

# Hebrews

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#### INTRODUCTION:

The message of the book of Hebrews is very simple. It presents the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish believers outside the area of Jerusalem to show them that they had made the right step in receiving Jesus Christ. Because Judaism was replaced by Christianity. Also through the book of Hebrews there are warnings to unbelieving Jews to know that Jesus Christ is greater than all of the individuals from the Old Testament and that the new covenant is greater than the old covenant. And the author frequently used the Old Testament to make his case. That is because that is the scripture that they were familiar with and trusted.

But in the midst of this, there is a very natural question that is going to arise. If you were to tell a Jew that the new covenant is greater than the old, they are going to question how the new covenant is able to provide atonement for sin when there is no longer an earthly high priest. Judaism is based on priests mediating between men and God. And the first question perhaps that a Jew would ask is this. If this new covenant is better, where is your high priest? Where is that mediator that ties man to God?

A Jew might wonder how your sins were going to be pardoned when you have no one offering sacrifices and no one interceding for you? How can you claim that this new covenant supersedes the old and is in every way superior and spells the nullification of the old if you have no high priest?

We saw a very clear and simple answer to that in **Chapter 4, verse 14.**

#### **Hebrews 4:14 (NASB95)**

**<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a (What?) a **great high priest** who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.**

Christianity, the new covenant, is not without a high priest. We have a great high priest.

This is the real key to the supremacy of the new covenant to the old covenant. This is what sets Christianity apart as better than Judaism, because our high priest is so superior. He can do what all of the priests put together in the old covenant could not do.

Christ in one act in history accomplished what millions of sacrifices by multitudes of priests could never accomplish. That was to open the way to God permanently so that any man at any time by faith in Christ might enter into God's presence.

#### **Hebrews 4:16 (NASB95)**

<sup>16</sup> Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

And so the great high priest has provided a new and living way in which there is no longer any need for more earthly priests or sacrifices. Jesus Christ now sits at God's right hand interceding for us. He is our living mediator. He is the only priest needed, the great high priest.

What was so hard for the Jews that this epistle was written to was, that they, for so many years, had gone through the sacrificial rituals and ceremonies. And now Jesus comes along and says you can now forget all of that. And that was very difficult for some of them. You can understand that, can't you?

In the first **four verses of Chapter 5**, He gives the standard Jewish qualifications for a priest. And in **verses 5 to 9**, He shows how Jesus meets every one of them. And this is a very important question for them to have answered because in their mind, Jesus would not fit any qualifications for a priest. He was a part of the wrong tribe. He was not born in the right family. And He apparently had not spent His life preparing for this. There is no indication that He, in any way, met what they thought were the qualifications for a high priest. So it is important that Jesus Christ be seen as the one qualified to be the high priest.

In **verses 1 to 4**, we see three qualifications for a high priest.

- He must be selected by God from men.
- He must be sympathetic with men.
- He must perform the sacrifices for men.

Then in verses 5-9 we see Jesus Christ meeting every one of those three major qualifications. Thus it becomes obvious that Jesus Christ **is** uniquely qualified to be the perfect high priest.

Now once He states that Jesus is the high priest, then He will move on through the rest of the book to show how His high priesthood really functions. But first He must show how Jesus Christ meets those qualifications.

## All Stand and Read Scripture

### **Hebrews 5:1-9 (NASB95)**

<sup>5</sup> For 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; <sup>2</sup> he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; <sup>3</sup> and because of it he is obligated to offer *sacrifices* for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. <sup>4</sup> And no one takes the honor to himself, but *receives it* when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.

<sup>5</sup> So 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”; <sup>6</sup> just as He says also in another *passage*, “You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”

<sup>7</sup> In 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.

<sup>8</sup> Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup> And

having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

## Prayer

First, let us look at the standard qualifications of an old covenant high priest as we examine the text. The first qualification for a high priest was he had to be selected by God from men.

### **I. The Qualifications for an Old Covenant High Priest. A. Appointed by God from among Men.**

Notice in verse 1,

#### **Hebrews 5:1a (NASB95)**

5 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God,

Stop right there and we will come back later to the rest of the verse.

"Every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men" So he must be taken from men. Now to show you that He is taken by God, look at **verse 4**.

#### **Hebrews 5:4 (NASB95)**

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

Aaron was a very good illustration for these Jews. They understood what Aaron, as high priest, was able to do for them. A true high priest had to be taken from men. That is he had to be a man. He had to minister for men and he had to be chosen by God. All of this is involved in his selection.

We will see that all of the Old Testament priests were chosen by God from among men.

#### **Exodus 28:1 (NASB95)**

28 "Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me—Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.

Now here is God very pointedly and very directly choosing His priests. He selects in a very direct sense Aaron to be His high priest. Old Testament priests were chosen by God. And you know as well as I do that anyone in the Old Testament covenant who ministered apart from having been chosen by God got into a lot of trouble.

In Ezekiel, Ezekiel says in Chapters 8 to 10 when he sees the desecration of the temple, he sees men ministering as priests and it is blasphemous. True high priests are ordained of God. Once again verse 1 tells us that every high priest chosen from among men. Now God chooses His priests from among men in the old covenant. These first four verses are still dealing with Old Testament qualifications. When God began the priesthood, He selected His pattern of priesthood from men.

God did not choose angels to be priests. He did not choose animals to be priests. He chose men who would act on the behalf of men. Angels did not have the nature of the men. They could not understand men. They did not have the free open communication with men. They did not exist in the form or experiences of men, therefore, they were not chosen to mediate for men. It had to be a man who was subject to the temptations of men. It had to be a man who had experimental acquaintances with suffering like men have in order that they might minister in a merciful way. And only a man could rightly minister for his people.

In order to understand the importance of this simple little point, you need to remember that the Jews to whom this Epistle is written had a very hard time understanding the incarnation or the death of Christ on the cross. Why would the Messiah would have to die?

So the Holy Spirit very simply answers the problem of the incarnation. God had to become man or He never could have been the great high priest of men, do you see? Unless God could feel what men felt and what men had to go through, then He had no experience needed to serve as a high priest for men. So God did not keep himself separated and unapproachable from sinners as they tended to believe. Christ entered into the world of men and felt everything that men will ever feel in order that He might be a sympathetic, merciful, and faithful high priest.

If God had never become man, He could never have been a high priest. He could never have been a mediator. He could never have been an intercessor. He could never have offered that sacrifice for the sins of His people which divine justice required. So His incarnation, the act of becoming a man, was not an option. It was an absolute necessity if salvation was to be accomplished.

They saw how God drove man out of the Garden of Eden and how man lost their close relationship with Him. The children of Israel got in the wilderness and they continuously heard stay away, stay away, stay away. Do not come near or you will die. In the tabernacle and the temple, God was behind a veil and men could only get to God through this priest that had been chosen from among them.

Now notice an interesting word in **verse 1**. It says, " **For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God**"

Priests were not arbitrarily selected, nor were they selected on the basis of their own will, but by God. Nobody elected him, he had to be appointed by God Himself.

Then look in verse 4 which expands this same thought.

#### **Hebrews 5:4 (NASB95)**

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

God called His priests directly. And this is a very serious matter. In Numbers 16, Moses and Aaron, who had been appointed by God, had their authority challenged by Korah and 249 other prominent Israelite men who were leaders of the community and representatives in the assembly. They claimed that everyone in the community is holy and God is among them. Listen to what God did to them.

#### **Numbers 16:28-32 (NASB95)**

<sup>28</sup> Moses said, “By this you shall know that the Lord has sent **me to do all these deeds**; for this is **not my doing**. <sup>29</sup> If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, *then* the Lord has not sent me. <sup>30</sup> But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the Lord.”

<sup>31</sup> As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; <sup>32</sup> and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with *their* possessions.

Then to further indicate that Moses and Aaron were appointed by God He induced a plague among them. Aaron quickly atoned for the people and caused the plague to end. But by the time it was over 14,700 more people had died because of the conflict with Korah. Then God had Moses speak to the Israelites and have the leaders of each ancestral tribe provide a staff with his name on it. Aaron's name was put on the staff from the tribe of Levi. God said that the staff of the man that He chose would sprout. So each staff was placed in the tent of the testimony (the holy of holies) and left overnight. Then listen to what happened.

### **Numbers 17:8 (NASB95)**

<sup>8</sup> Now on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds.

That is a pretty astounding thing. It was a stick that Aaron used when he walked around with and overnight it budded and had almonds on it.

And you know, it is not really any different today is it? When a man is **really** called by God supernatural fruit will be the result. We call it the fruits of the spirit.

It is still the standard. So the case in point is that no man can legitimately act as a high priest or any other calling from God unless he is divinely called to that office. And anybody who tries to usurp that office is coming under the judgment of God. No man can call himself the greatest high priest unless God directly has appointed him to be such.

So first of all then, the true high priest must be called from men by God. Secondly, the true high priest must be sympathetic with men. That is found in **verse 2**.

### **B. Sympathetic to Men.**

#### **Hebrews 5:2 (NASB95)**

<sup>2</sup> he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;

The phrase "deal gently" suggests that a high priest must be able to sympathetically deal with his people. A priest must be a man, completely involved in the human experiences. He must live with them. He must feel with them. He must know their highs and lows. A person who is non-compassionate could care less about anybody else's pain. But this is a priest who must come from men, because he must be able to bear gently with the faults of other men knowing that he has got the same problems. He must feel it like they feel it.

The Greeks maintained that a virtuous man was a man who found his way down the middle of every issue. It did not mean he was the middle of the road in politics or things like that. It meant in terms of emotions and feeling, he was in the middle. He had to be able to be between extravagant grief and utter indifference. He could not see somebody's problems and fall apart and panic. That is the extravagant grief. Nor could he be totally unconcerned with somebody's problems. That is indifferent. What falls in the middle of these two attitudes is **virtue**.

It is a gentle kind of working with the child of God to lead him in the right path so that you feel the ends of his extremes but at the same time you are able to be a his rock. So this person had to be a man because knows how a human feels. And remember, that both the Greeks and the Jews always felt that God was a little bit apathetic or far removed from man.

Now I want you to see who the high priest is dealing with. Let's reread verse 2.

### **Hebrews 5:2 (NASB95)**

**<sup>2</sup> he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness;**

The implication here is that the high priest is atoning for only the people who have gone astray because of ignorance. This is also confirmed from the old testament.

### **Numbers 15:28 (NASB95)**

**<sup>28</sup> The priest shall make atonement before the Lord for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven.**

The priest ministered in the behalf of only the one who sinned in ignorance or unwittingly, and thus went astray. And may I add this, in all of the Old Testament there is absolutely no provision made for the deliberate and defiant law breaker. There is none.

Now we will see more on that later in this message. But the emphasis here is sympathy and the high priest must have sympathy toward those who ignorantly go astray. And since the Jewish priest was a sinner, he had the natural and moral ability to feel a little bit of what everybody was experiencing.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Unfortunately we are out of time and this is as far as we can go this morning. Lord willing we will continue with this passage in the next couple of weeks.

What have we learned so far? We have seen two of the three qualifications for an earthly high priest. He must be appointed by God from among men and he must be sympathetic toward men. Next week we will see how he must offer sacrifices for his people. Then the author will show how Jesus perfectly meets and exceeds every one of those qualifications. And this is a very important question for them to have answered because in their mind, Jesus would not fit any qualifications for a priest. He was a part of the wrong tribe. He was not born in the right family. He is not on this earth among us conducting sacrifices. There is no indication that He, in any way, fits what they thought were the qualifications for a high priest. So it is important that Jesus Christ be seen as the unrivaled person to be qualified to be our ultimate high priest.

## **What A Day That Will Be.**