

## Toward a Better Understanding of Hebrews 5

### I Verses 1-4<sup>1</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.

A The writer now continues his comparison and contrast between the temple high priest and Jesus as our High Priest. He begins by describing the nature of the earthly high priests.

*The point is that in order for a priest to officiate on behalf of men, he must be taken from among men. A priest must partake of the nature of the person for whom he officiates. His work is to minister to men in things that involve man's relation to God. Wuest*

*At Calvary the Lord Jesus was not only the Lamb of God bearing judgment, but He was also His Priest officiating at the altar. A.W. Pink*

*Romanists, and with them an increasing number of Anglicans (Episcopalians ), virtually set aside the solitary grandeur of the Priesthood of Christ and the sufficiency of His Atonement, by bringing in human priests to act as mediators between God and sinful men. A.W. Pink*

*"Is ordained for men." ("Appointed on behalf of men") This tells us the reason why and the purpose for which the high priest was taken "from among men:" it was that he might transact on behalf of others, or more accurately, in the stead of others. To this position and work he was "ordained" or appointed by God. Thereby, under the Mosaic economy, the Hebrews were taught that men could not directly and personally approach unto God. They were sinful, He was holy; therefore was there a breadth between, which they were unable to bridge. A.W. Pink*

*Therefore when Adam transgressed, we are told, "So He drove out the man ; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3: 24). Thereby man was taught the awful fact that he is "alienated from the life of God." (Eph. 4: 18). The same terrible truth was pressed unto the Israelites. When Jehovah*

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*Himself came down upon Sinai, the people were fenced off from Him: "And thou shalt set bounds upon the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death" (Ex. 19: 12). A.W. Pink*

*But in the person of their high priest, through his representing of them before God, Israel might approach within the sacred enclosure. That is beautifully brought out in the 28th chapter of Exodus, that book whose theme is redemption. There we read , "And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel . . . and thou shalt put the two stones upon the shoulders of the ephod for stones of memorial unto the children of Israel: and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord . . . And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment and thou shalt set in it setting of stones . . . and the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel . . . And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breast-plate of judgment upon his heart when he goeth in unto the holy, for a memorial before the Lord continually" (verses 9, 12, 15,) A.W. Pink*

*"That He may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." To "offer" is the chief function of the high priest. He offers to God for men. A.W. Pink*

## **II Verses 5-6**

**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."**

**A Jesus is like the earthly high priest in that He did not take this position unto Himself.**

*That God has provided His people with a High Priest is the fulfillment of His own promise. On the demonstrated failure of the Aaronical priesthood in the days of Eli and his sons (1 Sam. 1: 14, 2; 12-17, 22), the Lord declared, "And I will raise Me up a faithful Priest, that shall do according to that which is in Mine heart and in My mind: and I will build Him a sure house" (1 Sam. 2: 35). The fulfillment of this is found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. A.W. Pink*

*There are three chief offices which Christ holds as Mediator: He is prophet, priest and potentate. But there is an importance, a dignity and a blessedness (little as carnal reason may be able to perceive it) attaching to His priestly office which does not belong to the other two. Scripture furnishes three proofs of this. First, we never read of "our great prophet," or "our great King," but we do of "our great High Priest" (Heb. 4: 14)! Second, the Holy Spirit nowhere affirms that Christ's appointment to either His prophetic or His kingly office "glorified" Him;*

*but this is insisted upon in connection with His call to the sacerdotal office (Heb. 5: 5)! Third, we read not of the dread solemnity of any divine "oath" in connection with His inauguration to the prophetic or the kingly office, but we do His priestly—"The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, thou art a priest forever." (Ps. 110: 4)! Thus the priesthood of Christ is invested with supreme importance. A.W. Pink*

- B Jesus is different from the high priest in that God Himself made Him the High Priest.**
- C He is different in that He is the Son of God begotten of God.**
- D He is different in that He is not of the tribe of Aaron according to the order of Melchizedek.**

*He quotes from Psalm 110 where Messiah is prophetically pointed out as a priest after the order of Melchisedec, the distinguishing characteristic of this order of priesthood being that it is an eternal one. Wuest*

### III Verse 7

**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.**

- A The cup which Jesus asked to pass from Him included both the physical sufferings he would endure and that of offering Himself as a sin offering for the world.**

*There are two words in Greek which mean "from," apo which means "from the edge of," and ek which means "out from within" The second is used here. The Messiah prayed to be saved out from within death. Wuest*

*The word translated "offered" is prosphero which was used in the LXX of the priests bringing a sacrifice to the altars of God. The Levitical priests offered up blood sacrifices. This Priest after the order of Melchisedec offered up Himself as a blood sacrifice, but before doing this, brought another offering to God, a heart torn with anguish and suffering, a soul in which the conflict of the ages was raging, a contest in which God the Son was facing the powers of darkness, waging a battle for the lost race, a battle in which He was victor over death, and thus over him who had the power of death, the devil. Wuest*

*Its theme (Vs. 7) is the priestly ministry of Christ: this is evident from the expression "offered up." "As the theme of verses 4-6 is, 'Jesus Christ has been divinely appointed to the priestly office, so the theme of verses 7-9 is Jesus Christ has successfully executed the priestly office.'" A. W. Pink*

*To sum up now the ground we have covered. 1. The occasion of Christ's priesthood was sin: it was this which alienated the creature from the Creator. 2. The source of Christ's priesthood was grace: rebels were not entitled to it; such a*

wondrous provision proceeded solely from the Divine favor. 3. The Junction of Christ's priesthood is mediation, to come between, to officiate for men Godwards. 4. The qualification for perfect priesthood is a God-man: none but God could meet the requirements of God; none but Man could meet the needs of men. 5. The work of priesthood is to make propitiation for sin. To these we may add: 6. The design of priesthood is that the claims of God may be honored, the person of Christ glorified, and His people redeemed. 7. The outcome of His priesthood is the maintaining of His people in the favor of God. A.W. Pink

He was heard in that He feared. The word for "fear" in the Greek text is not phobos, the ordinary word for fear, but eulabeia. The verb of the same root means "to act cautiously, to beware, to fear." The picture in the word is that of a cautious taking hold of and a careful and respectful handling. Hence, it speaks of a pious, devout, and circumspect character, who in his prayer, takes into account all things, not only his own desire, but the will of the Father. Wuest

#### IV Verses 8

**Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.**

**A Jesus did not need to learn how to obey, so what is this really saying. What are the things He suffered? Wuest offers the best explanation.**

*The translation should read, "Though He was Son by nature." The deity of the Messiah is referred to here. The idea is, "Though He was the Son of God, God the Son, Very God of Very God, yet He learned obedience by the things He suffered." The omniscient God knew what obedience was, but He never experienced it until He became incarnate in human flesh. Before His incarnation, He owed obedience to no one. There was no one greater than He to whom He could have rendered obedience. But now in incarnation, God the Son became obedient to God the Father. He learned experientially what obedience was.*

*It was not that He had to learn to obey, for He said, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). Vincent says that "He required the special discipline of a severe human experience as a training for His office as a high priest who could be touched with the feeling of human infirmities. He did not need to be disciplined out of any inclination to disobedience; but as Alford puts it, 'the special course of submission by which He became perfected as our high priest was gone through in time, and was a matter of acquirement and practice.' This is no more strange than His growth in wisdom (Luke 2:52). Growth in experience was an essential part of His humanity." -Wuest*

*"The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 50:5f.). So the sufferings which Jesus endured were the necessary price of his obedience-more than that, they were part and parcel of his obedience, the very means by which he fulfilled the will of God. F.F. Bruce*

*It is not by accident that he spoke of his impending passion not only as the cup which he was going to drink but also as the baptism with which he was going to be baptized (Mark 10:38f.; Luke 12:50); the career of public obedience which was inaugurated in the earlier baptism was crowned by the second baptism-the fulfilment of "all righteousness" by the utmost endurance of trial and suffering as the first baptism had been by anticipation. F.F. Bruce*

*To sum up now the important teachings of this wonderful verse: He who personally was high above all obedience, stooped so low as to enter the place of obedience. A.W. Pink*

*"For their sakes I sanctify (dedicate) Myself" (John 17: 19). "Here is the ultimate end why it was necessary for Christ to suffer: that He might thus become initiated into His priesthood" (John Calvin). A.W. Pink*

## V Verses 9-10

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

**A Perfection here has to do with Christ accomplishing through His life and death what He was destined to accomplish.**

*The word "perfect" is the translation of teleios. The fundamental idea in this word is the bringing of a person or thing to the goal fixed by God. The word speaks here of Messiah having reached the end which was contemplated in His divinely appointed discipline for the priesthood. Wuest*

**B Jesus is our source of eternal salvation. This verse seems to be putting conditions on having eternal salvation. What does "all those who obey him" mean?**

**1 In the previous chapter, we find our answer. The obedience that God wants is for men to believe in Jesus, thus entering God's rest.**

*All who hear the Gospel are commanded to believe (1 John 3: 23); such is their responsibility. The "obedience" of this verse is an evangelical, not a legal one: it is the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 16: 26). A.W. Pink*

**C Jesus was designated by God as high priest, not by man.**

**D "According to the order of Melchizedek" means that he was not of the order of Aaron.**

*The word "called" or "designated" is the translation of prosagoreuo which means "to address or accost by some name, to give a name to publicly, to salute, to style." Wuest*

*The Greek word for "called" in verse 10 is entirely different from the one used in verse 4, "called of God." The former signifies to ordain or appoint; the latter to salute or greet. To the right understanding of the purport of verse 10, it is*

*essential to observe carefully the exact point at which this statement is introduced: it is not till after the declarations that Christ had “offered up” (verse 7), had “learned obedience” (verse 7), had been “made perfect,” and had become “the Author of salvation” (verse 9), we are told that God saluted Christ as “High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.” A.W. Pink*

*That the Holy Spirit has not said Christ is “an high priest of the order of Melchizedek,” but, “alter the order of,” etc. The difference between the two expressions is real and radical. A.W. Pink*

*As we have pointed out on previous occasions, it is of the very greatest importance, in order to a clear understanding of the priesthood of God’s Son, to perceive that both Aaron and Melchizedek were needed to foreshadow His sacerdotal office. The reason for this was, that the priestly work of Christ would be performed in two distinct stages: one in the days of His humiliation, the other during the time of His exaltation. A.W. Pink*

*That nowhere in Scripture is Melchizedek ever seen offering a sacrifice, instead, we read, he “brought forth bread and wine” (Gen. 14: 18)— typically, the memorials of the great Sacrifice already offered, once for all. A.W. Pink*

*It was in death that Christ fulfilled the Aaronic type, making a full and perfect atonement for the sins of His people. It is in resurrection that He assumed the character in which Melchizedek foreshadowed Him— a royal Priest. A.W. Pink*

*The central design of which was to exhibit the immeasurable superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The very center of the Jewish economy was its temple and priesthood ; so too, the outstanding glory of Christianity, is its Priest who ministers in the heavenly sanctuary, officiating there in fulfillment of the Melchizedek type. A.W. Pink*

*To declare that, following His exodus from the grave, God Himself had greeted Christ as priest “after the order of Melchizedek,” was tantamount to saying that the Aaronic order was thus Divinely set aside, and with it, all the ordinances and ceremonies of the Mosaic law. A.W. Pink*

*Translation: Saluted by God as a high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Wuest*

## **VI Verse 11**

**Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.**

- A** The author of Hebrews is going to be talking more about Melchizedek’s in his letter.
- B** “Dull of hearing” means that the readers were sluggish in their thinking.

*These Hebrews were slow, sluggish, stupid, numbed, in their apprehension of the teaching of New Testament truth. This made it difficult to teach them. The difficulty lay therefore not in the writer but in them. Wuest*

*Their neglect had done its work, and they as a result were in a settled state of spiritual stupidity so far as their ability to apprehend New Testament truth was concerned. Wuest*

## VII Verse 12

**For 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.**

- A The Hebrew Christians had apparently been Christian long enough that they should be teaching the gospel themselves, but instead they were in need of instruction in the very basic things of God. Considering that some of them were even considering going back to the temple worship, they clearly were not established in the basics.

*These Hebrews had grown so sluggish in their apprehension of New Testament truth that it would require many lessons to do anything with them. Wuest*

*In the case of the Hebrews, those "first principles" or elementary doctrines were, that the Old Testament economy was strictly a typical one, that its ordinances and ceremonies foreshadowed the person and work of God's Son, who was to come here and make an atonement for the sins of His people. He had thus come: the types had given place to the great Antitype, and therefore the shadows were replaced by the Substance itself. A.W. Pink*

*The word "strong" is literally "solid." Thus, only a liquid diet, milk, the very beginning of the rudimentary teachings of the New Testament could be administered, not solid food, the deeper teachings of the Word. Wuest*

## VIII Verses 13-14

**For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.**

- A The logical question is, "What are the basics?" The writer here gives us an overall picture of what they lacked and goes on in Chapter 6 to be more specific. Overall, what they lacked was that they were not accustomed to "the word of righteousness". Anyone, no matter how long he/she has been a believer is an infant, if he does not understand the basics about righteousness by faith.

*It speaks here of the habitual use of the perceptive faculties (senses) which are being vigorously exercised. This results in the ability to discriminate between good and evil, and in this context, good and evil teaching. Wuest*

- B** These believers were only able to drink milk and were not ready for solid food. They could not even tell the difference between good and evil.

*The “good” is that which is nutritious and suited to his nourishment, “evil” is that which tends not to his edification, but to his destruction. Scripture itself is “evil” when wrongly divided and misapplied. This is seen in Satan’s misuse of Scripture with Christ (Matthew 4: 6). Truth becomes “evil” when it is not presented in its due and Divine proportions. A.W. Pink*