

OUR HEAVENLY HIGH PRIEST

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**By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter
Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines
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Let's Begin

In chapter four, we touched briefly upon our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. We discovered this truth to be the very heart of Hebrews. In Jesus Christ, everything is better! As the author moves along, we observe him unfolding the truth of priesthood even more.

Chapter five compares and contrasts the earthly priesthood of Aaron with the heavenly priesthood of a mysterious character named Melchizedek. And, while he develops Melchizedek's character more fully in chapter seven, he is introduced in this chapter as representing a higher order of priest than Aaron.

Hence, as we make our way through chapter five, let's focus on the simple outline below:

I. The Pattern of the Earthly Priesthood According to Aaron (vv. 1-5)

II. The Preeminence of the Heavenly Priesthood According to Christ (vv. 6-14)

I. The Pattern of the Earthly Priesthood According to Aaron (vv. 1-5)

In the first four chapters, the author deliberately contrasted the role and work of the Lord Jesus Christ with former prophets, angels, Moses, and now Aaron the High priest. Concluding Jesus' accomplishment of the Father's will stands in stark contrast to all who preceded Him. He sums it up nicely in a later chapter, "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" (8:6).

For now, he is satisfied to contrast the Aaronic priesthood with the priestly work of Jesus. He writes, "For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Heb. 5:1-4). The significance of Aaron to Israelite worship cannot be overestimated. He represented sinners before a Holy God. Hence, not just any man would do.

Aaron experienced the same constitutional weaknesses as did all other Israelite men.

First, the earthly priest accepted a profound appointment (vv. 1a, 5). Aaron was "taken" from among others and "ordained" to perform functions "pertaining to God." Hence, he was "called of God." The man chosen was to be a man who could adequately represent all other men. In other words, he would possess the nature of the men whom he represented. This remains the fundamental reason angels could not represent us, for angels do not have a human nature. They can appreciate neither our circumstances nor identify with our problems. But Aaron experienced the same constitutional weaknesses as did all other Israelite men.



The author uses the Greek term translated “ordained.” It literally denotes an “appointment.” Aaron did not wake up one morning and inform Moses he wanted to be a priest. God *called* Aaron to be priest (Ex. 28:1-3). Similarly, God *calls* preachers today to minister the Word of God to both His church and to the unsaved multitudes of the world.

Reflection Connection

Do you believe God “calls” men today to special ministry? How is such a “call” different from a “call” all Christians receive to serve the Lord Jesus? Explain.

Second, the earthly priest accomplished a particular assignment (vv. 1b, 3b). According to the author, the priest’s duties included offering “both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” Given the particular assignment given to the priest, it follows all men are sinners since he was to perform his duties on behalf of all other men. According to every page of Scripture, we all sin and fall far short of God’s demand (Rom. 3:10, 23). Therefore, every person requires payment for the sin debt he or she owes to the Holy Creator. Our iniquities have separated us from God (cp. Isa. 59:2). The priest’s assignment was to offer sacrifice to satisfy the demands of God’s justice.

Third, the earthly priest applied a personal approach (vv. 2-3a). Not just any man could stand in the gap for other men. He had to possess the ability to sympathize with all other men. If not, how could he have “compassion” on them? The author used a Greek word translated “compassion” which was not the normal word for sympathy. Rather the word he used literally means “measured suffering.” His point is, the priest possesses a balanced sense of sympathy for those with whom he identifies.

Our normal tendency in dealing with others’ sins is to be either too lenient on the one hand or too severe on the other. The earthly priest’s approach was to be patient with the sinner while not condoning the sinner’s wrong actions. Though a rather worn cliché, our “loving the sinner but hating the sin” captures the ideal of the personal approach the priest was to take as he made offering for the people’s transgressions.

In addition, the priest must be completely involved in the human situation. He was “compassed with infirmity.” In other words, like everyone else, the priest was encircled with sin, failures lying all around him. The priest could identify with the people because he himself was a sinner as well. No room existed in the priesthood for men who viewed themselves as morally superior to others. Humility was embedded in the earthly office of the Aaronic priesthood. In fact, before the priest offered sacrifice for the sins of others, he first had to offer sacrifice for his own sins (Lev. 16:6, 15; cp. Heb. 7:27).

II. The Preeminence of the Heavenly Priesthood According to Christ (vv. 6-14)

The earthly priesthood, which began with Aaron, served God’s people well. However, according to the Hebrews author, there is a superior priesthood which belongs to the people in this dispensation. Note the author’s description, “As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect,



he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:6-10).

The author compares and contrasts the earthly priesthood of Aaron with the heavenly priesthood of Christ (v. 5a). In doing so, he lists three attributes of the heavenly priesthood.

First, observe Christ's selection (vv. 5-6, 10). According to the author, Christ was "called of God" (v. 10). Note, Jesus' "call" was not the same as was Aaron's. Rather Christ was "Called of God an high priest"; that is, His formal ascription of His official title was "high priest." Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, was chosen in eternity and sent in time to be Great High Priest on behalf of all who believe in Him. Hence, the author quotes from Scripture, "Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee" (v. 5; cp. Ps. 2:7). God made Jesus High Priest. He was High Priest neither in earthly ministry nor at His birth in Bethlehem. Instead He was made High Priest after His resurrection, when He was ascended upon High and enthroned in Heaven. He now continues His priestly function "ever living to make intercession" for His people (Heb. 7:25).

Additionally, Christ is priest not after the Aaronic priesthood; rather He is High Priest

"after the order of Melchizedek" (cp.

Ps. 110:4; Gen. 14:18-21).

Long before the temple or ritual priests—including the call to Aaron to head up the earthly priesthood—Melchizedek is the first priest mentioned in Scripture. Later, the author describes this mysterious priest in terms

defying human qualities, "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life..." (7:3). Suffice it to say for now, He represents both royalty and perpetuity, Jesus being priest "forever" unlike the Aaronic priests who suffered death and burial but no resurrection.

Second, observe Christ's suffering (vv. 7-9a). The author speaks openly of the "days of His flesh," obviously alluding to His earthly life. Christ identified with us in our humanity because He was fully human Himself. He was able to not only understand us but to feel with us and for us. Hence, He suffered like us though we never have nor ever will suffer like Him!

In addition, during His earthly ministry, He prayed. Indeed His prayers remain an inspiration for all people to pray. If the Son of God practiced prayer, how could the people of God go one day without offering up prayers to their heavenly

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Father? The author recalls a particularly dark moment in our Lord's journey as He prayed "with strong crying and tears."

Is there another moment more bleak in our Lord's earthly life than the dark shadows which fell upon Him in Gethsemane? (Mark 14:33-35) And, what was found upon His lips? According to the Hebrews author, it was to save Him "from death" or "out of death." Understand: *Jesus was not attempting to avoid the cross.* He knew His life's purpose was to go to the cross (Mark 10:45). Also, recall His words, "not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). The key is, "out of death." Jesus was praying for His resurrection from the dead!

Moreover, as clearly as any other place in Hebrews, the author takes us to Calvary when he says Jesus "learned obedience" by the things which He suffered (v. 8). He literally became "obedient unto death" as Paul the Apostle said (Phil. 2:8). Even more, He was "made perfect" (v. 9). Was Jesus not already perfect in every way? Of course. However, His purpose was incomplete. Not until His last breath did He cry, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

Consequently, He was thoroughly equipped for His heavenly role as our Intercessor (7:25). When the believer prays, Jesus may say to the Father, "I know what he (or she) is going through. I've been there Myself!" He understands like no other.

Third, observe Christ's salvation (v. 9b). Aaron could offer no deliverance to the people from their sins. He only offered sacrifice for their sins. However, Christ is the "author" of our salvation. He is the One Who saves us. Neither friend nor family may deliver us from the wrath of a just and holy God. But, salvation is of the Lord (cp. Jon. 2:9). Christ accomplished a feat no earthly priest given time nor eternity could accomplish—He provided full and free salvation from sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26).

Even more, not only is the salvation Christ accomplished *complete*, it is also *ceaseless*; that is, Christ provided "eternal salvation." He offers neither a temporary fix nor even a lifetime guarantee. Rather Jesus provides salvation with no time expiration!

Therefore, no surprise exists concerning our personal response to Christ's provision as our Great High Priest. We are called upon to surrender to His salvation offer. The Hebrews author continues, "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:11-14).

The salvation provided by Christ begs for a response from those who hear. Yet, we face a two-fold obstacle in accepting the "many things" pertaining to

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Reflection Connection

Reflect upon your own responses to the preaching of God's Word. What obstacles keep you from hearing more than the "first principles" of the faith? Be prepared to share with the entire group.



our salvation. On the one hand, we face a *retarded development* (vv. 11-12a). The author speaks of being “dull of hearing.” The Greek term he used means “slow” or “sluggish.” The first sign of spiritual immaturity is a dullness in hearing the Word of God concerning salvation. And, just at a time when we should be teachers ourselves, the author says we are much too spiritually needy to be instructors. Rather we must be fed with “milk” and not “meat.”

Hence, we face the second obstacle of *restricted diet*. In other words, we have a problem understanding even the “first principles” of the Word of God! We live on surface slush. Our spiritual appetites can accept no strong proteins and minerals the Word of God offers. Consequently, we are “baby Christians” who survive on “milk,” not mature believers who crave the “meat” of God’s Word. Paul the Apostle spoke of “babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). Spiritual maturity is impossible on such a restricted diet, and so is any growth in Christ Who provides salvation to us.

Golden Greek Nugget

The author asserts Jesus “learned” obedience by the things which He suffered (v. 8). The single Greek word translated by the English phrase “yet learned he” is *manthano* and denotes to learn from experience and/or observation. Jesus learned to identify with sinners not because He sinned but because He was tempted in all points like we are (yet without sin, 4:15). Hence, He grew in knowledge during His earthly ministry.

Wrap Up

Chapter five compares and contrasts the earthly priesthood according to Aaron and the heavenly priesthood according to Christ. The author’s obvious conclusion is, Christ’s excellency as a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek stands beyond dispute. He offers the one who believes an eternal advocacy with the God of heaven. We stand fully, completely, and eternally saved in Him.

