

Hebrews 5 • The Greater High Priest

Introduction

In the first two chapters of Hebrews, the main theme revealed that Christ is greater than the prophets and the angels; in chapters 3-4 this progressed to show that Christ is even greater than Moses. Now the writer of Hebrews shows how Christ is greater than Aaron, Israel's first High Priest and that abandoning Christ for Judaism is to exchange the greater High Priest for a lesser one. This teaching shows how Christ is superior to Aaron in at least three important ways in the course of establishing that the Old Testament office and functions of High Priest were actually a shadow of their ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah to come.

¹For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;

⁴And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

⁵So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him,

“YOU ARE MY SON,
TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”;

⁶just as He says also in another passage, “YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.”

[Read v.1 & 4-6]

Q: What aspect of the office of High Priest is being discussed here?

A: It is the ordination of High Priest, the contrast between whom God ordained to fill the earthly office versus His ultimate ordination of Christ as the final High Priest.

Q: How did someone, in accordance with the Law, become a High Priest?

A: It began with Aaron, who was selected by God from among all other men and elevated to the position of High Priest. His tribe – Levi, was set aside to be the priestly tribe for all of Israel, but the office of High Priest was to be filled only by direct descendants of Aaron, or as the writer of Hebrew puts it, “*taken from among men...appointed on behalf of men*”. (v.1)

Q: According to v.4-5, what is a crucial characteristic of the office of High Priest?

A: The occupant must be “*called by God*” (v.4) and does not seek “*the honor to himself*”. (v.4)

Q: How is Christ's calling superior to Aaron's?

A: In quoting from Psalm 2, well-known as a Messianic Psalm, Christ's calling is related to His resurrection.

“And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.’

— Acts 13:32–33

Q: But why does it imply that Christ's priesthood is derived from the superior lineage of Melchizedek rather than Aaron?

A: “*Melchizedek*” means “king of righteousness” and he was also a priest of “Salem”, which means “peace”. In other words, whereas Aaron was a priest, Melchizedek was a priest-king. Jesus is both Priest and King. (Hebrews 3-4 establish Christ's ministry of peace, the “rest” discussed.) Christ came from the tribe of Judah, the kingly tribe and not from Levi, the priestly tribe of Aaron.

Q: How does Melchizedek's priesthood typify that of Christ's to come?

1. As stated previously, He is simultaneously both Priest and King.
2. There is no indication of the beginning or end of Melchizedek's ministry, an allusion to Christ's Sonship being “without beginning and ending”.
3. It is ordained directly by God, not bestowed by earthly lineage.
4. Others?

Q: How is Christ's ordination superior to that of Aaron's?

1. Aaron died and had to be replaced; Christ will never die – His priesthood is forever.
2. Aaron was priest over an earthly household; Christ is Priest over a heavenly people.
3. What Aaron did was symbolic whereas Christ is actually able to address sin directly and permanently.
4. Others?

Application: *The major purpose of Christ's First Coming is to establish the greater spiritual role fulfilling the office of High Priest prior to His Return when He will fulfill the role of King.*

[Read v.2-3 & 7-8]

Q: What is the chief difference between Christ and Aaron being discussed here?

A: Christ has a greater sympathy; He is better able to enter into the needs and problems of God's people.

Q: How is Christ contrasted to Aaron?

A: As a man Aaron had certain empathies with people's problems and weaknesses, but was ultimately in need of atonement himself. Christ not only became the qualified and ultimate atonement for sin, but because He was tested to the full beyond anything any human can endure, He actually knows our trials better than any man, Aaron included.

Q: Why was it necessary for the Messiah to experience trials and suffering?

A: In order to be a sympathetic High Priest and to establish the greater work of sanctification. Just as the earthly High Priest initiated an earthly process to consecrate things for God's service, so Christ the High Priest fulfilled the greater spiritual processes which they represented for God's people.

*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,
— Hebrews 2:10–11*

Q: Wouldn't the existence of suffering and trials be proof of the lack of Christ's deity?

A: This is actually the mark of Christ's deity because God was establishing a High Priest personally sympathetic to the people and as an example to the people. Note that at Gethsemane Christ was willing to face the cross and drink the cup of the Father (Jn. 12:23-34), not avoid it. He serves as the ultimate example to us to endure life's circumstances, trusting God the Father to save us not "from" death but "out of" death. His ultimate example to us is "*obedience from the things which He suffered*". (v.8)

Application: *Christ holds the office of High Priest not just as a title, but as the result of going through everything we are expected to endure in this life. He is not just qualified by pedigree, but by His personal fulfillment of the whole Law and life's circumstances they were created to deal with.*

²he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; ³and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

⁷In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. ⁸Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

³and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

⁹And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, ¹⁰being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

¹¹Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

[Read v.3 & 9-10]

Q: What is one of the major functions of the office of High Priest?

A: "...to offer sacrifices for sins". (v.3) Whereas all priests ministered to the people throughout the year, the most important work was when Aaron as High Priest offered sacrifices for the whole nation on the Day of Atonement. (Lev. 16)

Q: But how did Christ offer a greater sacrifice than Aaron or any earthly High Priest?

1. Christ as the sinless Lamb of God, unlike Aaron, needed no sacrifices of sin for Himself.
2. Christ did not offer a sacrifice of animals but offered Himself.
3. Whereas Aaron and the High Priests had to make the sacrifices repeatedly, Christ needed to offer Himself but once and for all.
4. Others?

Q: What is the difference between Christ and Aaron where the work of salvation is concerned?

A: Whereas Aaron's work was temporary, Christ was "the source of eternal salvation". The blood of bulls and goats only covered sin; Christ's blood took away sin once and for all.

Application: Just as Christ was perfect, so our work of salvation through Him is "made perfect". It is the fulfillment of the whole Law and requires nothing additional or extra.

[Read v.11-14]

Q: To what did the writer of Hebrews want to progress?

A: He wanted to go from "milk" – the basic teachings of the Christian life (listed in Heb. 6:1-2), to "meat" – the heavenly priesthood of Christ.

Q: What was hindering him from doing so?

A: "...you have become dull of hearing". (v.11) This is further elaborated as being spiritual immaturity, people who are not putting what they already know into practice.

Point: Just as no one can do calculus without first learning algebra and trigonometry, neither can the deeper things of Christ be learned without first putting the basics into practice. The spiritually immature may know Christ as Savior, but they do not understand what He can do for them as High Priest.

Q: According to v.13, what is the mark of an immature Christian?

A: Someone not in the Word.

Observation

1. In Heb. 2:1-3 is the warning not to "drift away" from the Word.
2. In Heb. 3-4 is the admonition of what happens to those who doubt the Word.
3. In Heb. 4:2 is the warning of what occurs when the Word is not combined with faith.
4. In Heb. 5:14 is the need to put the Word into the practice of daily life, not doing so resulting in dulled senses.
5. The ultimate result of failing to properly apply and live God's Word is expressed in Heb. 6:1-3 as heading in the wrong direction.

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Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permits.

— Hebrews 6:1–3

Application: *Christians who fail to understand the greater spiritual teachings of the Word are usually characterized as not having put the foundational teachings of the Word into practice. Biblical understanding is intrinsically tied to biblical obedience.*

Overall Application

For the spiritually mature Believer progressing in God's Word, the Old Testament office of High Priest and its associated Laws and occupants such as Aaron serve to teach of their ultimate fulfillment in the work and Person of Christ. Just as Joseph's life teaches about Christ's First Coming as the "Suffering Servant", and David's life teaches about Christ's Second Coming as the "Conquering King", so Aaron teaches how Christ functions as the ultimate High Priest in dealing with sin and pursuing sanctification. One of the unmistakable proofs of the deity and authenticity of Christ is found in His direct role regarding sin through what began at the cross and His continuing work as our High Priest.