

Jesus Christ as our High Priest

Hebrews 5:1-14

Hebrews 5:1-14 - *“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. ² 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. ⁴ And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. 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.” ⁶ As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” ⁷ He, 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, ⁸ though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰ 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. 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. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 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.*

Background Notes

Although there have been some differences of opinion as to the theme of Hebrews, most students of Scripture agree that ***the central theme of Hebrews is the doctrine of the High Priesthood of Christ.***

Back in chapter 2, Christ was mentioned as our High Priest. Hebrews 2:17: *“Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest.”* The subject continued at the beginning of chapter 3: *“consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus.”*

Then this great theme, the great High Priesthood of Christ, was developed at the end of chapter 4. Hebrews 4:14-15: *“Seeing 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. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* The author continued his theme of the High Priesthood of Christ in chapter 5.

The essential content of chapter 5 has to do with the qualifications of a high priest. In the Old Testament, the high priest represented the nation of Israel before God. The high priest (and **only** the high priest) went into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle once a year, with the blood of the atoning sacrifice, to maintain the relationship between God and His people.

So it was very important that the high priest be fully qualified to be a high priest. In the same way, if Christ is our High Priest, it is very important that He is fully qualified to be our High Priest. There were two requirements for the qualification to be high priest.

- The high priest had to be a man. *“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God” (v5).* The high priest had to represent man before God, and he had to be compassionate with those he represented, and he had to be a man.
- The high priest had to be called by God to this office. You couldn’t choose to be the high priest; you were selected by divine appointment. *“And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God” (v4).* It was a serious sin to assume the role of a priest if God had not called you. (Check out Numbers 16 and the rebellion of Korah.)

Aaron was qualified to be a high priest, and so is Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ’s qualifications are far better than Aaron’s!

Doctrinal Points

1. Aaron was qualified to be an imperfect high priest.

Aaron’s qualifications were discussed in the first four verses of this chapter. Aaron was certainly qualified to be a high priest. He was a man, and as man he was able to have compassion on people who are ignorant and who go astray (v2). And Aaron was called by God to be the first high priest of Israel.

In Exodus 28:1 God said to Moses: *“Now take Aaron your brother and his sons with him from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to me as priest.”* Aaron passed the two requirements and met the qualifications for being a high priest. He was a man, so he could have compassion on the people, and God had called him.

But Aaron was not a perfect high priest because he himself was a sinner. He had to offer sacrifices for himself as well as for the people. *“...he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins” (v2-3).* So Aaron was qualified to be a high priest, but he was not a perfect high priest because he had to offer sacrifices for his own sins.

2. Christ is qualified to be a perfect High Priest.

Again we see the two qualifications for being high priest, and our Lord meets both qualifications. His qualification by divine appointment, the call of God, was given in verses 5-6. Jesus Christ did not qualify Himself to become High Priest. He is High Priest by divine appointment.

Two quotations from the Messianic psalms were given to back up this point.

Psalms 2:7 was quoted in verse 5: *"You are My Son; today I have begotten You."* If the Messiah was God's Son, He was certainly qualified to be a High Priest. What better Mediator could we have than the Son of God Himself to speak to God the Father on our behalf?

Psalms 110:4 was quoted in verse 6: *"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."* Chapter 7 will have more about the *"order of Melchizedek."* The main point here is that Christ is called to be a Priest **forever**, by divine appointment. That's certainly a better qualification than Aaron's priesthood, which was only temporary.

Verses 7-8 give our Lord's qualifications to be High Priest because He was truly human, and can therefore show compassion toward us. Note the phrase, *"in the days of His flesh"* (v7). Jesus Christ was a **real Man** who really lived in history on this earth!

What about His ability to be compassionate when we suffer? Verses 7-8 describe the sufferings of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Has anyone gone through the human suffering, leading up to the Roman crucifixion at Calvary that our Lord went through in the Garden of Gethsemane? Our Lord knew exactly what was ahead of Him – not just the physical agony of His crucifixion, but it was the horror of the sins of the world being laid upon Him - the sinless Son of God. There has never been suffering greater than that!

Verse 7 says: *"who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears..."* The Gospel records don't reveal the Lord's cries and tears in Gethsemane, but Hebrews 5 emphasized the measure of His suffering. Remember, in the Garden our Lord prayed to the Father: *"if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done."*

It was not possible for the cup to pass from Him, and our Lord knew it. There was no other way for us to be saved, and our Lord drank that cup. The cup was not death itself. It was suffering the wrath of God against sin, and being forsaken by God as the sin-bearer. The Lord Jesus Christ did that - **for us**.

Are you looking for a compassionate High Priest? Has anyone gone through such deep suffering as our Lord? Don't ever say that the Lord can't feel your depth of suffering!

Notice that verse 8 does not say that the Lord learned to obey, but that He “learned obedience.” That is, as Man he went through the experiences of learning obedience. If He had remained in Heaven, He would never have “learned obedience.” He **learned by experience what it means to submit to the will of God** - and suffer.

“*And having been perfected,*” means “having been fully qualified.” He always was sinless and perfect. The idea is that He was “perfected” through experience. Our Lord is now the perfect High Priest. He is fully qualified. He is not only the Author of our salvation (v9) - He is also our perfect High Priest (v10).

Jesus Christ is qualified to be a perfect High Priest.

Practical Application

Have you moved from milk to meat?

Verses 11-14 were an exhortation and challenge for the believers to **move on** and **mature** in the Christian faith. In fact, these verses are part of the larger warning passage that continues on into chapter 6. The writer to the Hebrews said that he had much more to say to his readers, but their “hearing had become dull” (v11). They were not stupid – but they had become lazy. They couldn’t be bothered to listen to heavy doctrine!

The author reminded these Hebrew believers that by this point they should have been **teachers** of the Word - not just pupils learning the “ABCs” of the Christian faith. They were like babies who were still sipping milk, when they should have been mature believers who were ready and able to chew and digest solid food (v13).

There is “milk” and there is “meat” in *every* area of doctrine. Don’t get the idea that the “milk” of the Word means salvation, whereas the “meat” of the Word means the heavier doctrines – like understanding the doctrines of the Holy Spirit or prophecy. No! There’s milk and meat in every area of doctrine.

We can still enjoy the “milk” of the Word - but it’s very important for us to grow up in our faith and knowledge, and get our spiritual appetites into the “solid food” of the Word. Hebrews 4, for example, about the “rest of God,” was not an easy passage of Scripture to understand. It was “meat.” It was solid food!

Regardless of how long you’ve been a Christian, if you’re still only a milk-drinker you probably did not enjoy our discussion of Hebrews 4 at all. And that’s sad, because God wants us to **grow** in our knowledge of His Word. He wants us to move on to solid food and to maturity in the faith (v14).

Have you moved from milk to meat?