

BETTER!
Hebrews Series
Part 5
“Jesus-Our Great High Priest”

Last time we closed out chapter 4 with the writer talking about Jesus as our compassionate great High Priest. In chapter 5 he focuses on the same thing. Whereas Aaron was the appointed high priest for the people of Israel under Moses, Jesus is a better priest who offers a better priesthood.

In the Bible the primary function of a priest was to assist God’s people in accessing God so there could be union with Him. The priest did this by acting as a mediator between God and men, and also through being a teacher of the kind of life that helped the people walk with God. So the priest interceded for the people, and taught them God’s law.

The priest also offered the various sacrifices established by God on behalf of the people—such as the burnt offering and the sin offering. And the high priest alone was designated to enter the holy of holies once a year on the Day of Atonement to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat for the sins of the people.

While Aaron faithfully performed his God-given duty as priest, Jesus is now the one and only, final Great High Priest who

intercedes for us before God, and who teaches us the way of true life. The writer begins:

5:1 “For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins (as we just discussed),

5:2-3 “He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.

3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer *sacrifices* for sins.”

Notice that any priest called by God can and should have compassion on the people for their faults because he too is weak and flawed. Hence, when he offers a sin sacrifice for the people, he must also offer it for himself.

Next, we see that the priesthood is anything but a career choice!

5:4 “And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.”

Genuine ministry always begins with a call from God. No man can simply choose ministry like a career. It begins with God’s choosing, not ours. And this was true of Christ Himself:

5:5 “So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but *it was* He who said to Him: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.”

The writer here quotes from Ps 2:7, which is the first Messianic psalm filled with Messianic prophecy. It clearly predicts the Immaculate Conception—“You are My Son, this day I have begotten You.”

The writer reasons that if Aaron was called out by God to be high priest, so much more is Jesus, God the Son, appointed by God the Father to be our Great High Priest. For whereas Aaron was called out from among men to be priest, Jesus was begotten of God by the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary.

Then the writer makes reference to a very mysterious character found in the OT:

5:6 “As *He* also says in another *place*: “You *are* a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”;

This is a quote from another Psalm (110:4) where the Psalmist makes reference to a man named Melchizedek. Melchizedek is the first person in the Bible to be called a priest. He informs us that Jesus is a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek.” But what does this mean? Who is this mysterious man? And what is “the order of Melchizedek?”

We first encounter Melchizedek in Genesis following Abraham's victory over several kings that had gone to battle against the king of Sodom and Gomorrah. If you recall, Abraham's nephew, Lot, had moved his family into Sodom. While living there, the king of Sodom, in alliance with four kings, went to battle against four other kings. So it was five kings against four.

Yet the king of Sodom and his allies lost the battle. The victors pillaged the city of Sodom and kidnapped Lot and his family. When Abram heard of this, he gathered 318 trained servants from amongst his own household and pursued Lot's captors. Abram found them, defeated them, and delivered Lot and Sodom.

This should have been a wake up call to Sodom that it was a righteous man who had delivered them when they couldn't deliver themselves.

Nevertheless, it was as Abram was meeting with the king of Sodom after his victory that literally out of nowhere Melchizedek appears on the pages of Scripture.

Gen. 14:18 "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. 19 And 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 (Abraham) gave him a tithe of all."

Heretofore we know nothing of this man. We're told he's the king of Salem (meaning 'king of peace') and that he is the priest of God—Abram's God. He appears to celebrate Abram's victory and blesses the God of Abram.

And not only do we hear the word 'priest' for the first time, we also hear the word 'tithe' for the first time. Abram gives Melchizedek a "tithe of all."

So we have first priest, first tithe!

Now, we will look more closely at Melchizedek in chapter 7 but let's lay some groundwork in our understanding of him. The commentators suggest that Salem was likely Jerusalem, of which Melchizedek was king. Jerusalem lay on Abram's route homeward, and was within a reasonable distance of Sodom, so this makes sense.

Melchizedek being called a priest suggests that some kind of offerings were made by him on behalf of his people. So he was a king/priest, just like Jesus. He is a type of Christ.

When the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus is "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek," it means that as

Melchizedek was both a king and a priest, it set him above the Aaronic priesthood where Aaron was a priest only. Jesus is also in the same way a King and a Priest. He rules as a King, and He is a Priestly mediator between God and His people.

Next, the writer switches gears to focus on an intense hour of prayer on Jesus' part:

5:7 "who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,"

I believe, and so do most of the commentators, that this is a reference to Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. It describes an intense prayer of loud cries and hot tears. Dr. Luke in his gospel relays the intensity of this prayer best:

Lk 22:44 LB "...for he was in such agony of spirit that he broke into a sweat of blood, with great drops falling to the ground as he prayed more and more earnestly."

The writer of Hebrews tells us that He was praying to the God who could "save Him from death." We must be careful here because Jesus full well knew that He was born for this moment

to die for the sins of mankind. So He can't be asking to be delivered from the Cross because we're told "he was heard."

So what did He pray for? The Greek word translated into "from death" is *ek*, which means "out of." Jesus is not praying for deliverance FROM death itself, but "out of" the fear of what He was about to encounter.

Remember, Jesus was in "all points tempted as we are" yet without sin. He knew full well what the Cross was about to bring—that He would take upon Himself the sins of the world; that for a brief time He would experience separation from the Father—"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me."

God heard His prayer and brought relief. We're informed that "an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him," (Lk 22:43) steeling Him for the dark hours ahead.

The writer takes us from this moving moment to tell us more of what Jesus experienced:

5:8 "though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

Again we must be careful here. For Jesus did not learn obedience like we do. We learn obedience because our natural inclination is to be disobedient by sinning. Jesus had no such

natural inclination for He did not carry within himself Adam's fallen nature.

What is meant here is that, as God's Son, He learned obedience by experiencing it as a man. Just like one might learn by experience the taste of meat by eating it, Jesus experienced first hand the difficulty in obeying a very hard and difficult command from God, yet without sin.

This is why in Hebrews 2:9 it says He "tasted death for every man." As a man, Jesus tasted the difficulty and hardship of obedience and even death. Yet He never sinned or fell short of it.

5:9 "And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,"

One more time we need to be careful how we interpret this. Because on its face it seems to suggest that Jesus had some imperfections that needed perfecting. But that's not what it's saying because Jesus had no imperfections.

"Having been perfected" means He consummated all the work He came to accomplish. His work as our Redeemer was perfectly completed, which positioned Him to be our Great High Priest/King, and the Author of our eternal salvation through His shed blood.

5:10-11 “called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,” 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”

The writer is now turning his attention from the priesthood of Christ Jesus to the spiritual condition of the people to whom he writes. He wants to say more about Melchizedek (which he will do in chapter 7), but the church has become “dull of hearing.”

In other words, they can’t appreciate the meat of the Word because they’re stuck in spiritual infancy. He continues:

5:12 “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”

They should be teachers by now but haven’t cut their spiritual teeth enough to move beyond the milk of the Word. They need to be taught again the basic principles of the faith, which he lists in the next chapter.

He next explains the limitations of spiritual infancy:

5:13 “For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.”

The LB says, “You are like babies who can drink only milk, not old enough for solid food. And when a person is still living on milk it shows he isn’t very far along in the Christian life, and doesn’t know much about the difference between right and wrong. He is still a baby Christian!”

They should have grown beyond milk drinkers by now. For some reason their growth is stunted. In chapter 6 he will encourage them to move forward in their growth, God permitting.

5:14 “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

A child puts into its mouth both things hurtful and things nutritious, without discrimination—but not so the adult. Apparently, because of their spiritual infancy these Hebrew Christians were not discerning between good and bad teaching. Spiritually speaking they were eating things that weren’t sound or healthy.

So the writer expresses frustration that they should be more discerning and encourages them at the beginning of chapter 6, “...let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again

and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding” (6:1).

LET’S PRAY