

THE STAND

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE HEBREWS CHAPTER 5



Chapter 5 Commentary

As we begin to look at Hebrews 5, you might see the Hebrew writer's quest has been to prove Jesus is not only greater than these Old Testament systems, but He has fulfilled them. Jesus has taken everything that "had been" and is completing it and making it better. At this point in the message, the people are probably beginning to see how Jesus is better than angels, Moses and their law. The writer has one last Old Testament system to address: the priesthood. As modern-day Christ-followers, we may lack understanding about the Old Testament priesthood and its purpose. In Hebrews 2, we briefly mentioned that a priest was a representative. If we are to understand why Christ becoming our perfect High Priest is so important, it is worth taking time to understand why priests were needed in the first place.

Before the fall of man, God had an intimate relationship with us like we have not experienced since the Garden of Eden. Genesis 2 shows us a picture of God walking in the garden in the presence of Adam and Eve. Until sin entered the world, man had a unique bond with God. God cannot be in the presence of sin, therefore, at the fall of man, we were separated from God. Adam and Eve were ashamed before God. This caused the created order that God refers to as "very good" to be disrupted.

Since the fall of man, God's desire has been to restore this relationship with mankind. The first step was to begin to restore communication and allow man to "meet with God." Since God was no longer walking the earth with man, He established the priesthood to represent all of mankind before Him. This priesthood was called the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood as it began with Moses' brother, Aaron, a Levite. These men were able to communicate with God on behalf of the people. This was God's first step toward restoring His relationship with man.

The law had a specific way for the people to deal with sin. The priest's primary function was to offer sacrifices that would atone for Israel's sin. Today, we have direct access to God, but the Israelites had to go to the priest to access God. Throughout the year, the people would come before the priest with offerings to reconcile and offer atonement for their sin. They could not simply sit and pray for forgiveness like we can today. Under the law, a blood sacrifice was required to atone for each sin committed. The law even set aside a specific day, the Day of Atonement, where a sacrifice was offered for the whole nation to atone for sins they had committed in ignorance.

In short, man needed someone to represent him before God. God chose certain men as priests, or representatives, that would once again allow God's people access to God. The priests were appointed to handle this communication between God and man. In Hebrews 5, the writer will show that Christ has fulfilled and perfected the priesthood and is our perfect and eternal High Priest before God. Today, we no longer require an earthly priest to access God. Through Jesus Christ, God has further restored His original connection with mankind.

At the end of chapter 4 and beginning of 5, we see the writer claim that Jesus, as a man, is able to hold the position of High Priest. Now, it is important to realize that a high priest is at the top of the priestly order. In the Levitical priesthood there were many different priests, but the High Priest represented the whole nation on the Day of Atonement. Christ is the ultimate High Priest and is able to represent everyone. We no longer need the Levitical priesthood because we have Christ. He completed and perfected the priesthood. Hebrews 5:2 says that one of the functions of a high priest is to deal with ignorant and misguided people. Being sinful men themselves, priests understood and could sympathize with their fellow people. Christ, as Man, can also sympathize with our weaknesses because He faced temptation just as we do. The difference is that Christ never sinned. Christ, being a sinless man, didn't have to offer a sacrifice on His own behalf.

Old Testament priests had to offer sacrifices for themselves before they could offer sacrifices on behalf of others, because of their own sin. Leviticus 17 gives specific rules for the Day of Atonement. We see the priests were



Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement was the most important day on the Jewish calendar. On this day a special offering was made for the entire nation of Israel. The rules and regulations of this special sacrifice are described in Leviticus 16. Read this chapter closely and see how this ritual deals with the sin of the people.

instructed to give an offering for themselves before they could offer a sacrifice for the people.

In verse 4, the writer reminds his audience that priestly honor was never attained, but was given by God. Christ didn't chose to be a priest; the Father chose Him to be a priest. In addition to being God appointed, we see Christ is chosen from a different order than all the other priests. At this time, the Jewish nation was still under the authority of the Levitical priesthood. Since the priesthood was established in Exodus with Aaron, all the priests God called until present day had descended from Aaron's lineage. But Christ was different. Christ was from the priestly line of Melchizedek, as prophesied in Psalm 110. We will not go into detail now on the Melchizedek priesthood, because Hebrews 7 will address this in more detail. It is important to understand here that the Melchizedek priesthood was different. It was eternal and was not the same as the priesthood established in the original covenant with Israel. It was better.

The writer really wants his audience to see the humanity of Christ. He returns to the idea that Jesus was a perfect high priest because He can sympathize with us. In verses 7-9, we see that Jesus suffered here on earth physically, emotionally and even spiritually. In Matthew 26 we see Christ in the garden at Gethsemane praying to God, "if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me." As a man, He desperately did not want to suffer through the things He was about to face. As a man, He would be heart-broken that His friend would betray Him. The hardest thing for Christ was the separation from the Father that He experienced on the cross. It was through His obedience to these things that He became the perfect representative for mankind before God. He was already the perfect sacrifice as a sinless man, but the suffering He experienced allows Him to represent our struggles before the Father. Jesus can say to the Father, "I've been there."

Unfortunately, the author's audience has yet to completely grasp these Truths about Jesus. It had been 30 years since Christ ascended into heaven. Within 30 years, these Jews had not been able to understand how Jesus fulfilled the old covenant well enough to move past these basic teachings. They may have believed in God, but they were not resting in God because they didn't understand how He fulfilled all their laws. The writer becomes notably frustrated towards the end of the chapter and tells these new Christians they should be further along in their journey and that he should not have had to teach these things. Instead, the very audience He is addressing should be the ones teaching these Truths to others.

Nonetheless, the audience is young in the faith. They are like babes. They are drinking spiritual milk and not eating meat. Today, many of us are only babies in the faith, but that's because we do not understand the basics of Christ. Being so far removed from the old sacrificial system and the law, we don't believe that it has any bearing on our understanding of Christ today. Yet understanding Christ's role in these systems is what the writer considers milk. The Bible is the full revelation of God. Finding rest in the final revelation does not mean that the other revelations of God are not important. In fact, the more we know about Christ, the more we can rest in Him. If we do not take time to realize that man has not always been in communion with God as we know it today, we will not see the picture of God's continuous restoration of man. If we do not see sin as needing a sacrifice, we will never understand how important Christ's blood really was. And finally, if we do not acknowledge that God's desire is to be in an intimate relationship with mankind, we cannot grasp why Christ would come and die. Understanding the Old Testament revelations of God is essential to understanding the fullness of Jesus Christ and truly experiencing Sabbath rest.



Personal Study Questions

The purpose of these study questions is to help you get into God's Word. We hope that through a personal encounter with God's Word, He will reveal His Truth and allow you to understand His story first hand.

1. What two functions of priests does the writer describe?

2. Read Leviticus 9:5-11 and Hebrews 5:1-3. How was Jesus' role as priest different from all the other priests?

3. Christ reminds us of His humanity in verses 7-8. In the life of Christ, what stories remind you of His humanity?

4. Was Christ born as High Priest or was He appointed High Priest?

5. What do you consider elementary principles (milk) in your journey with Christ?
