

Hebrews

Chapter 5

For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. 4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; 6 as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” 7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

5:1–4 The high-priestly office had two specific qualifications: (1) A candidate had to be “selected from among men” (v. 1) and thus be able to represent them before God; and (2) he had to “be called by God” (v. 4). (CSB)

The author advances the thought of Christ’s superior priesthood by drawing a comparison between Him and the high priests of Judaism. (PBC)

5:1 *chosen ... appointed.* An OT priest could not decide on his own initiative to be high priest. God chose the sons of Aaron and on the basis of this election they fulfilled their office (cf Ex 28:1; Nu 3:10) (TLSB)

gifts and sacrifices. Emphasizes the way the high priest offered something other than himself to atone for sin. (TLSB)

5:2 *the ignorant and wayward.* See Isa 53:6. Contrast the unintentional sin (as in Lev 4; Nu 15:27–29) with defiant rebellion against God (see Nu 15:30–31; cf. Heb 6:4–6; 10:26–31). (CSB)

The high priest, too, was weighed down by weakness in the face of temptation. (TLSB)

Those who sinned defiantly and thus blasphemed God were to be cut off from Israel and carry their sins with them. Those who sinned ignorantly and unintentionally were to have their sins covered by the sacrifice brought on the Day of Atonement. The high priest, knowing from his own human experience the weaknesses with which his people had to grapple, could deal moderately with them. (PBC)

5:3 *offer sacrifice for his own sins* – But being a human also had a disadvantage, since the high priest would have sins of his own. Leviticus 16 relates how the ritual on the Day of Atonement made provision for his sins. Before he sprinkled the blood of the goat on the mercy seat as an offering for the sins of his people, the high priest had to enter behind the veil into the Holy of Holies with the blood of a bullock “to make atonement for himself and his household” (Leviticus 16:17). (PBC)

The high priest, being a sinner, had to make atonement for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people. (TLSB)

5:4 *No one takes this honor for himself.* In Christ's day the high-priestly office was in the hands of a family that had bought control of it. (CSB)

In Exodus 28 and Leviticus 8 God established the OT priesthood and called Aaron as its first high priest. Through Aaron's direct call God also marked his descendants as the ones from whom the high priests would come. (PBC)

5:5 *also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest.* The Son was appointed by the Father, as the two prophetic statements cited here show (Ps 2:7; 110:4). His high priesthood, however, was "in the order of Melchizedek" (v. 6), not in the order of Aaron. (CSB)

The Father appointed Jesus to serve as the true High Priest. The quote from Ps 2:7 was addressed to the earthly king of God's people. Yet it prophesied Christ's enthronement in glory after His ascension. (TLSB)

The word "glory" is used instead of "honor" because Christ's is the greater priesthood. Note, how John 8:54 pointed out to the Jews how He obtained that glory, "If I glorify myself my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me." Here was the greater high priest holding a glorious office as appointed by God Himself. (PBC)

5:6 *the order of Melchizedek* – Melchizedek is one of those mysteries of Holy Scriptures, appearing only three times. In Genesis 14:18-20 he appears briefly as he meets and blesses Abraham returning from rescuing Lot. There he is called both "King of Salem" and priest of God Most High." In Psalm 110:4 David refers to him even more briefly and by inspiration sees in him a type of Christ, who would be both King and Priest. Here in Hebrews the reference is in much greater detail. (PBC)

Melchizedek was a priest and king who blessed Abraham and received offerings from him (cf Gn 14:18–20). Like Melchizedek, Jesus is a true priest, even though He was not from Aaron's lineage (cf v 10). (TLSB)

Following the example of Ps 110:4, the writer of Hebrews provides an extensive comparison between this ancient priest of Salem (Jerusalem) and Jesus. The Dead Sea Scrolls and other early Jewish literature show a similar interest in the priesthood of Melchizedek, who was viewed as the first to establish priestly services at or near the site where the temple was built (Jos, *War* 6:438). Using Melchizedek as an illustration is one reason why the audience for Hebrews is considered to be a Jewish-Christian congregation. For the history of Melchizedek, cf Gn 14. (TLSB)

5:7 *days of his flesh.* The principal reference here is to Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. (CSB)

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Offered. Same word is used for offering sacrifice. This emphasizes the priestly nature of Jesus' suffering. Luther: "That is the true sacrifice... It deserves to be praised to the utmost and to have every honor given to it, especially over against those other false, lying sacrifices of our own works which were invented to deny and blaspheme this sacrifice. He is also the Priest who

ought to be called a priest above all others. What man can praise and exalt Him enough?... No matter how great or burdensome sin, wrath, hell and damnation may be, this holy sacrifice is far greater and higher. (TLSB)

loud cries and tears – The anguish and the agony deepen till they lead to His sweat “like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Did any of those Hebrew Christians think they were alone? Was persecution’s pressure rubbing their souls sore? Here was one who, utterly alone, had gone through more than they would ever know. Here was one who would know just how to help them. (PBC)

who was able to save him from death. To the Father. Jesus did not shrink from physical suffering and death but from the indescribable agony of taking mankind’s sin on himself (see Mt 27:46). Although he asked that the cup of suffering might be taken from him, he did not waver in his determination to fulfill the Father’s will (see Mt 26:36–46). (CSB)

Jesus trusted that His Father would bring Him through death to resurrection and new life. (TLSB)

he was heard. His prayer was granted by the Father, who saved him from death—through resurrection. (CSB)

Jesus lived with pure devotion to the Father. His prayers conformed fully to the Father’s will and were heard. Luther: “In the same manner He also fulfilled the third part of the priestly office: intercessory prayer. Along with, and beyond, His sacrifice Christ also prayed to God the Father in our behalf. Isaiah 53:12 speaks of this function of His priestly office: ‘He bore the sins of man, and made intercession for the transgressors’... By means of such prayer He won for us and communicated to us the power and merit of His sacrifice, that is, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life. Prayer like that is valid forever and works its power in all Christendom. In short, He continues to exercise this office as our Mediator and Advocate before God” (AE 13:320). (TLSB)

because of his reverence – taking well (carefully), that is, circumspect / (religiously, pious):—devout.- *caution*, that is, (religiously) *reverence (piety)*; by implication *dread* (concretely):—fear (-ed). (QV) – Here again Christ’s humility is emphasized, this time in respect to the reason for the answer to his prayer. His humility, as his obedience, is perfect, demanding nothing from his Father and refusing to use what was his own (his nature and power) to save himself. He lived and prayed in perfect submission to the Father.

5:8 *he learned obedience through what he suffered.* He was made “perfect” (v. 9) through suffering, namely, his temptation in the desert and his ordeal on the cross. Though he was the eternal Son of God, it was necessary for him as the incarnate Son to learn obedience—not that he was ever disobedient, but that he was called on to obey to an extent he had never before experienced. The temptations he faced were real and the battle for victory was difficult, but where Adam failed and fell, Jesus resisted and prevailed. His humanity was thereby completed, “made perfect” (v. 9), and on the basis of this perfection he could become “the source of eternal salvation” (see 9:12). (CSB)

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This follows on the heels of his humility. While the Greeks took it as axiomatic that learning comes from suffering, this phrase is difficult for many today who believe that suffering is to be avoided at all costs. But in becoming the perfect High Priest, the humble servant of God, submitted himself fully and willingly to suffering, and through that suffering learned obedience rather than resentment.

5:9 *being made perfect* – More literally it means “having reached His goal” of cross, tomb and throne. (PBC)

source of eternal salvation – The fountain of Jesus’ blood never dries up. It is an unending source of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

FOR ALL WHO OBEY HIM – to *hear under* (as a *subordinate*), that is, to *listen attentively*; by implication to *heed* or *conform* to a command or authority:— hearken, be obedient to, obey. (QV)

Here obedience is the fruit of faith, that is, utter trust in the person, word and work of Christ who humbly submits to the will of God out of love.

5:10 *designated by God* – While God’s will was thwarted in the Garden of Eden, it was fulfilled in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 4)

Solemnly acclaimed by the Father. (TLSB)

4:14–5:10 Jesus Christ, our true High Priest, shares our humanity and knows the weaknesses that we experience. Being one with the Father, He is the source of God’s full forgiveness. If we approach God confident in our own goodness, we will be condemned according to the strictness of the Law. But Christ Jesus is gentle and understanding. He forgives us, gives us confidence before the Father, and helps us in all our needs. • Lord Jesus, our true High Priest, help us, in our weakness, to call to our Father for all that we need. Amen. (TLSB)

Warning Against Apostasy

11 About this we have much to say, and it is 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 basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

5:11–6:20 The heart of the Letter, where the author rebukes his readers and draws them back from spiritual collapse. (TLSB)

5:11 *about this we have much to say..* About Christ’s eternal priesthood “in the order of Melchizedek” (v. 10). (CSB)

hard to learn. Instead of progressing in the Christian life, the readers had become spiritually sluggish and mentally lazy (6:12). (CSB)

The teaching is not too complicated, but hearers are slow to listen and understand. (TLSB)

5:12 *by this time.* They were not recent converts. (CSB)

Likely the readers had been Christians for some time. (TLSB)

principles of the oracles of God. These are listed in 6:1–2 (see note there). Having taken the first steps toward becoming (mature) Christians, they had slipped back to where they started. (CSB)

Key points of apostolic teaching, such as the examples listed in Heb 6:1–2. (TLSB)

milk. Gathered from cows, sheep, or goats and stored in jars immersed in spring water. Milk was food for children but also given to the sick. (TLSB)

solid food. Advanced teaching such as that given in ch. 7. (CSB)

With maturity, a student of Scripture is better prepared to understand the more challenging passages and apply them correctly to life’s more difficult issues. An immature student may fall into doubt or fear, or perhaps most dangerously, pride. (TLSB)

5:13 *unskilled in the word.* People could not keep the truths of Scripture straight and so fell into error. (TLSB)

5:14 *the mature.* Those who had progressed in spiritual life and had become Christians of sound judgment and discernment. (CSB)

powers of discernment trained by constant practice. Adults by experience have developed palates that can discern subtle differences in food and drink. Only spiritually mature people can properly discern and receive the “solid food” of advanced teaching. (TLSB)

distinguish good from evil. Something neither physical nor spiritual infants can do. (CSB)
The spiritually mature are able to distinguish true teaching from false teaching, good behavior from wickedness. (TLSB)