

Hebrews 5

Jesus as our High Priest.

The writer has already referred to Jesus the Son of God as a ‘merciful and faithful high priest’ in **2:17**, and as ‘a great high priest who has passed through the heavens . . . who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin’ in **4:14-15**. In this chapter, he starts to explain a little bit more, with even more coming in later chapters.

Remember, this letter was probably written to churches with Jewish believers and to others who were already familiar with the Old Testament. We will continue to dig back into the OT to find ways in which the LORD’s working with the Israelites fits together with what he has done and is doing in the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. Lots of fulfilment!

5:1 A simple definition of the role of a high priest: 1) Taken from among mankind and so rooted in humanity. 2) Appointed on behalf of mankind to deal with ‘things pertaining to God’ – a specialist in God-related things. 3) One who offers both gifts (showing appreciation, worship and praise) and sacrifices (dealing with people’s alienation from God and restoring their broken relationships with him).

5:2 A high priest rooted in humanity knows exactly what weakness is like and so is able to deal gently (i.e. with compassion) with those who come to him. We know that Jesus was sinless, but we can easily forget that he shared our weaknesses. The writer has just made the same point just a few sentences ago (**4:15**) but comes back to it for emphasis here.

5:3 In every other case, the high priest had needed to offer sacrifices for his own failures and misdeeds as well as for those of the people (**Leviticus 9:7, 16:6**). Not so with Jesus!

5:4 The high priesthood was not something that someone could just walk into; they needed to be appointed by God, as Aaron was (**Exodus 28:1, 1 Chronicles 23:13**). If we look at the examples of Annas and Caiaphas in the Gospel accounts, it looks like they shuffled the high priesthood around between them – not the right way! ¹

5:5-6 So, in the same way (and not like Annas and Caiaphas!) Jesus did not appoint himself as a high priest, but was appointed by God, in the words of the Messianic **Psalms 110**. This psalm was already acknowledged by the Jews (including the scribes and Pharisees) as referring to the Messiah,² and speaks clearly of the Messiah being a high priest of a completely different sort, not descended from Aaron (not even from the tribe of Levi) and **continuing for ever!**

It’s worth looking at Melchizedek, at least briefly, just to see what sort of ‘wild card’ he really was! We’ll read more about him in **chapter 7**, so we may come back to these verses again: **Genesis 14:13-20**. He is not mentioned anywhere else in the whole Bible except in **Psalms 110** and in **Hebrews 5,6 & 7**. For the writer of this letter, Melchizedek is an ideal example from Jewish history who illustrates the ‘differentness’ of Jesus as compared to the established Jewish priesthood. We shall be coming back to him in **chapters 6 & 7**.

¹ **Luke 3:2, John 18:13, 24, Acts 4:6**

² **Matthew 22:41-45, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44, Acts 2:32-36, Hebrews 1:13.**

5:7 Jesus offering up ‘prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears’ – ? What does that make us think of? Gethsemane! (**Matthew 26:36-44, Mark 14:32-39, Luke 22:39-46**). Do we think that his prayers in the garden went unanswered? In one way, they did, because he did have to go through the agony of death by crucifixion. But this verse in Hebrews gives us the other side of the picture, especially when we realise that a more accurate translation of ‘save him **from** death’ is actually ‘save him **out of** death’. Yes, he was heard and answered – he was raised out of death! (His ‘piety’ or ‘reverence’? This word is only used in two other New Testament passages, **Hebrews 11:7 & 12:28**. It seems to imply obedient responsiveness to God and his commands.)

5:8-10 More of the process that was taking place during Jesus’ earthly life. He learned obedience through suffering and became complete. The translation “once made perfect” (NIV) can be confusing, as it seems to imply that he was not always faultless. The word means ‘having reached the goal’. He had successfully gone through 30+ years of human life without failing, had then given that perfect life as a sacrifice for all our failures, and then had been raised out of death by the power of the Father. He certainly reached the goal – as a human being – and, having done so, became the source through whom we receive rescue that lasts for ever.

As a result of that, the Father declared him to be high priest! Not according to the old Levitical priesthood through Aaron, but like that ‘wild card’ Melchizedek! A new order of things.

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5:11-14 There’s so much more to say, and we shall read about that as we move onwards, but the writer is concerned that his readers may find it hard to follow his explanation. (He seems to know who he is writing to!)

But why may they be missing out? There is something wrong! They seem to have been going backwards, because he says that they need to be taught the basics all over again. It seems that they had already been ‘weaned’ from those basics onto ‘solid food’, but may have now regressed to being infants again. The word means a child who does not have the power of speech, so a real youngster! By now (given how long they have been in Christ), they should have been able to teach and pass on the message (‘solid food’ and all) to others. Far from it – they can’t even speak themselves! Why has this happened?

5:14 seems to imply that they may not have been **putting into practice** the truth that they had been taught, and so those basics had just remained mostly theoretical and had not worked out in their lives, so they didn’t ‘have their senses trained to discern good and evil’.

There is more encouragement – and warning – in the next chapter!

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