



Jesus' Qualifications to be High Priest Hebrews 5

Introduction

By calling Jesus our high priest, the writer has introduced a two-fold problem. How could Jesus become high priest, an honor specifically given by God to the sons of Aaron (Exodus 28:14, 29, 40-43)? No one but a descendant of Aaron, from the tribe of Levi, had ever been a high priest of Israel. In fact, all priestly duties were reserved for the Levites. Not even Jeroboam, when he appointed non-Levites as priests, had dared to tamper with the office of high priest (1 Kings 13:33). The gospel writers had gone to great length to establish that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah in order to show His qualification as Messiah (Genesis 49:10). They documented His birth in Bethlehem of Judea, as well as His descent from David, to prove He was the rightful heir to the title "King of the Jews" (Matthew 1:1, 2:1-2, Luke 2:4,5,11). Jesus clearly was not a Levite and therefore not a descendant of Aaron. He could not be in the order of the Aaronic priesthood.

Furthermore, the priestly role was expressly forbidden to the king. He was not to perform priestly duties or to usurp the role of a priest or high priest. (An example of this restriction is seen in King Uzziah's action in 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). These offices were strictly separate, (which may be the beginning of our British and American concept of the separation of powers in government). How then could Jesus, the King of the Jews, the Messiah, born to rule and reign, also be their high priest? Hebrew believers would be understandably confused by the concept of a royal high priest, and doubly so, since they had not heard anything concerning it prior to this letter to the Hebrews. The writer must prove that Jesus is legitimately both King and High Priest.

If Jesus is High Priest, the writer must also show that He was ordained of God, explain how He qualified to be High Priest and define to what priestly order He belonged. Do you, also, appreciate God's character and understand the veracity of His word enough to question ideas that seem to conflict with revealed Scripture? Or, do you accept anything that comes down the pike, never comparing it with the Bible or asking God in prayer if it is so? Also, do you accept the Bible as literally true so that new thoughts must be brought to its pages for acceptance? The Bible is God's standard for truth. Is it your standard?

In Hebrews 5, the writer proves that Jesus is ordained of God, that there is another order of high priest, unrecognized heretofore, and that Jesus qualifies to

be High Priest. Then the writer chastises the readers for lacking the maturity to pursue this fascinating but deep subject. Are we deserving of the same remonstrance?

Outline of Hebrews Chapter 5

- I. Two Orders of High Priest - Hebrews 5:1-10
- II. The Danger for Dullness Toward the Word - Hebrews 5:11-14

I. Two Orders of High Priest – Hebrews 5:1-10

- A. Aaronic Qualifications for High Priest – Hebrews 5:1-4

- 1. Taken from among men – 5:1

The high priest had to identify with the people. A king could be remote and still reign effectively through counselors, though perhaps not popularly. Not so a priest. Therefore the first qualification emphasizes the high priest's humanity.

- 2. *Appointed for men in things pertaining to God* - 5:1

The New American Standard Version of the Bible says *appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God*. The High Priest was Israel's representative to God. The prophet functioned as God's representative to the people of Israel. (Moses was the first prophet in this sense and his brother Aaron was the first high priest.)

God promised Moses, *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be, that whoever will not hear My words which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him* (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). Jesus was that Prophet during His earthly life.

- 3. *Offers both gifts and sacrifices for sins* - 5:1

The high priest's time and energy was spent mostly in offering gifts and sacrifices, as the book of Leviticus describes. The priests could help, but the high priest officiated (Leviticus, chapters 1-5). There were sacrifices continually: every morning, every evening, multiples at feast times, and throughout each day. Also, the high priest alone was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, and only on the Day of Atonement, with blood (Leviticus 16).

4. Has compassion - 5:2

The High Priest was to be compassionate and patient with his people. He was not appointed as ruler or judge. God was to be both their Ruler and Judge. The high priest was to function more as a shepherd and counselor. There were two categories of people who needed compassionate treatment:

a. The *ignorant*

While everyone was responsible to know the law, there were some, who for whatever reason, mental presumably, did not. They were to be gently led to obedience to the law.

b. Those *going astray*

These would seem to be rebellious ones who should be entreated and brought back "into the way". The high priest, Eli, should have done at least this much to his rebellious sons, but he did nothing to correct them and God held him responsible for their behavior (1 Samuel 2:12,17,22-25).

Jesus was the compassionate Good Shepherd of His people. He was patient and kind (John 10). Can you say with David, *The Lord is My Shepherd; I shall not want* (Psalm 23:1)?

5. Has weaknesses, shortcomings, and sins of his own - 5:2

He himself is also beset by weakness. The high priest was not to exalt himself but always to remember that he too was a sinner as needy as the rest.

6. Offered sacrifices for His own sins - 5:3

Being a sinner, the high priest had to make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. Aaron and all high priests after him were to offer the sacrifices for themselves, particularly on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 9:7-8,24, 16:6,17,24,34). No one's sin could be bypassed or excused without sacrifice. The high priest was as much a sinner as anyone.

No matter what your position, or length or quality of service, do you identify with sinners, never forgetting the sacrifice that was necessary for your own sin?

7. Not self-appointed - 5:4

And no man takes this honor to himself. No one could decide, aspire or earn the right to be high priest. It was strictly hereditary and by God's appointment, routinely through the firstborn son. "Upon the death

of Aaron, the office of high priest passed to his eldest son, Eleazar (Numbers 20:28) and, according to divine promise (25:13), was vested in his descendants from Phineas downward (Judges 20:28)" (Unger's Bible Dictionary). The line continued unbroken through the Babylonian captivity, to Caiaphas and Annas of Jesus' day and Seriah, the last high priest at the time of the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Through sonship they all could claim two things:

a. *they were called of God*b. *they were just as Aaron was*

"The high priest formed the culminating point in the Israelite hierarchy. The first to fill this high position was Aaron, who was succeeded by his eldest (surviving) son, Eleazar" (Unger's Bible Dictionary). This was the high priesthood with which every Jew was familiar. It was the only high priesthood they knew.

B. Christ's Qualifications for High Priest - Hebrews 5:5-10

1. Not self-appointed - 5:5

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest. The writer picks up the last point concerning the Aaronic priesthood to begin qualifying Jesus Christ. Jesus made no claims to the position during His earthly life, but submitted to and cooperated with the established order (Luke 5:14, 22:50-51,54, John 18:19-24). Even though He knew that He was somehow to be High Priest, He left the details to God.

2. God appointed

How this was to happen was prophesied in the Psalms, obscurely to you and me, but crystal clear to Jesus who took the Scripture seriously, personally, and literally. He was the one of whom David said, *You are My Son, today I have begotten You* (Psalm 2:7).

This is the third time Psalm 2:7 is quoted in the New Testament. We have already seen it once in Hebrews in reference to Christ's Sonship contrasted with angelic servanthood (Hebrews 1:5). It is also in Acts 13:33 in Paul's synagogue sermon to the Jews of Antioch in Pisidia.

There it specifically refers to the Resurrection of Christ, when He was begotten from the dead. In chapter 5, it is used to establish Christ's right to be High Priest as God's Son, superior to a son of Aaron.

Now comes the blockbuster of a revelation. The Aaronic order was not the only order of priests! There was

another order, which up to then had contained only one adherent, namely Melchizedek. We will study him more thoroughly in chapter 7. Here we will only point out that he preceded Aaron (Genesis 14), ministered to Aarons ancestor, Abraham, and was both a king and a priest.

Christ is declared to be a priest in Psalm 110:4, where David says, *You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek* after beginning in verse 1 by saying, *The Lord said to My Lord sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool*. This Psalm was recognized as a Messianic Psalm by the Jews themselves and was used by Jesus on more than one occasion to challenge their thinking concerning Him. It is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament.

3. Qualified by experience - 5:7-8

The earthly life of Jesus Christ was spent qualifying Him to be the perfect High Priest in every way but one. He had no sin of His own. To make up for this lack He willingly entered into the human experience to a greater degree than most of us (Philippians 2:6-11). He allowed all temptations to try Him (Hebrews 4:15). He held nothing back. He disciplined Himself, He submitted to His parents and the governments of both Israel and Rome. He gave Himself to others in teaching, healing, and service, spending sleepless nights and arduous days. The writer sums these up in three categories.

a. Prayers and supplications - 5:7

Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear... Did any high priest ever pray harder or oftener? The Aaronic high priest was to pray and discern God's will through the Urim and Thummim and inform the people (Numbers 27:21). Jesus needed no accessory but performed the same duty. He agonized in prayer, crying aloud with tears. Perhaps the reference is to Gethsemane, but also it could have happened more than once. In fact, it could have happened every time there was the possibility of His mission being cut short. He had to complete the work assigned by the Father or He would not have become *the author of eternal salvation* (5:9). Furthermore, He was heard because of his godly fear. His prayers were answered.

b. Obedience Learned - 5:8

This is one of the most intriguing, debated, fathomless verses in the Bible. How are we to understand that the Son of God, Second Person of the Trinity, co-existent with the Father, *learned obedience by the*

things which He suffered? The answer is found simply in the difference between knowing and experiencing. Christ knew about obedience, of course, as we know about the sun, moon, and stars. However, to qualify as our High Priest He had to experience obedience. He also had to be tempted as we are by disobedience. In willingly submitting to others and to circumstances, however unpleasant or unwanted, He learned through obedience about obedience. Thus it was demonstrated for all time that He was obedient.

Have you learned obedience? Can you identify in this way with Jesus who identified with you? Where, how, or to whom do you need to be obedient today?

c. Suffering - 5:8

Here is a mystery. When we seek to explore or even look into the suffering of Jesus, we enter the realm of the incomprehensible. It is beyond our human understanding. Yet it was in His suffering, as He continued to submit to human and divine reproaches upon Him at deeper and deeper levels, that He learned obedience. He continued to submit. *He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth* (Isaiah 53:7).

4. Perfected - 5:9

And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation...(KJV) Being perfectly matured, developed, having arrived at where He was meant to be, does not imply that He was at any stage imperfect, but only that He had to go through each stage and be shown to be perfect at each stage so that His purpose of being the author of eternal salvation could be realized.

5. His followers - 5:9

All who obey Him - He had followers, His people, who would obey Him as He obeyed the Father. Can you, or will you, write your name beside this verse?

6. Called of God

The writer comes full circle. Having begun with Christ not appointing Himself, we finish with God's appointing Him as High Priest and naming the order, that of Melchizedek.

Is Jesus Christ your High Priest? Will you thank Him now for carrying out each of the above six points in order to qualify Himself to be your High Priest?

II. The Danger of Dullness Toward The Word - Hebrews 5:11-14

This is the third danger we have encountered in

Hebrews. The first was the danger of drifting from the word (Hebrews 2:1-18). The second was the danger of doubting the word (Hebrews 3:19-4:16). The third is the danger of dullness toward the word.

A. Dullness and Drop-outs - 5:11-13

1. *Dull of Hearing* - 5:11

The writer would like to continue on this same track and develop it but believes the audience would be left in the dust. The writer knows there is a hearing problem and they cannot go any deeper. Jesus had the same problem with audiences for He said to His disciples, *O you of little faith...do you not yet understand* (Matthew 16:8,9)? Perhaps they have hearing fatigue. We speak of people being "gospel hardened" meaning they have heard the message and heard it until there is no more sensitivity or response. Paul called the Corinthians *babes in Christ* who still needed milk when he wanted to give them meat (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

The writer is frustrated because of all there is to say on this subject. Present day teachers and preachers share this frustration for there is so much to explore in the Bible and it is so exciting, stimulating, satisfying, and life-changing! But we grow restless quickly and reach saturation points early. We lack the holy desire for all God has. We bypass the riches of His treasury for the fool's gold of the world. The TV seems much more engaging and the pleasures of this world more absorbing. It takes too much effort to explore "The Book". The Psalmist prayed against this malady, *Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law* (Psalm 119:18). Is that your prayer too?

It is none other than the Holy Spirit telling these people that they are dull of hearing. Does God see you or me that way? How does He rate your interest in His word and your eagerness for the depth of His riches? Are you like Jeremiah, *Your words were found and I ate them; and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart* (Jeremiah 15:16)? Are you like the Psalmist who wrote, *I rejoice in Your word, as one who finds great treasure* (Psalm 119:162)?

Hearing God's word may mean overcoming some obstacle. In the last book of the Bible, John says, *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches* (Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). He couples this with overcoming. Read the promises to overcomers in Revelation 2:7,11,17,26 and in 3:5,12,21. What do you need to overcome in your life in order to give at least thirty minutes a day to studying God's word? Might it be lengthy, empty telephone conversations, mindless television shows,

some self-indulgence, a little sleep? Will you ask the Lord what you can eliminate from your day to make time to study His word?

2. Drop-outs, *you ought to be teachers* - 5:12

Hebrews 5:12 could well be every Sunday School superintendent's favorite verse! How many longtime church members ought to be teachers, but are endlessly seeking to be spoonfed? Dr. Frank Laubach's motto for wiping out illiteracy is applicable to Biblical illiteracy too, "Each one teach one." You can always find someone who knows less than you do. What a joy it is to teach our own children or new believers! Who is God calling you to teach? Will you ask Him to show you? This is the basis of discipleship, for Jesus taught His disciples. Another amazing thing is that as you teach someone else, you learn more yourself. The Holy Spirit continues to teach us as we open our hearts and minds to Him.

B. Developed and Discerning - 5:14

1. Developed, or *those who are of full age*

As we develop in life from milk to baby food to *solid food*, so we are meant to develop in the Christian life as well. We go from simple, easily grasped concepts to the deeper teachings of the cross-centered, surrendered life, an intimate relationship with God and an obedient, disciplined, self-sacrificing, self-denying lifestyle. This is not popular teaching and never has been. The disciples did not like it and neither do we. That is, until we try it once and find how pleased the Lord is with even our smallest step of utter obedience and total trust. The reward of inner joy, the accomplishment of self mastery, the exhilaration of experiencing His victory creates a hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). His promise is to fill us with Himself in a Spirit-filled life of answered prayer, victory over temptations, and changed lives around us. The effort we put forth in study and application of His Word is rewarded a hundredfold.

Being developed, or mature, means taking responsibility for ourselves. In the Christian life it means that we are not dependent on someone else to spoonfeed us but regularly feed ourselves the Bible and take responsibility for others less mature.

2. Discerning *both good and evil* - 5:14

Not knowing good from evil is moral bankruptcy. A conscientious parent teaches a child early to know right from wrong. Such knowledge is basic to living in society, even apart from a Christian lifestyle.

The readers must have slipped considerably for the writer to remind them that not knowing right from wrong is immature. On the other hand, knowing right from wrong requires frequent exercise, probably daily.

Applications

1. What steps toward spiritual maturity will you begin taking today?
2. Who needs to know your great High Priest as theirs? When will you share what you have learned with those persons?