Now, this simple fact is not that personally significant to believers in this generation because they have always known that Christ is the Messiah for both Jew and Gentile. However, for the Jew, this was a complete paradigm shift for them. What the author is doing is reminding his readers that there was a superior priesthood that existed long before their priesthood. The message that is being presented here to the Jews is that the priesthood of Jesus Christ was not after the order of Aaron, but was after the order of Melchizedek. Their priesthood was temporary, ineffective, and had been set aside because it had no redeeming eternal value. However, the priesthood of Jesus Christ was permanent, effective, and has immense eternal value. The whole point is why would they or anyone else ever want to put their confidence and hope in something that had absolutely no eternal value for their life.

Melchizedek went out and **“blessed”** Abraham after Abraham had defeated the Canaanite king **“Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him”** ([Genesis 14:17](#)). And in the process of providing the blessing to Abraham, he in turn received an actual tithe from Abraham (v2). In his role as king, he is referred to as a **“king of righteousness”** and as a **“king of peace”** (v2). What that means is that he was simply a king who ruled righteously and peacefully. He was considered to be an excellent king during his monarchy.

Then lastly, v3 says that he was **“without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God....”** These verses have often caused a degree of confusion relative to understanding who Melchizedek really was. It appears at first glance that he had no father, no mother, no beginning, and no ending, and so the inevitable conclusion that is arrived at is that this had to be a Christophany, or an Old Testament appearance of Christ. He would be the only one who could actually fulfill those requirements. However, to the Hebrew, what the writer was saying was something that they would have fully understood and without the need

for any real explanation. This entire verse simply means that there was no actual record of who his parents were or from where he actually came. His parents are simply not recorded in Scripture. Everyone has a genealogy, but it may not actually be one that can be determined. The phrase that he had **“neither beginning of days nor end of life”** refers to the fact that the historical record is silent regarding his birth and death.

Furthermore, for Melchizedek to be a priest, there was no specific genealogical requirement simply because there was no law and no Levitical priesthood at that time. There was no Jewish nation. Once again, in the Jewish mind genealogy was everything – absolutely everything, but this was simply before the Jewish nation even existed. To the Jew everything always related to the priest and to the priesthood and to their genealogy. Just think for a moment as to the major content of [Matthew 1](#) and [Luke 3](#). They both have genealogies. Why? It is because the genealogies, even though they may not be that meaningful to us personally as we read through them in our devotions, they were everything to the Jew. The Messiah had to be a Son of David. He had to have a very specific lineage, or in the mind of the Jew he could not even be considered to be the Messiah.

So, the Levitical priesthood was entirely hereditary and had nothing to do with character or integrity. A person’s genealogy was the most significant criteria as it related to the priesthood. Without the correct genealogy, no matter how righteous someone was and no matter how much they may have wanted to be a part of the priesthood, they simply were not allowed to do so. If an individual did not descend from both Levi and Aaron, then they could not serve as a priest. In some ways, this may shed some light on why there were so many bad priests in Israel during the Old Testament. It was simply because the only qualification was one of genealogy, not character. Obviously, in the New Testament it is the exact opposite. Being qualified to minister in the New Testament has absolutely nothing to do with genealogy, but everything to do with character. There are multiple attributes that must be in a man’s life before he can actually be considered qualified to serve in the ministry. [1 Timothy](#), [2 Timothy](#), and [Titus](#) all provide definitive guidelines for determining if a man is qualified to actually be a pastor, an elder or a deacon, and if he does not meet these qualifications, then he should not be in a place of leadership within a local assembly.

Without entering into the details of [Hebrews 7:4-10](#), it simply deals with the fact that Abraham offered a tithe of the spoils he had brought back from his battle with the several kings. In the ancient world, paying tithes to another was a way of recognizing the other person's superiority and your subjection to them. So, by providing a tithe to Melchizedek, Abraham was recognizing that he was in the presence of one who was greater than him. For the Jewish mind, the key verse in this section is v7 which states that **"the lesser is blessed by the better"**, with Abraham being the lesser and Melchizedek being the better, or the greater.

Now, what is critically important in this section of Hebrews is to appreciate what the author is trying to actually do. Please remember that the letter of Hebrews is very pastoral in nature. It is like a pastor that sees his congregation going in the wrong direction, and he desperately wants to help them make the best of decisions. These are men and women who are finding it difficult to maintain both their faith and their faithfulness during a very, very demanding and trying time, and in order to find some relief from the trials that they are facing, it appears that many of them are choosing to go back into a now defunct and meaningless religion. The issue is one of what are we really going to place our faith in. Whatever someone places their faith in creates the primary direction of their life. Right now, each believer has their faith placed in something or someone. It may be some strong characteristic in their life like their personal resolve and determination. They may be trusting in their abilities and in their skills to get them through difficult times. Many people are trusting in the fact that they are a good, moral people and work hard and are resourceful. Just think of the number of people who are trusting in the fact that they are members of a church, or that at some previous time in their life that they made a "decision" for Christ. The issue is not that any of those things are necessarily bad or wrong, but rather that from a salvific perspective none of them having any meaningful eternal value.

In the final analysis and at that one moment in our life that will have the greatest impact on our eternity and where we actually spend it, the only thing that will have any value whatsoever is how we have lived our life for Christ. Were we faithful or were

we unfaithful? Was our verbal statement of faith actually a real faith in the Person of Christ? Are we men and women who have truly given our lives to Christ and men and women who will trust in His Word no matter what it may cost us? Is the honor of Christ and the glory of God what actually drive our lives, or is all of this just mere lip service? Did we really place our faith in Him to save us? Has our life had meaningful evidence that what we said we believed was in fact the governing factor in our life? You see, it is not a matter of being good or being better or being resourceful or being independent or being creative or being anything, but whether or not we were ultimately willing to trust God with our life no matter how difficult and no matter how stressful our life became. What has it been worth to us to bear the name of Christ? How have we really been willing to live in regards to our faith in Christ? Is all that we have a kind of window dressing Christianity, a kind of superficial and plastic religion? Or is this thing we call "faith in Christ" something that is real and meaningful and something that has had a life transforming impact on our life? It has been aptly said that when this life is past that the only thing that will last is what we have done for Christ.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹Stedman, 80.
 - ²Hughes, 184-185.
 - ³Phillips, 222-223.
 - ⁴MacArthur, 174.
 - ⁵MacArthur, 174.
 - ⁶MacArthur, 175.
 - ⁷Brown, 126.
 - ⁸MacArthur, 177.
 - ⁹Hughes, 187.

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