

Hebrews 5

Lesson 5 Christ Is A Better High Priest

Outline

- I. Christ is Qualified as our High Priest** (vv. 1-10)
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 5. Appointed of God (v. 4)
 - B. *Christ qualifies for the perfect High Priest* (vv. 5-10)
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 - a. Didn't glorify self (v. 5)
 - b. God: "after the order of Melchizedek (vv. 6, 10)
 2. Had "days in the flesh" (v. 7)
 - a. Thus, from among men
 - b. Thus, acquainted with man's infirmities
 3. He suffered death (vv. 8-9)
 - a. His sacrifice: himself
 - b. Thus, he is perfect High Priest
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- II. The Hebrew's Lack of Maturity** (vv. 11-14)
- A. *Dull of hearing* (v. 11)
 1. Have much to say about the subject (v. 11a)
 2. Thus, hard to explain a difficult subject (v. 11b)
 - B. *In need of first principle teaching* (vv. 12-14)
 1. Ought to be teachers, but are not (v. 12a)
 2. In need of milk and not solid food (vv. 12b-14)
 - a. Milk – for babes and unskilled (v. 13)
 - b. Solid food – for full age and exercised (v. 14)

Key Verse that Summarizes the Chapter

Hebrews 5:6

As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."

It would be helpful to turn back to the outline of the book found in the Introduction. There you will see that the author made a shift in emphasis beginning at the end of the previous chapter. The focus has been on the superiority of Christ's *person* (1:1 – 4:13). Now the focus is on the superiority of Christ's *work* (4:14 – 10:18).

In this chapter attention is given to the priesthood of Christ. More details will be given in chapters 7.

Christ is Qualified as our High Priest (vv. 1-10)

Christ being our High Priest was introduced twice before we get to this chapter (3:1; 4:14-16). The obvious question, for the Hebrews, would be how could Jesus (from the tribe of Judah) qualify to be High Priest since priests were to come from the tribe of Levi? These ten verses show that he is not only qualified to be High Priest, but is better than those of the lineage of Aaron.

Qualifications and function of a high priest (vv. 1-4). Here are five principles that were true of every high priest from the Aaronic priesthood.

From among men (v. 1). A high priest was taken from among men (Exo. 28:1). Thus, he understand the needs of those whom he serves. If he were taken from among the angelic order, he could not relate to the struggles of man.

Functions for man (v. 1). The high priest is appointed *for* man. His work is for the benefit of man, not God. He functions "in things pertaining to God" (v. 1), that is in that which has to do with man's relationship with God.

Offers gifts and sacrifices (vv. 1, 3). The work of the high priest was to offer gifts (those of the bloodless nature) and sacrifices (blood offerings).

Is acquainted with infirmities of man (vv. 2-3). The high priest would have compassion ("bear gently" ASV) with those who sinned out of ignorance or weakness, because he himself was a sinner.¹ Thus, he offers sacrifice for himself as well as for the people (v. 3).

Appointed of God (v. 4). No man takes the honor of the priesthood on himself. Aaron and his sons didn't arbitrarily assume their positions. Rather, they were appointed by God (Exo. 28:1).

Christ qualifies for the perfect High Priest (vv. 5-10). The author now shows that Christ meets the qualifications.

Appointed of God (vv. 5-6, 10). Christ did not glorify himself by appointing himself to be High Priest (v.5a). Rather, the Father said to him "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You" (Psalm 2:7). This Psalm had reference to the resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:33). Two things we learn from this Psalm. First, Christ is the Son of God (deity). Second, he was declared to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead.

1 Aaron sinned with the golden calf (Exo. 32:1-6), complaining, along with Miriam, against Moses (Num. 12), and was included in the sin of striking the rock (Num. 20:1-13).

What does the fact that he is God's Son and that he was raised from the dead have to do with his priesthood? He is saying that the one who called him his Son, is the same one who called him a priest (vv. 6, 10). Thus, he was appointed of God. Furthermore, the one who is our High Priest is the Son of God. His priesthood began when he was raised from the dead to sit at the right hand of God.²

The writer quotes from Psalm 110:4 showing that God called him a priest forever³ after the order of Melchizedek (vv. 6, 10). Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God (Gen. 14:17-24).

How is Christ a high priest like Melchizedek? Melchizedek was a king and priest at the same time (Gen. 14). Christ is king and priest at the same time (Zech. 6:12-13). Melchizedek was without father and mother (Heb. 7:3), which means he didn't come to the office through descent, but by appointment. Likewise Christ didn't become priest by earthly lineage. Both were superior to Aaron.⁴ Melchizedek was



in a one-high-priest priesthood. He was priest over all (long before Aaron was appointed over the Jews). So, Christ is High Priest over all and is the only High Priest. In contrast the Aaronic priesthood was over the Jews only and involved many high priests.

The point here (and in chapter 7) is to prove the claim that Christ is high priest since he is not of the Aaronic priesthood.

Had “days in the flesh” (v. 7). While Christ was in the flesh (thus from among men) he offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears. This must have reference to his pleading to God in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46). The agony that he displayed shows he was acquainted with man's infirmities.

His plea was to the Father, who was able to save him from death. He was heard because of his godly fear. His prayer was that if possible the cup of suffering would pass, “nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). God heard and answered that prayer—that is, his will was done. That prayer showed his deep reverence and devotion to God.⁵

² He would be a king and priest at the same time (Zech. 6:12-13).

³ Forever here means as long as time endures. He is a king and priest at the same time (Zech. 6:12-13). He will be king until the second coming (1 Cor. 15:23-24). Thus, he will cease to be priest at that time as well.

⁴ This will be developed more in chapter 7 (vv. 4-11).

⁵ The phrase, “was heard because of His godly fear” is a difficult phrase. Many interpretations have been given. Some think it refers to his fear of death. Others think it refers to his fear of God. Another question has to do with what his request was. Some think he was praying to be raised from the dead, while others think he was praying that the will of God be done. The position presented here makes more sense to this writer.

He suffered death (vv. 8-9). Even though he is God's Son, he was not exempt from obedience (submitting to death). He learned obedience by the experience of suffering. His death made him "perfect" (complete) or fully qualified to serve as High Priest. Through his suffering and death (his sacrifice) he became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey.⁶ Thus, Christ meets all the qualifications to be High Priest. But, more, he is a greater High Priest. He is the Son of God (v. 5, 8). He offers eternal salvation (v. 9).

The Hebrew's Lack of Maturity (vv. 11-14)

This begins the third of five warning sections.⁷ This warning about not maturing continues through the end of the next chapter. The discussion of the priesthood of Christ will be taken up again in chapter 7.

Dull of hearing (v. 11). The author had much to say about the subject of the priesthood of Christ being after the order of Melchizedek (v. 11a). But, such a difficult subject is hard to explain because they had become dull of hearing (v. 11b). Their dullness was a mental dullness rather than a literal hearing problem. This is seen in the next three verses.

In need of first principle teaching (vv. 12-14). Enough time had passed⁸ that the Hebrews should have become teachers (v. 12). "The Apostle does not mean by this, that the Hebrew brethren should all be teachers in a public and official sense; but simply that they should be able to explain the Gospel to others in their several places and relations, as parents, neighbors, and friends."⁹ However, they were not able to do that. In fact, they needed to be taught again the first principles or basic elements of the gospel.¹⁰

The Hebrews now stand in need of milk and not solid food (vv. 12b-14). Milk is for babes and the unskilled (v. 13). Solid food is for those who are mature or of full age (v. 14). "Whenever adults, who used to be on solid food are reduced to having to eat baby food, it usually signifies they are sick or something is seriously wrong."¹¹

The maturity they were lacking comes by having their senses exercised by "reason of use" (v. 14). The idea of use is "habit" (Darby), "constant practice" (ESV), or by "constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (NIV). The point is that by use and exercise one's senses are improved. Had the Hebrews exercised and used what knowledge (and faith) they had, it would have grown. Consequently, they would have matured and not be in the danger of falling that they are in now.

Use of the Old Testament in this Chapter	
Verse in Chapter 5	Old Testament Reference
v. 5	Psalm 2:7
v. 6	Psalm 110:4

6 The present tense of "obey" suggest continual obedience, which is faithfulness. Thus, a point to which the Hebrews needed to take heed.

7 Look back at the Introduction for a list of the warning sections.

8 Approximately 30 years have passed since the day of Pentecost.

9 Robert Milligan, *Vol. IX – Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary, 166.

10 Not only had they not progressed, but they regressed. They lost or forgot (through neglect) much of what they already knew.

11 Gareth L. Reese, *Hebrews*, 81.

Questions

1. Why does the writer need to address the qualifications of a high priest?
2. What are the five qualifications or functions given in verses 1-4?
3. What does the fact that he is God's Son and that he was raised from the dead have to do with his priesthood?
4. How do we know that Psalm 2:7 is talking about the resurrection of Christ?
5. What does it mean that Christ is priest "according to the order of Melchizedek"?
6. What is the point being made from Psalm 110 about Melchizedek?
7. What point is being made about the prayers, cries, and tears in the days of his flesh (v. 7)?
8. What does "he was heard because of His godly fear" (v. 7) mean?
9. In what sense were the Hebrews dull of hearing?
10. What had created the lack of maturity in the Hebrews?