

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:11 – Jesus Christ: Our Great High Priest

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:4 - Jesus is Better than Aaron and His Sons

Introductory note – Most commentators are in agreement as to the division of the thoughts within the first part of chapter 5: verses 1-4 = the qualifications for the high priesthood; verses 5-10 = Jesus' qualification as high priest. Verse 11 begins a new line of thought, which line continues through chapter 6:20.]

1. “Seeing then, that we have a _____ Who is passed through the _____, Jesus, the _____ of _____, let us _____ our _____.”

[“Great” - from the Greek megas, from which we get our prefix “mega” to describe things exceedingly great, large, and/or powerful. This is the first of three immediate contrasts between the high priesthood of Aaron and that of Jesus (though others will follow later).

“That is passed into the heavens” - this separates the high priesthood of Jesus from that of Aaron. In the Aaronic high priesthood, God descended from heaven to meet with the high priest in the Most Holy Place. In the high priesthood of Jesus, the high priest is ascended into heaven (cf Eph 4:10) where God is and there makes intercession for God's people (cf 1 Tim 2:5; 1 John 2:1-2).

“Jesus, the Son of God” - As human and Divine (John 1:1-4, 14), Jesus is uniquely qualified to make intercession on man's behalf. Though His most unique quality is noted in verse 15, we must elaborate on the importance of Jesus' lineage. As the eternal Son of God, Jesus never needs anyone to take succeed Him (Heb 7:24). This is in stark contrast to the priesthood of Aaron (Heb 7:23). Additionally, the high priesthood of Aaron and its rite of succession had been perverted in the days of Jesus to be nothing more than a political office (cf Luke 3:2; John 18:13-14, 24 and McGarvey's comments on each in The Fourfold Gospel, 64, 694. See also B.W. Johnson's comments on John 18:13-14 in his Commentary on John, 263).

“Let us hold fast our profession” - Yet another exhortation to these beleaguered Christians to hold fast to Jesus Christ. “Profession” in verse 14 is the same as that in 3:1. The word is a Greek compound, homologia: homo = same + logia = word. Jesus is the subject of our profession (Matt 16:16), which includes more than a simple statement of faith in His Deity. When one confesses Jesus as the Son of God, he obligates himself to submit to Jesus as Lord. Of necessity this includes a willingness to obey His every command (Luke 6:46; Matt 7:21-23).]

2. “For we have not a high priest who cannot _____ with our _____; but was in _____ like as we _____, yet without _____.”

[In spite of His position as Deity and present state in heaven, the author reassures his audience that Jesus is indeed concerned about the lot of mankind and is sympathetic to our plight. This is true because, as one Who was tempted in every way, Jesus can indeed sympathize with us as we face daily temptations (cf Heb 2:18).

On this point, some commentators point to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) as being the fulfillment of this truth. John spoke of all that is in the world as consisting of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Jesus did indeed endure these general temptations while in the wilderness. However, this was not the extent of His temptations, for the devil departed from Him only "for a season" (Luke 4:13). It is folly to think the devil considered himself defeated after this single encounter. Jesus would face many more temptations in dealing with: His disciples, the multitudes, unbelievers, Jewish leadership, His trial and crucifixion, perhaps even after His resurrection (Mark 16:14).

Perhaps the most magnificent truth to enter the heart of man is that of Jesus as a perfect Savior. He was without sin! No sins in dealing with others. No sins of the tongue. Even more incredible, Jesus never had to repent of any thought that entered His mind. He was absolutely perfect in every aspect of His being! Of His fitness to offer Himself as a perfect sacrifice, Peter wrote of Jesus as "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet 1:19). He would later write of Jesus as one "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" (2:22). More than seven centuries earlier, Isaiah referred to Him as God's "righteous servant" (Isa 53:11).]

3. "Let us therefore come _____ to the _____ of _____, that we may obtain _____ and find _____ to help in time of _____."

["Let us therefore come boldly" - the word translated "come" in the KJV/NKJV is rendered "draw near" in the ASV, NASB, and RSV. Imagine the thoughts that entered the minds of these Hebrews as they heard the invitation for each individual to "draw near." Until Christ came and took away the veil (cf Matt 27:51) which separated between man and his approach to God, the right to "draw near" was reserved only for the Levitical priesthood (Ex 19:22-25; 28:43; Deut 21:5). The word translated "boldly" is that of confidence, not bravado. On this word, Lightfoot commented:

"In ancient Greece (this word) denoted the right of a full citizen to speak his mind on any subject in the town assembly-aright that the slave did not have. In the Epistle, it stands for freedom to approach God on the basis of the blood of Jesus. Before God's throne Christians need not have fears and inhibitions. They can come just as they are." (101)] Lightfoot's comments fit well with the following passages from the mouth of Jesus and the pen of Paul:

- a. Matthew 11:28 "_____ to Me, _____ you who _____ and are _____, and I will _____ you _____."
- b. Philippians 4:6 "Be _____ for _____, but in _____ by _____ and _____ with _____ let your _____ be made known to _____."

c. 1 Peter 5:7 “Casting ____ your _____ upon _____, for He _____ for you.”

[In spite of this confidence and the open invitation of God, one must remember that it is still a special and holy thing to enter into the presence of God. It must not be done with disregard or disrespect to our Creator nor with a trite, blasé attitude.]

[Chapter 5 begins a lengthy discussion of the high priesthood and Christ’s relationship thereto. This text also reintroduces the Jews (and us) to Melchizedek, one of the most enigmatic characters of the Old Testament. More is said of this man in the New Testament than in the Old where he is first revealed. There are but three verses of historical narrative concerning this man (Gen 14:18-20) with only one more Old Testament mention of him (Psalms 110:4). Melchizedek serves as a type (or shadow) of Jesus Christ. There has been much misplaced and highly speculative commentary regarding Melchizedek based upon what the Hebrews writer says of him. More will be said along these lines as we proceed.

Most commentators agree there is a division of the thought within the first part of chapter 5: verses 1-4 = the qualifications for the high priesthood, and verses 5-10 = Jesus’ qualification as high priest. Verse 11 begins a new line of thought, which line continues through chapter 6:20. This will be picked up in the next lesson.]

4. “For every high priest taken from among _____ is _____ for _____ in things pertaining to _____, that he may offer both _____ and _____ for _____.”

[The high priest served as a mediator between God and men in matters pertaining to God. The high priest was the only man permitted to enter the most holy place, and that only once yearly (7:25) to present an offering for his own sins and the sins of all the children of Israel (v 3).

Some commentators connect these particular “gifts and sacrifices” to the offering made for the people on the Day of Atonement, since the “gifts and offerings” are offered “for sins” (Bruce, 89; Lightfoot 106).]

5. “He can have _____ on those who are _____ and going _____; since he himself also is _____ to _____.”

[“Have compassion” (i.e., “bear reasonably with”). This phrase shows the piety required of one who would serve as high priest. When an offering for sin was made, it wasn’t offered as a fine or penalty which could be paid like one might pay when convicted of a traffic violation or crime. The sin offering required repentance in recognition of God’s wrath and recompense for sin.

“The ignorant and going astray” (other renderings include: “wayward” - RSV; “erring” - ASV; “misguided” - NASB). The Mosaic Law showed mercy on those who sinned “through ignorance” (Lev 4:13, 22, 27; 5:15, 17), but ignorance was not excuse from guilt (Lev 4:13).

There is also the inclusion of those who sin, but not with intent or forethought (e.g., words spoken in anger or deeds of passion). But those who sinned “presumptuously” (e.g., with intent or open defiance - Num 15:30-31) was to be “cut off from among his people” (i.e., “put to death” - cf Heb 10:27). In similar fashion, there is no provision to forgive willful sins under the New Covenant (Heb 10:26ff). In any event, when the sin was made known to the offender, a sin offering was to be made without delay (Lev 4-5).

All sin offerings were made understanding the substitutionary nature of the animal sacrificed. In offering the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, the high priest went before God with great grief on account of his own sins and the many sins of the people. The high priest must therefore be a man of great holiness, able to appreciate the gift of God as given in the law, and able to bear, to some degree, the feeling of guilt for sin on behalf of the people.]

6. What is said of the sacrifices offered by the former high priests? _____

[In Leviticus 9:7-17, Aaron was commanded to first offer a sacrifice for his own sins that he might be able to then offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. This weakness of the Aaronic high priesthood will come into play again later in the letter.]

7. “And no man _____ this _____ for himself, but he who is _____ by _____, just as _____ was.”

[“takes” = obtains, grabs hold of, receives. This statement stands in contrast to the current state of the high priesthood when the epistle was written (see note on Heb 4:14 and “Jesus, the Son of God”).

Because the high priesthood was an office of Divine appointment, there is an inherent honor or dignity associated with it. This honor and dignity was present even among the Levitical priesthood (1 King 12:31). Christians are God’s priests today (1 Pet 2:5, 9). They are called by God into His service (1 Cor 1:2, 9; 1 Thes 2:12; 2 Thes 2:13-14). As being called by God, there is an inherent dignity in the position and relationship to which we are called.]

Hebrews 5:5-11 - Jesus is a Priest Forever

8. “So also _____ did not _____ Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: ‘You are My _____; today I have _____ you.’”

[This continues the thought verse 4, “no man takes this honor to himself.” There are a couple of things we learn from this text about Jesus and His status as High Priest: 1) Jesus did not exalt Himself or engage in political manipulation to become High Priest; 2) God the Father, the One who called Jesus His Son, is the one who glorified Jesus as High Priest. In one sense, Jesus was like Aaron in both cases. However, in the sense that Jesus was God’s Son as opposed to being a human appointee, He far exceeded the High Priesthood of Aaron.

This is the second time the author has quoted Psalm 2:7, the first being found in Hebrews 1:5 in the opening exaltation of the Lord Jesus as God's Son and greater than the angels. A.W. Pink notes the opening statement from Psalm 2:7, "I will declare the decree," as a public announcement of a Divine commission and appointment. Jesus was unmistakably declared the Son of God, both explicitly (cf Matt 3:17, 17:5) and implicitly (cf Mark 15:37-39, Rom 1:4, Acts 2:22-36).]

9. "You are a _____ according to the order of _____."

[This is a quote from Psalm 110:4, and marks the author's second quote of Psalm 110 (cf 1:13). Jesus' identification with Melchizedek rather than Aaron will be seen in chapter 7.]

10. "Who, in the days of His _____, when He had offered up _____ and _____, with _____ cries and _____ to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear."

[Charles Gabriel's song, "I Stand Amazed," has a line that disturbs me. Speaking of Jesus' prayer in the garden, the second line in verse 2 of this song says, "He had no tears for His own griefs, but sweat drops of blood for mine." I always think of Hebrews 5:7 when this song is sung, with or without verse 2. Hebrews 5:7 portrays Jesus in the throes of mental pain and agony, just as Luke portrayed our Lord in Luke 22:39-44, requiring the assistance of angels, being in agony, and having His sweat fall as great drops of blood (see hematomidrosis).

The phrase "in the days of His flesh" is also to be considered of some import. First, it refutes the Gnostic heresy that Jesus never existed as flesh and blood (2 John 7). Second, it denies any idea that Jesus lived previously on this earth in flesh and blood. Some believe that Melchizedek was actually Jesus in Genesis 14.

I think an important part of this verse is sometimes overlooked. Jesus prayed for deliverance from the events that lie before Him, and the crucifixion in particular. God did not remove the cup that had been given to our Lord to drink, yet the text here says "He was heard." May we never consider our prayers as going "unheard" when God does not choose to give us those things for which we ask! Romans 15:30-32 provides a picture of God answering Paul's prayers in different ways, including "No."]

11. "Though He was a Son, yet He learned _____ by the things which He _____."

[I have been guilty of separating this verse from its immediate context to emphasize the need to obey God in order to be accepted of Him. In light of the next verse, I believe this is part of the intended meaning, but I believe there is a greater, deeper emphasis. Note how Jesus' obedience is directly linked to His suffering immediately prior to and including His crucifixion. Even on the cross Jesus was still learning to obey His Father! So many nominal Christians find it nigh unto impossible to obey God in the smallest of matters in our persecution-free society. What in the world could we expect of them should persecution arise for the word's sake? We must also beware concerning our personal estimations of our own faith in such easy times. No one knows his mettle until he is placed in the fire and proving grounds of persecution (cf Heb 12:4-11).

12. "And having been _____, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who _____ Him."

[Only after Jesus successfully endured all temptations and trials was He fit to be the captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10). Being perfected and exalted (Acts 2:32-36), He ascended to Heaven where he was given "dominion and glory and a kingdom" (cf Dan 7:13-14).]

13. "Called by God as High Priest "according to the order of _____," of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing."

["Called by God" - a phrase unlike any other in the Inspired Text. "Called" here is not called in the sense of being invited (e.g. Matt 20:16, 22:14, Strong's #2822) or named by God in the sense of the disciples being "called Christian" (Acts 11:26, Strong's #5537). This is a particular "call by name," so strong so as to be almost in the sense of compulsion (Strong's #4316). There doesn't appear to any other word like it in the New Testament.

"After the order of Melchizedek" - "order" from the Greek taxis (S #5010), from which we get our English taxonomy, a means of classifying similar things (Do you remember Kingdom Phylum Class Order Family Genus Species? That's taxonomy!

"You have become dull of hearing" - "Dull" from the Greek "slothful" (cf Heb 6:12), meaning sluggish or lazy. The best way to prevent such dullness is to keep one's mind and heart fresh with daily reading and study. Are you excited about digging for and discovering the precious gems found in God's word? Remember the fourth beatitude (Matt 5:6)! I wonder if some brethren have had "spiritual lap band surgery." It certainly doesn't take a lot to fill them up! God has preserved His word through the ages. It is our spiritual food, yet many are too lazy to even bring their hand out of the bowl to feed themselves! See Proverbs 19:24.

This concludes, albeit briefly, the author's treatise on Jesus and the high priesthood, and introduces the new subject of spiritual growth and maturity. For the moment, he will turn his attention to the problem of his hearers' spiritual immaturity in the most fundamental doctrinal principles. He would like to say more at this point about Jesus and Melchizedek, but he must first exhort them to spiritual maturity and discernment.]