

Candlelight Christian Fellowship

Hebrews (Chapter 5)

Hebrews 5 (NKJV)

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. 4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.” 6 As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”; 7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek,’ 11 of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

The Throne of Grace

In chapter 4 we left off mentioning *“the throne of grace.”* This throne (at least in the minds and experiences of the Hebrews) would be thought of as the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy Place at the Temple. However, as a dispensational change has occurred, from the Old Covenant to the Church Age, that *“throne”* should now be thought of as a location in heaven. It is the throne of God!

During the Old Covenant dispensation, Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle as a *“copy and shadow of the heavenly things”* (Hebrews 8:5a). Of this construction we read, *“Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For [God] said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’”* (Hebrews 8:5b). (Cf. Exodus 25:40) These facts tell us that the model was important (a *“copy and shadow of the heavenly things”*) and that the tabernacle would serve as a type—the antitype being in heaven.

In that Tabernacle (and later in the Temple), there was to be an article of furniture known as the Ark of the Covenant. Resting upon it, and serving as a lid, was the Mercy Seat. This Ark and Mercy Seat was to be kept in the Most Holy Place (aka the Holy of Holies) and was protected from visibility and access to all but the High Priest by a woven veil believed to be a handbreadth thick (about nine inches). Of this veil there is much to say. Suffice it to say for now, the veil represented Jesus’ body. *“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh”* (Hebrews 10:19–20).

The Day of Atonement

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest was allowed access to the Holy of Holies and therefore the Mercy Seat. This occurred only once a year. (For further details and study see Leviticus 16 and 23:27–32.) On this day in the Hebrew calendar, the High Priest would offer a sacrificial bull for his own sins and a sacrificial goat for the sins of the people of Israel in order to atone for sins done in ignorance throughout the preceding year. (Intentional sins were handled differently: either through sacrifices provided immediately following the act(s) or through the penalty of death.) The High Priest went behind the veil, in the dark, with a censer of incense (further obstructing his vision and often representing prayer) and with the sacrificial blood of the bull and goat. That blood was to be sprinkled on the east side (front) of the Mercy Seat and before it on the ground. Through this prescribed ceremony mercy was granted: the covering of the sins of the people until the following year when the event would take place again.

The sprinkling of blood on the front and before the Mercy Seat was symbolic and created a picture. In this case, if someone were bloody and went into the Holy Place, sat upon the Mercy Seat, then got up and went away, it would leave a blood stain residual on and before the Mercy Seat. This would therefore symbolically allow the Mercy Seat to appear as a *“throne of grace”* in the Old Covenant.

The High Priest was a mediator between God and man. He (like the Mercy Seat) was a foreshadowing type of Jesus the Messiah during the Old Covenant dispensation. Jesus is the fulfillment of the type and, as Paul put it, is the One who was to come (see Colossians 2:17).

The Day Jesus Atoned for Sin

When Jesus went to the cross, there was a three-hour period of time when darkness covered the land in the midst of that day. In the Gospel of Matthew we read, *“Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’”* (Matthew 27:45–46). One might suggest that this period of three hours served as an antitype (fulfillment) to the time the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies alone, in the dark, and with obstructed vision to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice before and upon the Mercy Seat. It is a certainty that Jesus, alone on the cross, in the dark, with what appeared to be obstructed spiritual vision, said *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* and there, with torn flesh, atoned for the sins of Israel—and the whole world (see 1 John 2:2), allowing all men access to the *“throne of grace”* to obtain mercy and find grace to help us in the time of our need (See Hebrews 4:16).

It is of note to suggest that Jesus was not forsaken, but as fully human, He experienced a real sense of aloneness and rejection during that time on the cross. It was there that He became our Great High Priest (fulfilling the type) and went alone, beyond the veil, with His own blood, offering prayers at the *“throne of grace”* on our behalf.

Jesus, Our Great High Priest

Jesus’ sacrifice and High Priestly work forever put away the need for an earthly priest. Jesus Himself became, for us, the one and only mediator we will ever need. This fact goes hand in hand with the fulfilling of the Old Covenant Law and its ceremonial sacrificial system. This is noted repeatedly by Paul in His epistles. (See Romans 7:6, 10:4, Ephesians 2:14–16, Colossians 2:13–14, Hebrews 8:12–13)

The Appointment

The author to the Hebrews aptly points out that *“every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins”* (vs. 1). The High Priest was from the tribe of Levi. The first High Priest of the Levitical System was Aaron. He was a man whom God appointed to serve Him and to stand before Him on behalf of the people of Israel. Aaron was a man who, like all of us, made mistakes and suffered when seeing the mistakes of others. (See Exodus 32 and Leviticus 10 for examples.) Therefore, *“[h]e can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness”* (vs. 2). And, *“Because of this [as mentioned above], he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins”* (vs. 3). Moreover, *“no man takes this honor [of serving as High Priest] to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was”* (vs. 4), and points out that Jesus was therefore appointed by God to His role as Great High Priest: *“So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He [God] who said to Him [Jesus]: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’”* (vs. 5). (For notes on “begotten” see Chapter 1, Lesson 3, under “As Declared by the Father” and “Incarnate and Firstborn.”)

Jesus’ appointment as High Priest was predetermined by God before the foundations of the world and therefore part of God’s purposes and plan from the beginning of creation. It was not God’s purpose to appoint Aaron or any other man under the Levitical system of the Old Covenant to a permanent role as High Priest. Therefore, *“He also says in another place: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’”* (vs. 6). God always planned for Jesus to serve as our Great High Priest.

Our Great High Priest—Forever

Jesus’ priesthood is perfect and permanent – *“forever.”* It is the fulfillment of the typology found in the Old Covenant.

As we are aware, the Old Covenant was temporary and weak. *“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son”* (Romans 8:3a). However, the promises and work of God found in the New Covenant are both perfect and permanent. Therefore, the Hebrews (like you and me) must embrace Jesus and become participants in the *“new and living way”* (Hebrews 10:19–20) God foreordained in Jesus in order to gain what is needed for the forgiveness of sins. As said before, attempting to return to or stay in the Old Covenant is futile and worse—it is deadly (See 2 Corinthians 3:4–8 and Hebrews 10:26–31).

Jesus’ Preparation for the Day He Atoned for Sins

In order to put context around the next few verses, we should familiarize ourselves with Jesus’ prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Matthew we read, *“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’ Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will*

be done.’ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand” (Matthew 26:36–46).

It seems clear that the author had Jesus’ prayers of agony in the garden in mind when he wrote “[Jesus] who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (vss. 7–8). The author may have also been thinking about Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1–11 or Luke 4:1–13).

It is certain that Jesus was under great duress when He “*offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears.*” It is clear that He was heard in the garden, and that He learned obedience when submitting to the will of His Father when He said, “*not as I will, but as You will.*” Had He simply said, “O My Father, let this cup pass from Me,” the outcome would have been quite different. But no! Jesus was perfect and demonstrated that perfection in its completed form—submitting to the will of His Father. Therefore “*having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (vs. 9). “*Having been perfected*” does not indicate that Jesus was at any time imperfect. It simply shows that through temptation(s) He overcame perfectly and completed all necessary in His redemptive ministry.

Obey Him

The scripture, “*He [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (vs. 9) points out that faith is obedience. For to “*obey Him*” is to believe and trust Him. It is to know and believe in all He is, all He has done, and all He will do. He is the “*author and finisher of our faith*” (see Hebrews 12:2). Jesus said, “*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent*” (John 6:29). Moreover, and in contrast, the Jews at Kadesh Barnea, did not believe and are therefore said to be disobedient, “*For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief*” (Hebrews 3:16–19). Please note, the author equated obedience with faith and disobedience with unbelief (vss. 18–19). Therefore, the Hebrews (and all of us) must obey the Lord and believe.

According to the Order of Melchizedek

In verse 6 above and here in verse 10 we read, “*He [God] also says in another place: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’*” (vs. 6) and that Jesus was “*called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek,’*” (vs. 10). Then it goes on to say, “*of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing*” (vs. 11).

Indeed, there is much to say about Melchizedek. We will dig into that subject in Chapter 7. Admittedly, the author tells the Hebrews that they have become dull of hearing and suggests he will refrain (at the moment) from going into detail with them about Him. However, as we will see, he does spend a considerable amount of time on Melchizedek.

Dull of Hearing?

The author's rebuke about the Hebrews' dullness of hearing (vs. 11b) is a statement against their lack of growth into maturity, genuine confidence in the Lord, and a full understanding of the Scriptures. Sadly, this "dullness" is not only true of the Hebrews of old, but is true of many believers today. Too few churches lead their people past repentance from dead works (which as a further rebuke many still don't understand), faith toward God, baptisms, eternal life or eternal damnation, etc. (Hebrews 6:1–2). In fact, most churches today have chosen not to go beyond these things. This fact has caused many in the pews to become immature—and worse—ineffective. Furthermore, it has resulted in a failure of the development and multiplying of Biblically sound church plants and mission workers. Their rebuke becomes ours, *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food"* (vs. 12) and, *"For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe"* (vs. 13).

God called the Hebrews—and all of us—to *"Be diligent [in study] to present [ourselves] approved to God, [workers who do not] need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15), and to know that *"solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (vs. 14).

Too many Christians are unable to defend the faith (their faith) and are unable to *"discern both good and evil"* (vs. 14). Heresy, aberrant theology, false doctrines and false teachers abound. The Hebrews should have been more discerning and faster to reject the temptations they were facing—a return to the Old Covenant ways and trust in the works of the flesh. The same applies to us! We must be ready to spot and reject error and be always ready to defend our faith.

Questions:

- 1) **True or False:** The Mercy Seat was a type of the *"Throne of Grace"* in the Old Covenant.
- 2) **True or False:** At Calvary Jesus provided access to the *"Throne of Grace"* to all men.
- 3) **True or False:** Jesus sacrifice and High Priestly work forever put away the need for an earthly priest.
- 4) **True or False:** Jesus might have been under great duress when He *"offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears."*
- 5) **True or False:** To believe the Gospel is obedience to God.
- 6) **True or False:** The Hebrews had a hearing problem and therefore were unable to understand the Scriptures.
- 7) **True or False:** Dead works are things people do in an effort to gain the favor of God.

Notes: