

Hebrews Chapter Five

In chapter five we learn that Jesus has a better priesthood than what was possible under the Old Testament law. The High Priest in the old covenant was not self-appointed. God called Aaron, the brother of Moses, to his office (Exodus 28:1-4). Jesus was also ordained High Priest by God. His calling is distinctive because He was not a descendant of Aaron (which was a requirement to be High Priest under the Law of Moses). Aaron was from the tribe of Levi (Exodus 2:1). Jesus was from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:3). Jesus was made a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, who was a unique king and priest. Melchizedek had no historical, earthly successor to his office; his order came to an end with his death.

The qualifications for High Priest (verses 1-4)

The human priesthood was imperfect, taken from among men. There were specific qualifications that had to be met in order for a person to serve as High Priest (Leviticus 21:10-15). The High Priest was appointed and consecrated in a specific manner (Exodus 29:1-9). Verse four tells us that the High Priest was called by God.

The work of the High Priest was not toward man but toward God. They were required to offer gifts, burnt offerings, and sacrifices. But, because they were human, they could have compassion on their neighbors. The writer says in verse two that they can have compassion on the ignorant and those gone astray because they are also subject to the same weaknesses. Because even the High Priest sinned before God, they were required to offer sacrifices for themselves before offering sacrifices for the people (verse three). This is shown clearly in the actions taken on the Day of Atonement, that yearly

event where the priest went into the most holy place of the temple (Exodus 30:10 and Hebrews 9:6-7).

Jesus, a Priest forever (verses 5-11)

Jesus did not glorify Himself, but was glorified by God. The quote in verse five comes from Psalm 2:7 and the announcement of the Sonship of Jesus was repeated at His baptism (Matthew 3:13-17) and on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5). But Jesus is more than a Son; He is also regarded as a priest forever (verse six).

The Old Testament quotation in verse six comes from Psalm 110:4 and refers to Jesus as the successor of Melchizedek. Who was Melchizedek and why was he so important to warrant inclusion in the book of Hebrews?

Melchizedek was known as the king of Salem (which later became Jerusalem) in Genesis 14:18-20, and he is referred to in the Psalm mentioned earlier. Other than that there is no mention of Melchizedek anywhere else in the Bible outside the book of Hebrews. Melchizedek is mentioned in Hebrews 5:10; 6:20; and quite frequently in 7:1-28. More will be said on Melchizedek in chapter seven.

Jesus is described as offering up prayer and supplications in the manner of a priest. We are told about Jesus praying on several occasions in the New Testament, but one incident in particular brings it to mind, His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46). He also learned obedience through His sufferings (Hebrews 13:12 shows that He suffered outside the gates of the city of Jerusalem upon the cross). One of the most beautiful descriptions of the sufferings of Jesus on our behalf is found in Isaiah chapter 53, and Peter also alludes to it in 1 Peter 3:18.

After His sufferings on the cross and subsequent burial and resurrection, Jesus is described in verse nine as having been perfected. This thought is also found in Hebrews 7:28. He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey; He was called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, denoting a change from the Levitical priesthood.

Verse eleven is very peculiar. The writer indicates that much more would be said, things that were hard to explain, not because of the mysteries of God, but because the readers had become hard of hearing. We are warned in the remainder of this chapter not to allow spiritual immaturity to hinder us.

Spiritual immaturity (verses 12-14)

Reference is made to the first principles in verse 12. This is a theme that will be continued in the next chapter. The readers are chastised because they should have developed into teachers by now, but they were so immature that they needed someone to teach them the first principles again. The message is clear: we must progress in truth.

Spiritual immaturity is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2; 1 Corinthians 14:20; and Ephesians 4:14. Spiritual maturity is the goal for each Christian and is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14, where it is said to lead to discernment.