

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 4:14-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

- A. Outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
 - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
 - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 2. The superiority of the priesthood of Christ (4:14-10:18)
 - a. A superior confession (4:14-16)
 - b. Superior qualifications (5:1-10)
- B. Review of Hebrews 4:14-16
1. William Barclay, *Jesus is the perfect high priest because he is perfectly God, and perfectly one with us. Because he has known our life, he can give us sympathy, mercy and power. He brought God to men and women, and he can bring them to God.*
 2. R. Kent Hughes, *Some in that beleaguered little house-church of the first century had allowed the mounting hardships to draw them away from God, rather than closer by prayer. Their confidence was gone. What about you? Has life made you draw away from the throne of grace or draw near?*
- C. Comments on Hebrews 5:1-10
1. William L. Lane, *The consideration of the solidarity of the exalted heavenly high priest with those who are weak in 4:15–16 sets the tone for the exposition in 5:1–3.*
 2. William Barclay, . . . *Hebrews comes to work out the doctrine which is its special contribution to Christian thought—the doctrine of the high priesthood of Jesus Christ.*
 3. Zane Hodges, *Before enlarging on the ramifications of the priesthood of Christ, the writer took the logical step of showing Christ's qualifications for that role. Though His priesthood has already been assumed, its validity must now be asserted if the admonitions based on it are to carry full weight.*

HEBREWS 5:1-10, SUPERIOR QUALIFICATIONS

- A. The qualifications of a high priest (1-4)
1. Introductory notes
 - a. The previous verses in chapter 4 are connected to chapter 5 by the conjunction *for*.
 - b. Douglas Mangum, *The author builds on the theme of Jesus' priesthood, expanding particularly on 4:15 and the notion that Jesus is a priest who is like us and can sympathize with us in our humanity.*
 2. The qualifications for a human high priest
 - a. He is to represent mankind before God (1), ***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.***
 - 1) *chosen from among men . . . appointed*
 - a) Hebrews 2:16-17, *For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*
 - b) R. Kent Hughes, *No angel, no celestial being, no deceased soul could function as high priest. He had to be a living human being—a mortal like everyone else.*
 - c) H. D. M. Spence, *The phrase expresses both the necessary humanity of the high priest, and also his being set apart for his peculiar office . . .*
 - d) We will see in verse 4 that the appointment is by God.

- 2) *act on behalf of men in relation to God*
 - a) Thomas Constable, . . . *to stand between God and people as their representative before Him.*
 - b) William L. Lane, *The interest in the office of the high priest is sharply focused upon his ministry on the Day of Atonement when he offered the sacrifices for the cleansing of sin in the most holy place (cf. v 3).*
 - c) R. Kent Hughes, *The solidarity factor was essential to effective priestly ministry, as it is today in pastoral ministry, and the universal requirement is, as it has always been, a real man with a real link to God and a real bond to man.*
 - d) A. J. Gossip, Trinity College, Glasgow concerning his congregants, *We are forever involved in the dust and the heat of the day; we have to spend our time getting and spending; we have to serve at the counter, to toil at the desk, to make the wheels of industry go round. We want you to be set apart so that you can go in to the secret place of God and come back every Sunday with a word from him to us.’ The priest is the link between God and the world.*

- 3) *to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins*
 - a) *Offer*
 - 1] It means *to present offerings, a sacrifice.*
 - 2] It carries the meaning of *to accomplish the sacrifice.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *His services included presenting gifts (offerings) of worship and sacrifices for sin.*
 - c) William L. Lane, . . . *in later statements in the OT all sacrifices pertain to the procuring of atonement and the removal of sin (cf. Ezek 45:15–17). The bloody offerings for the Day of Atonement are in the foreground of the discussion of the sacrificial ministry of the Levitical high priest here and elsewhere in Hebrews (cf. 7:27; 10:4, 12, 26).*

- b. He can sympathize with the weak by offering sacrifices for himself and others (2-3), ***He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.***
 - 1) *deal gently*
 - a) Donald Hagner, *The rare word to “deal gently” occurs only here in the entire Greek Bible and has the connotation of moderation when circumstances otherwise might well provoke severity.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *He also had to be a compassionate person. This grew out of his own consciousness of being a sinner himself. In other words, he needed not only to carry out his duties acceptably, but he also needed to do so with the proper attitudes and feelings. “Deal gently with” means neither indifferent to moral lapses nor harsh.*
 - c) Zane Hodges on *deal gently*, *For an ordinary high priest of the Old Testament, this sympathy grew out of an awareness that he himself was subject to weakness, prone to failures of his own. Hence in his sacrificial activities he must make the necessary offerings for his own and the peoples’ sins.*
 - d) Raymond Brown, . . . *he must also be sympathetic . . . He could serve others compassionately and helpfully because ‘he himself is beset with weakness’. Whenever he was tempted to pronounce harsh judgments, place intolerable burdens, or make excessive demands on other people, he would remember that he too was exposed day after day to the same hazards. Their dangers were his also.*
 - 2) *offer sacrifice for his own sins . . . for those of the people*
 - a) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *on the Day of Atonement, while decked out in his spectacular priestly robes, he had to kill a bull for his own personal sins and his family’s sins. In slaughtering the bull, he would lay his hands on its head and confess his sins. . . It was only after taking care of his own sins that he dared offer sacrifice for his people on the Day of Atonement. The ideal high priest knew he was a sinner through and through—and thus was equipped to “deal gently” with his sinful people. He did not elevate himself above them, but ministered with sympathetic grace as a priestly sinner in behalf of other sinners.*
 - b) William L. Lane, *His compassion, however, extended only to those who sinned through ignorance or error (cf. 9:7; Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:2–4). Sins that were committed intentionally would entail exclusion from the congregation of Israel (cf. Num 15:30–31).*
 - c) William Barclay, *The sin of ignorance is pardonable; the sin of presumption is not. Nevertheless, we must note that by the sin of ignorance the Jews meant more than simply lack of knowledge. They included the sins committed when someone was carried away in a moment of impulse or anger or passion or was overcome by some irresistible temptation, and the sins were followed by repentance. By the sin of presumption, they meant the cold, calculated sin for which the perpetrator was not in the least sorry, the open-eyed disobedience of God. . . So, the priest existed to open for sinners the way back to God—as long as they wanted to come back.*

- c. He is called by God to the position (4), ***And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.***
- 1) Paul Ellingworth, *The essential nature of a high priest is that he should be chosen by God to act for his fellows in offering sacrifices related to the removal of sin.*
 - 2) R. Kent Hughes, *All were sovereignly chosen. Therefore, a proper priest was filled with deep humility. His work was never a career. It was a divine calling.*
 - 3) William L. Lane, *What his statement expresses directly is not the dignity associated with the office nor the grandeur of the divine call, but, on the contrary, the humility required of the high priest who is dependent upon the divine appointment for his office.*
 - 4) One who *takes this honor for himself* is judged by God.
 - a) Numbers 16, Korah and his followers were swallowed by the earth because they burned unauthorized incense.
 - b) 1 Samuel 13:8-14, due to impatience, Saul assumed the priestly function of Samuel and lost his reign.
 - c) 2 Chronicles 26:16-21, Uzziah improperly entered the temple to burn incense and was judged by God with leprosy.
 - 5) Thomas Constable, *Only those whom God chose served in this office. . . This ceased to be true after Israel lost her sovereignty as a nation beginning with the Babylonian captivity. Then the high priesthood became a political appointment.*

B. The superior qualifications of Jesus (5-10)

1. A superior appointment (5-6)
 - a. Introductory note (5a), ***So also***
 - 1) Readers are directed back to verse 4, comparing Jesus' appointment by God as High Priest to that of the Aaronic priesthood.
 - 2) Note Jesus' statement in John 8:54, *Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'*
 - b. Jesus was appointed as God's Son (5b), ***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"***
 - 1) A citation of Psalm 2:7-9, *I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.*
 - 2) R. Kent Hughes, *Psalm 2 was already a famous Messianic Psalm, understood to be fulfilled in a future day by a descendant of David who would be crowned king... "Son" is Jesus' eternal name that was given exalted declaration in his resurrection and exaltation. No angel ever had that!*
 - 3) *Begotten* refers to the incarnation and Jesus' human nature not His divine nature which is eternal.
 - a) Thomas Constable, *"Son of God" is a title that refers to one of the Davidic kings (2 Sam. 7:14) and specifically to Jesus Christ, God the Son (Mark 1:11; Luke 1:32).*
 - b) William L. Lane, *It was apparently the writer's conviction that although Jesus was the pre-existent Son of God, "although he was the Son," he entered into a new dimension in the experience of sonship by virtue of his incarnation, his sacrificial death, and his subsequent exaltation. This new dimension finds expression in the legal formula of recognition, "You are my Son."*
 - c. Jesus was appointed as the forever High Priest (6), ***as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."***
 - 1) A citation of Psalm 110:4, *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."*
 - 2) This is the first reference to Melchizedek in the New Testament.
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *No other New Testament writer referred to Ps. 110:4, but this writer quoted it three times (cf. 7:17, 21) and alluded to it eight more times (in chs. 5-7).*
 - 4) William L. Lane, *The appeal to Melchizedek, who as the first priest mentioned in Scripture is the archetype of all priesthood, validates Jesus' priesthood as different from and superior to the Levitical priesthood.*
 - 5) Leon Morris, *There was no succession of priests from Melchizedek and thus no 'order.' Jesus, however, was a priest of this kind—not like Aaron and his successors.*

- d. Comments on Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4
- 1) The writer uses Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4 to prove Jesus is both king and priest.
 - 2) Ray Stedman, *This first of eight mentions of Melchizedek in Hebrews stresses the right of Jesus to serve because his appointment came directly from God and is confirmed by Psalms 2 and 110.*
 - 3) Donald Hagner, As the author will explain later (chap. 7), Melchizedek was both a king and a priest (Gen. 14:18). Jesus is also king and priest, and thus corresponds to Melchizedek.
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *Jesus Christ could never have served as a priest when He was on earth because He did not belong to the tribe of Levi. Jesus was born of the seed of David, the tribe of Judah. He became the sacrifice on earth that He might become the High Priest in heaven. All of these truths will be developed in Hebrews 7–10, but they are introduced here.*

e. Comments on Melchizedek

- 1) He was the *king of Salem and priest of God Most High in the time of Abraham (both after Gen 14:18).*
- 2) Lexham Bible Dictionary, *While not messianic in his own right, Melchizedek serves as a prototype for Christ by establishing the eternal priesthood that the Son of God now possesses.*
- 3) TDNTA, *Melchizedek is seen as a link between Noah and Aaron. Josephus calls him the founder and first priest of Jerusalem. Philo thinks he is a type of the kingly mind or logos and an example of one who is taught by God. . . Melchizedek's name and dignity point to the messianic gifts of righteousness and peace. His mysterious appearance indicates the eternity of Christ. The fact that Abraham pays him tithes shows his superiority to Levi.*
- 4) Gleason Archer, . . . *Melchizedek was a true believer, who had remained faithful to the worship of the one true God (just like Job and his four advisors in North Arabia; Jethro, Moses' Midianite father-in-law; and Balaam, the prophet of Yahweh from Pethor in the Euphrates Valley). The testimony of Noah and his sons had evidently been maintained in other parts of the Middle East besides Ur and Haran.*
- 5) A sect known as the Melchizedekians believed that Melchizedek was a heavenly power greater than Christ and that Christ was made in his image. They looked to Melchizedek for salvation.
- 6) Others taught that Melchizedek was the Holy Spirit while others believed he was the Logos, Jesus, or even God the Father.

2. A superior priesthood (7-10)

a. In His humanity (7-8)

- 1) He fully obeyed (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.***

a) *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications*

- 1] Jesus' humanity was a time of intense prayer to His Father.
 - a] Warren Wiersbe, *"In the days of His flesh, means, In the days when He was on earth in a human body.*
 - b] Matthew 26:39, *And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*
 - c] Luke 22:44, *And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*
 - d] Ray Stedman, *He was oppressed by a sense of hopelessness, total discouragement and utter defeat. He is anticipating the moment on the cross when he would be forsaken of the Father, since he would then be bearing the sin of the world as though it were his own. The very thought of it crushed his heart as in a winepress.*
- 2] The verb *offered up* is the same one used in verse 1, . . . *to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin.*
 - a] Jesus' prayers were offerings of Himself for your sins and mine. He is the sacrifice.
 - b] Zane Hodges, . . . *it is probable that he actually has the sufferings of the Cross in mind . . . This would be appropriate since the cries of the Savior would then be linked directly with His sacrificial work.*
 - c] R. Kent Hughes, . . . *Jesus placed the exercise of his omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence under the direction of God the Father when he came to earth in the Incarnation. This explains his flashes of supernatural knowledge and power while on earth. . . . But it also explains how he could undergo the agony of Gethsemane with his full humanity, so that we see his authentic human agony in recoiling from the cross. . . As a man Christ cried for escape, but as a man he desired the Father's will even more.*

- b) *to him who was able to save him from death*
- 1] Jesus' confidence was in His Father who would take Him through not only physical death, but especially, through spiritual death.
 - 2] Raymond Brown, *Jesus was not afraid of physical death as such, for to say that would be to make him less than many other men and women who, through the centuries, have faced death confidently and courageously. But their death was not remotely like his. In the moment of his supreme agony he carried our sins to the cross, he was despised by those for whom he was making such a sacrifice and, worst of all, the Father's face was turned away from his only Son.*
 - 3] His prayers were answered not by deliverance from death but strength through it, note Luke 22:43, *And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.*
 - 4] Donald Hagner, . . . *the answer came not in the avoidance of death, but in deliverance from (lit., "out of") death through the resurrection.*
- c) *he was heard because of his reverence*
- 1] *reverence*
 - a] It means *piety, reverent awe in the presence of God.*
 - b] It is *reverence toward God with the force of obedience.*
 - 2] *Comments*
 - a] Douglas Mangum, *His mediation, which was accompanied by crying and tears, was effective because of his godly fear.*
 - b] Thomas Constable, *"Piety" means reverent submission, godly fear, and trust.*
 - c] Raymond Brown, *In sincerity before his Father he gave voice to his human distress: 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me,' but in surrender he also added his word of complete resignation: 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' Gethsemane is the most moving example of that 'humble submission' (NEB) which characterized his whole life.*
 - d] R. Kent Hughes, *His reverence for the Father determined that his humanity would do nothing but please the Father.*
- 2) He fully suffered (8), ***Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.***
- a) Thomas Constable, *Even though Jesus was the Son of God (Son though He was), and as such perfect in one sense, He gained something through His sufferings. He gained experiential knowledge of what being a human involves.*
 - b) Zane Hodges, *The whole experience just referred to was a form of education for Jesus before He served His suffering people. His unique relation to God notwithstanding (He was a Son), He had to experience the true meaning of obedience in terms of the suffering it entailed.*
 - c) William L. Lane, *Although Jesus was the eternal Son of God, he entered into a new dimension in the experience of sonship by virtue of his incarnation and sacrificial death. . . Jesus learned experientially what obedience entails through his passion in order to achieve salvation and to become fully qualified for his office as eternal high priest (2:10; 5:9–10).*
 - d) R. Kent Hughes, *This "does not mean Jesus passed from disobedience to obedience (Leon Morris)." Nor does it mean that he developed from imperfection to perfection. The idea is that he became complete in his human experience.*
 - e) Ray Stedman, . . . *he learned how it feels to obey when such obedience only promises further pain . . . even though he was a son who loved to obey his Father, yet he learned obedience the hard way through his experience in Gethsemane.*
- 3) *Comments*
- a) H. D. M. Spence, *This main intention of vers. 7, 8 must be kept in mind for a proper understanding of them. Christ is in them regarded, not as executing his priestly office, but as being prepared and consecrated for it. His eternal priesthood is conceived as entered on after the human experience which is the subject of these verses. . .*
 - b) William L. Lane, *Jesus freely accepted the suffering of death because Scripture, and through it God, appointed him to this sacrifice for the sake of his office.*
 - c) Charles Spurgeon, *God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without suffering.*
 - d) R. Kent Hughes, *His superior selection as both eternal King and priest, coupled with his superior solidarity with us, makes him far superior in sympathy to the high priest of old.*

- b. In His deity (9), *And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,*
- 1) *And being made perfect*
 - a) This is directly tied to the previous verse in that Jesus' suffering led to perfection, Hebrews 2:10, *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.*
 - b) The perfection does not concern His nature since He is fully God but it concerns his function as High Priest.
 - c) Warren Wiersbe, *As God, He needed to learn nothing. But as the Son of God come in human flesh, He had to experience that which His people would experience, so that He might be able to minister as their High Priest.*
 - d) Thomas Constable, *This experience perfected Jesus Christ in the sense that it completed Him by giving Him experiential knowledge of what human beings must endure.*
 - e) Raymond Brown, *The word 'perfect' here obviously does not refer to his moral perfection. It repeats the idea found earlier (2:10) that by his life, death and exaltation Christ became 'fully qualified' as our saviour.*
 - 2) *he became the source of eternal life*
 - a) R. Kent Hughes, *His solidarity with us means he can save us to the uttermost. Christ is our triumphant, eternal Savior.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *Jesus is, of course, the source of eternal, not just temporal, salvation to all who initially believe on Him.*
 - c) Ray Stedman, *Having learned obedience in Gethsemane, Jesus is now perfectly qualified to become at once the sin offering and the high priest who offers it.*
 - d) Charles Spurgeon, *Some of you are trying to preface Christ's work, but your toil is fruitless; He will never bind up your wretched introduction with His golden lines of love. Come to Him without a preface, just as you are. . . Man can be the author of temporary salvation; but only He who is "a high priest forever" can bring in a salvation that endures forever.*
 - 3) *to all who obey him*
 - a) Obeying is tied to trust as seen in the following verses.
 - 1] John 6:29, *Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."*
 - 2] Romans 10:16, *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"*
 - 3] William L. Lane, *The description of the community of faith as those who obey Jesus is appropriate to the stress on the radical obedience of Jesus in v 8. As the one who experienced the meaning of obedience in the suffering of death in response to the will of God, Jesus recognizes obedience in his followers and on their behalf carries out his priestly ministry of intercession...*
 - 4] Charles Spurgeon, *To obey Christ is in its very essence to trust Him, or believe in Him . . . The moment you put yourself into His hands you must obey Him, or you have not trusted Him.*
 - b) It is tied to inheritance.
 - 1] Hebrews 1:14, *Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*
 - 2] Thomas Constable, . . . *it may be that he was also referring here to the ultimate aspect of our salvation, our eternal inheritance (1:14; 9:15). We obtain this to the extent that we "obey" God, and obey Him through suffering as Jesus did (cf. Mark 8:34–35).*
 - 3] Zane Hodges, *The salvation here referred to cannot be distinguished from that which is termed an inheritance (Heb. 1:14). It is also to be identified with the "eternal inheritance" mentioned in 9:15 . . . This kind of salvation is explicitly contingent on obedience and indeed on an obedience modeled after that of Jesus who also suffered. It is thus closely related to the saying of the Lord in which He declared, "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34–35).*

- c. In His designation (10), *being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek*.
- 1) *designated*
 - a) It means to give a name or title.
 - b) It was an appointment based on meeting the requirements of the position.
 - 2) *after the order of Melchizedek*
 - a) *Order* deals with nature, quality, manner, condition, appearance, just like.
 - b) The order was qualitative in that the uniqueness of Melchizedek was comparable to that of Jesus, in contrast to Aaronic priests.
 - c) Walter Bauer, . . . *the reference is not only to the higher 'rank', but also to the entirely different nature of Melchizedek's priesthood as compared w. that of Aaron 7:11b.*
 - d) Ray Stedman, *This perfect sacrifice, offered by the perfect priest, entirely supersedes the Aaronic priesthood and is again designated by God as of the order of Melchizedek. The phrase appears five times in Hebrews and becomes the subject of the epistle from 5:6 to 7:28.*
 - e) Charles Spurgeon, . . . *the apostle appeared to be going on to enlarge upon the Melchizedek priesthood, but he stopped. Perhaps he recollected what his Master said to his disciples on one occasion, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot hear them now."*
 - f) The *order of Melchizedek* is addressed by the writer in Hebrews 7.

CONCLUSION

- Raymond Brown, *It is important for us to see that when Jesus surrendered himself entirely to God's will, he obeyed not only in order to honour God but also to help us to see what obedience is all about.*
- John Calvin, *He did this for our benefit, to give us the instance and the pattern of His own submission ... If we want the obedience of Christ to be of advantage to us, we must copy it.*
- Charles Spurgeon, *How clear it is that we have a suitable High Priest, of tender heart and loving soul!*