

Hebrews 5:1-10 – Our Great High Priest

Jesus is superior to the Old Testament prophets, angels, Moses and Joshua. Joshua did not give the Israelites permanent rest in the Promised Land, but Jesus will lead us into God's heavenly, eternal rest. The next six chapters primarily focus on Jesus as our great high priest. Jesus as high priest was already mentioned in 2:17, 3:1 and 4:14-15. The idea of Jesus as high priest would probably seem strange to someone raised as a Jew. High priests were from the tribe of Levi and were descendants of Aaron. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and descended from David. How could Jesus be a high priest? That question is answered in chapter 5. In Zechariah, we saw hints that the office of king and priest would be combined in the future.

Read Hebrews 5:1-4.

From verse 1, what was the job of the high priest? What gifts and sacrifices did the high priest offer? The word "gift" was used in the Septuagint along with "sacrifice". Jesus said, "so if you are offering your gift before the altar...". (Matthew 5:23) The phrase "gifts and sacrifices" is probably used here as a general phrase for the various offerings that the high priest presented to God. (5:1)

Verse 2 says of the high priest that "He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward". Just because they were able to deal gently with the people, did the high priests always deal gently with the people? See John 7:45-49, 11:49-50. Based on the second part of verse 2, why should the high priest deal gently with the people? What do you think the word "weakness" refers to? Is it talking about physical weakness or moral weakness? Is it referring to mistakes or sins or something else? See the end of verse 3. (5:2)

In verse 3, because the high priest was a sinner like everyone else, what is he required to do? Some versions like the KJV don't have "sacrifice(s)". NASB has "sacrifices" in italics. That means they added the word in their translation to enhance the meaning even though it was not in the original text. In the context, it is obvious that what the law required for sin was the offering of sacrifices. (5:3)

How did someone become a high priest? How did Aaron become high priest? It is interesting to note that the first time someone was given the title of "high priest" is found in 2 Kings 22:4. Haggai and Zechariah both mentioned "Joshua the high priest" multiple times. The term "chief priest" was used 8 times in the OT. Aaron was referred to as "Aaron the priest" but not "high" or "chief" priest. That should not be surprising because Aaron was the first priest under the Mosaic law. The term "high priest" is used 122 times in the NT. It is used in the four Gospels, Acts and Hebrews. (5:4)

Read Hebrews 5:5-10.

Jesus did not appoint himself as high priest. BDAG translated the first part of verse 5 as “he [Jesus] did not presume for himself the prestige of the high priesthood”. What two Old Testament quotes were given to show that Jesus was appointed by God? See Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4. Psalm 2:7 was already quoted in Hebrews 1:5 to show that Jesus is superior to the angels. (5:5-6)

Is the quote from Psalm 2:7 about Jesus being appointed high priest by God the Father or is it just showing that Jesus was generally chosen / appointed by God the Father? We already saw Psalm 110:1 quoted in Hebrews 1:13. As we said when we looked at that verse, Psalm 110 was definitely considered Messianic. What does Psalm 110:4 say about the Messiah, and therefore Jesus? Who was Melchizedek? See Genesis 14:18-20. Hebrews 7 goes into detail about Melchizedek, so we won't do that here. Melchizedek was the first person in the Bible to be called a priest. Melchizedek lived in the time of Abraham and was before Aaron by hundreds of years. If Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek then he did not need to be descended from Aaron because Melchizedek was obviously not descended from Aaron or even Levi. (5:5-6).

In verse 7, ESV and NIV both have “Jesus”. KJV and NASB have “he” / “his”. Do you think this verse is talking about Jesus? There is an intensity to verse 7. Do you think verse 7 describes a daily practice or do you think there was a specific event in mind? If a specific event, which one? Why were Jesus' prayers heard? One commentator said that the description of God as “him who was able to save him from death” had nothing to do with the content of Jesus' prayers in this verse. Do you think this commentator was correct? Why or why not? (5:7)

Verse 8 may sound strange when we hear that Jesus “learned obedience”. It seems to imply that Jesus did not know or understand obedience before he suffered. We know from other passages that Jesus was always obedient, so that can't be the meaning. BDAG says that the word “learn” here means “to come to a realization, with implication of taking place less through instruction than through experience or practice, learn, appropriate to oneself: he learned obedience through what he suffered = he realized obedience through suffering”. What does verse 8 mean? See Phil. 2:8. (5:8)

Verse 9 may remind us of 2:10 which said that Jesus, the “founder of their salvation”, was made “perfect through suffering”. In verse 5:9, how was Jesus made perfect? What was the result of Jesus' perfection? Who receives the benefits of Jesus' work as high priest? In verse 10, the idea of 5:6, from Psalm 110:4 was repeated with the exception that verse 10 has “high priest” while 5:6 and Psalm 110:4 simply have “priest”. (5:9-10)