

Hebrews 5:1-14 to 6:1-6

The last few verses of chapter 4 introduced us to our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

V 14 **"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession."**

Chapter 5 continues the theme of the priesthood.

First of all, we are told what the priest's duties were in the old economy.

V 1-4 **"For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:**
² Who can have compassion on the

ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

³ And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

⁴ And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."

From these verses we learn several things about the priesthood.

First of all, we get a few details about the man himself.

He was "**taken from among men**," that is, he was an ordinary man.

He was one of themselves, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh.

And yet he was the standard-bearer or mediator between mankind and God.

And because he also was a sinner, he must offer a sacrifice for his own sins as well as for the people's.

However, even though he was a sinner, because of the value of his office, he was qualified and responsible to be the mediator between God and man.

Man had sinned, so God, who is righteous, could not let man come into His presence without a high priest.

So God was pleased to take one from among mankind by whom they might approach Him in hope, and by whom God might receive them in honour.

Because of the high priest and the sacrifices, Israel could come before the Almighty and be accepted.

They were accepted, not because their sins had been put away, but only because

they had been covered by the
sacrifices, and an audience gained
through the priesthood

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So what were the chief duties of the high
priest?

V 4 tells us "**that he may offer both gifts
and sacrifices for sins.**"

Through the high priest, the Israelite could
offer gifts, or free-will offerings,
which acknowledged that all he had was
from God.

Also, he brought "**sacrifices for sins**" that
sin might be covered and the sinner
accepted.

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And how was this high priest qualified for
the job?

Surprisingly, one of his qualifications was the fact that he had the same infirmities that plagued his brethren. And because of that, he was able to empathize with and have compassion on the people.

He must be one who could find it in his heart to pity them, and intercede with God for them, and be willing to instruct those that were dull of understanding and be able to lead them back from the path of sin and error.

V 2 says **"Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."**

And another, and most necessary qualification, was the fact that he had been called and certified by God.

V 4 **"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."**

The office of high priest was a great honour.

To be employed to stand between God and man, to represent God and His will to man, and at the same time present man and his case to God, and to deal with matters of great importance to both, was a great responsibility.

So, such an honourable office could not be taken on without God's direct approval.

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Now, to the Hebrews receiving this letter, this information was quite familiar. However, the writer went over these points carefully because he was about to make a comparison.

Already Christ had been proven to be superior to the angels and to Moses. Now He was to be presented as a superior High priest from a superior priesthood.

V 4-10 **"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.**

⁵ So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. (of course that would be God.)

⁶ As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

⁷ Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save

him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

⁸ Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

⁹ And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

¹⁰ Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec."

In verse 4 we saw that no man was entitled to claim the priesthood without God's permission.

And, in verse 5, we are told that Christ did not make Himself a High Priest, but God the Father appointed Him as such.

V5 "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day

have I begotten thee.

⁶ As he saith also in another place,
Thou art a priest for ever after the
order of Melchisedec."

The first reference in V 5 is to Psalms 2:7

"I will declare the decree: the LORD
hath said unto me, Thou art my Son;
this day have I begotten thee."

Of course we know that Christ is a member of
the Godhead, and so always existed.

However, here in Psalms, His relationship as
God's Son is acknowledged.

He was the faithful and trusted Son.

He was the Mediator between God and man, but

He was not of the order of Aaron.

He was of a different priesthood, as we see

in Psalm 110:4: "**The LORD hath sworn,
and will not repent, Thou art a priest**

**for ever after the order of
Melchizedek."**

So, God appointed Him a priest of a higher order than that of Aaron's.

The priesthood of Aaron was only temporary, but the priesthood of Christ is eternal.

The priesthood of Aaron was successive, descending from father to son.

The priesthood of Christ was after the order of Melchizedec, which was an immortal priesthood.

We will not get into a study of the priesthood of Melchizedec today, as it is fully covered in Chapter 7.

Not only is Christ of a superior priesthood, but He is superior to Aaron in the holiness of His person.

The Aaronic priest was to offer up
sacrifices **"as for the people, so also
for himself"** - V 3.

Christ was perfect, and needed no sin
offering for Himself.

Although Christ had none of the failings of
the priests in the Aaronic order,
because He was sinless, nevertheless He
had the qualifications of humanity.

He was **"a man of sorrows, and acquainted
with grief."**

As we have already seen in Chapter 4:15, He
knows our sorrows--- **"For we have not
an high priest which cannot be touched
with the feeling of our infirmities;
but was in all points tempted like as
we are, yet without sin."**

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In verse 7, the Spirit emphasizes the reality of Christ's manhood

V 7 " **Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;**

--"in the days of his flesh"---When He lived on this earth as a mortal man, He trod the path of dependence upon His Heavenly Father, and "**offered up prayers and supplications**" accompanied by "**strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.**"

He did not fear physical death, but had an awful sense of the wrath of God, and of the weight of our sin.

Now, it says here that God **"was able to save him from death."**

God could have saved Him, but He would not, for then the great design of redemption would have been defeated.

And, in spite of the **"strong crying and tears,"** as His divine and sinless nature shrank from the awfulness of becoming **"sin for us,"** not for a moment did He consider bypassing the cross.

"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

He came into the world to die, yes, for that very purpose, and He would never consider any other path.

It says in Luke 9: 51 --- **"when the time was come that he should be received up, he**

**stedfastly set his face to go to
Jerusalem."**

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V 7 says He **"offered up prayers and
supplications with strong crying and
tears."**

What a testimony those tears were to the
reality of His Manhood!

Three times we read about Christ's tears:
He wept at the grave of Lazarus as He
contemplated the awful ravages that
death had made. That day He wept tears
of loving sympathy.

He wept as He looked upon Jerusalem, and His
prophetic soul saw the tribulation
ahead for that beloved city.

And He wept in the Garden of Gethsemane as
His holy soul shrank from the thought

of drinking the cup of indignation for sin.

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The eternal Son of God, who in glory had never known subjection, became a man, and, as such, trod the pilgrim pathway of suffering and obedience.

As V 8-9 says, **"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;**

9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

Not only has His suffering made Him the perfect Saviour, but it has made Him the perfect High Priest.

And because a real man sits at the right hand of God, not only do we have a High Priest Who has made us acceptable to

His Father, but we have One who can enter into the sorrows of His people and sympathize with them in all their infirmities.

He does not sympathize with our sins, and indeed we would not want Him to, but He does feel for us in all our weaknesses, and is waiting to supply needed strength for every trial.

And He will always be there, and He will always be the same.

Yes, He is the High Priest of an unchangeable priesthood ---"**Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.**"

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Immediately upon mentioning the priesthood of Melchisedec, which should have brought joy to the Christians, the

writer recognizes that he is wasting his time on them for the present.

He has come up against a roadblock, for he is talking to those who have not grown in the Word.

V 11 **"Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing."**

You see, the truths of the priesthood of Melchisedec would be most unpalatable to Jewish tastes, and particularly hard to understand by those among them who were still under legalistic bondage.

Even to the truly born-again believer, this teaching might seem to be a shunning of their ancient God-given Aaronic priesthood.

So, Christian maturity would be required to understand this subject, and apparently

it was sadly lacking, even among the believers.

V 11-14 **"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.**

¹³ **For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.**

¹⁴ **But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."**

Indeed, the early Hebrew Christians seemed to be slow in grasping mature Christian doctrine, and quick to hold onto Old Testament Judaism.

For instance, just look at the problems this

mindset caused Paul and Barnabas, when they visited Jerusalem.

Acts 15:3-5: **"And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.**

⁴ **And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.**

⁵ **But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed (so they were believers) saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."**

So, it seemed at that time, there was a real lack of clarity in the minds of the early Hebrew believers.

It is not unreasonable then to assume that there could be those in their number, although unsaved, that would still feel quite at home in their assemblies.

Yes, the believers were **"such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."**

And this was not an expected or acceptable condition, considering the opportunities they had been given to learn.

"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God."

They were babes in the truth . . . when they should have been mature believers.

So, the time had come to insist that they set aside Judaism and go on to the full truth of Christianity.

And, it is in this attitude of mind, that the writer pens Chapter 6.

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V 1-3 **"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,
2 Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."**

The thought here is not that they should abandon the basic Gospel message in favour of deeper truths.

Salvation through the work of Christ is the foundation of our faith, and it should

be ever before us in love and admiration for our Lord.

Also, there should always be an opportunity for the unsaved to accept Christ as their Saviour.

So, the Gospel should always be preached.

But Christians, having planted their feet up on this solid foundation, should then build upon that foundation and grow in the knowledge of Christ and Bible doctrines.

As V 1 says **"leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again---**" and the writer goes on to describe foundational truths.

And, these truths were---

1. **"repentance from dead works"**
2. **"faith toward God"**

3. "the doctrine of baptisms"
4. "laying on of hands"
5. "resurrection of the dead"
6. "eternal judgment."

It is not hard to recognize these as foundational New Testament truths.

"Repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" is the path that leads to conversion and regeneration.

"Baptism" is a step of obedience, and a testimony as to our new life in Christ.

"Laying on of hands" was done in Acts 13 when Barnabas and Saul were sent out on their missionary journey -- V3: **"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."**

And the "**resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment**" are fundamental Christian doctrines also.

We must ever keep these before us. However, the Hebrew believers needed to strengthen their faith by going on to mature Christian doctrines.

And certainly, those who only had a head knowledge of Christianity, to whom this message was principally aimed, needed to leave the Old Testament dispensation and go on to faith in Christ.

Already there had been apostasy among their numbers, and there was a great danger that the uncommitted would also slip away from the truth of Christ and be lost forever.

V 4-6 "**For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted**

of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

⁵ And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

⁶ If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

This passage has been very troublesome to many Christians, as it seems to teach that you can be saved and then lost again.

But this interpretation would not be consistent with the rest of scripture, which always describes salvation as a finished work.

So, I believe verses 4-6 describe those that had *already* become apostates.

As we noted earlier, there were many Hebrews who, in the beginning, professed to acknowledge the Messiahship of Jesus, and were eyewitnesses of the marvellous things that took place at Pentecost and afterwards.

Also they were well aware that Jesus' followers had seen their resurrected Lord for 40 days.

So, there must have been some expectation among them that Jesus would return to rein as their Messiah.

Indeed, in the days after Christ's resurrection, before He ascended into heaven, even His own disciples hoped that He would set up His kingdom over Israel.

Acts 1: 4-7 **"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they**

should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

⁵ For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. (But what was really on their minds?)

⁶ When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

⁷ And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

So, it is not hard to see that many of these Hebrews, if lacking personal faith in Christ, and realizing that Jesus had not returned to set up His kingdom,

would eventually give up the Gospel message and go back to Judaism.

This was a very serious problem, and no doubt the reason for the writer's admonition to **"go on unto perfection."**

They must make a clean break with Judaism and go on to the perfection of Christianity.

Already it seemed that some of their number had left their expectations of Christ and gone back.

So apostasy had already begun to set in.

And, as I said, verses 4-6 describe those apostates.

V 4-6 **"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,**

⁵ **And have tasted the good word of**

God, and the powers of the world to
come,

⁶ If they shall fall away, to renew
them again unto repentance; seeing they
crucify to themselves the Son of God
afresh, and put him to an open shame."

So, for those who had already apostatized,
it was too late for the writer of
Hebrews to help them.

They had made their choice and acted
accordingly, and having experienced so
much that was new and wonderful, and
then having turned away from it all,
they would be the hardest people on
earth to change again.

It is impossible, we are told, to renew them
again to repentance who were thus
enlighten.

What could the writer of Hebrews tell those who had already heard all that could be said about Christ, and had nevertheless turned away from Him?

For him it would be impossible.

Such a one, if there could ever be hope, must be left to God.

So it remained to the writer of Hebrews to concentrate on the true believers, and to urge them to press on to fuller knowledge.

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Some would argue that those described in V4-6 must have been saved and then lost, because it would be impossible for the unsaved to go so far in their experience of Christ.

After all, verses 4-5 say that they had

"tasted of the heavenly gift, and were

made partakers of the Holy Ghost,
5 And have tasted the good word of
God, and the powers of the world to
come."

How could this be true of an unbeliever?
Well, it is remarkable how close a person
can come to the gate of salvation, and
then turn back.

Let's look in at some of these points.

1. They had been at one time enlightened as
to the claims of Jesus the Messiah.

But, everyone who hears the message of the
Gospel is to some extent enlightened,
however, not everyone accepts that
light.

For, instance in Matthew 4:16, **"The people
which sat in darkness saw great light;
and to them which sat in the region and
shadow of death light is sprung up."**

However, not everyone in Zebulun and Naphtali became Jesus' disciples. In fact, John 1:5, speaking of mankind in general, says, "**And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.**"

2. They had tasted the sweetness of the heavenly gift to some extent, but that does not in itself imply that they had eaten the Living Bread.

Jesus did not say "he that tasteth me, even he shall live by me," but, "**he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.**"

3. They were made partakers of Holy Spirit. You'll notice I changed the quoting a little bit there.

The little word "**the**" is purposely omitted in the original.

It was not that the Holy Spirit as a divine Person had ever indwelt them, but they had participated in the blessing that the Spirit had given.

They had seen the signs and wonders done by the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

To be partakers of Holy Spirit, is not the same as to be born of the Spirit, sealed by the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, anointed by the Spirit, baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ, or filled with the Holy Spirit.

4. They had tasted the good Word of God, having listened to the good news of the Gospel, and, to a certain extent, apprehended the message that was brought.

5. They had even been eye-witnesses of the **"the powers of the world to come,"** or,

the coming age, as were all who beheld the mighty miracles wrought by our Lord and His apostles, but that does not mean they were born again.

For instance, we read in John 6:66 that many who had seen the miracles and believed on Jesus for a while, eventually turned back: **"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."**

And so it was that some of the Hebrews that had been attracted by the disciples' message, but who had never really known what it was to receive the Lord Jesus as their own personal Saviour, had turned away from the Lord, and in so doing, they had crucified to **"themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."**

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Well, our time has run out, but next week,
Lord willing, we will continue this
subject in Hebrews Chapter 6.