

# The Book of Hebrews

מְאֹנְשׁ מִנְמָה דָא מִנְהָת אַקְלָא  
צְמַאַלְלָא נְתַחְצְרָה דְרַחְסָנָה סָקָה  
אַחֲ פְּקָלָא תְּסִנְ סְרְבָּאַלְלָה  
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תְּאַתְּפָלָשָׁה נְתַרְדְּנָה הַרְפָּרָה נְרַלְדָה  
תְּאַגְּשָׁה רַלְדָה מְלַלְצָה סָסָה תְּלָשָׁה



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# **Outline of Hebrews**

## **“Jesus is Better”**

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)**
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)**
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)**
- IV. Jesus’ Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)**

# Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

- In the same way in which the author developed the “*rest*” theme, the author now aims to show that the Old Testament Scriptures themselves *upgrade*, and at the same time, announce the *obsolescence* of the very priesthood that most Jews thought was the most important aspect of their Jewish faith.
- To most of the original readers of this letter, when someone said, “high priest,” they would think *instantly* of the *Levitical* high priest.
- So what the author intends to do now is to relativize that understanding and to show that their very own Old Testament Scriptures, announce the principled obsolescence of that priesthood with some huge implications.

# Outline of Hebrews

## IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)

- A. Jesus Is a Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14-16)
- B. Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)
- C. Warning and Assurance (5:11-6:20)
- D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
- E. The New Covenant Is Better than the Old (8:1-13)
- F. We Have a Better Sacrifice Under the New Covenant (9:1-10:18)

# Jesus is a Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14–16)

<sup>14</sup> *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.* <sup>15</sup> *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* <sup>16</sup> *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

<sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great **high priest** who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

- This theme of Jesus as “*high priest*” has already been introduced a couple of times in the book of Hebrews.
- The first time Jesus is identified as “*high priest*” **explicitly** is in Heb 2:17, where we were told that “[Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful **high priest**...”
- Now, after having warned his readers in the previous two verses (Heb 4:12–13) that God stands over against us in judgment and God’s Word is not to be played with, the author reintroduces this theme of Jesus as “*high priest*” as a word of **encouragement** to his readers.

<sup>14</sup> *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

- He points out that our “*great high priest... has passed through the heavens* ...” There’s that *heavenly* theme again that we’ve seen over and over in the letter.
- Furthermore, our “*great high priest*” bears the title “*Son of God*” bringing back to mind a major theme of the book’s first two chapters, where the incarnation and exaltation of the Son were on display.
- Therefore, he tells us, knowing we have this “*great high priest*” we should be *encouraged* to “*hold fast our confession*.”

<sup>15</sup> *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

- Jesus is **not only** a **majestic** high priest who has passed through the heavens and sits at the right hand of God. He is **also** a **tender** high priest who is able to “*sympathize with our weaknesses*”.
- He is not a distant and aloof high priest, but is himself **intimately acquainted** with the human condition.
- Indeed, during his earthly ministry, he experienced the **full range** of human temptation.
- The delight and joys offered by sin were no stranger to Jesus. He was cognizant of and experienced the attractiveness of sin, realizing that it brought pleasure (cf. Heb 11:24-25).

<sup>15</sup> *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet **without sin**.*

- Jesus understands every temptation we face, since he experienced something similar. And yet he **never** surrendered to sin's power.
- What we need is **not** a *fellow loser*, but a *winner*; not one who shares our *defeat* but one who is able to lead us to *victory*; not a *sinner*, but a *savior*.
- It is evident from this text that sin is not intrinsic and inherent to human nature. Jesus was **fully human** in every respect, and yet he never sinned.

<sup>16</sup> ***Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.***

- Following the description of Jesus as a compassionate high priest in the previous verse, the author now gives a ***second*** exhortation: “*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace.*” This exhortation flows naturally from verses 14–15 as shown by the conjunction “*then*”.
- Jesus’ compassionate disposition (as described in the previous verse) invites us to ***intimacy*** with God – in fact, it ***makes*** that intimacy ***possible***.
- The exhortation “*let us... draw near*” translates a present tense form of the verb, indicating that drawing near to God constitutes an ***ongoing aspect*** of the Christian’s relationship with God: “*let us constantly draw near.*”

<sup>16</sup> *Let us then with **confidence** draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

- Under the old covenant the **only** person allowed into God's presence was the **high priest**, who entered the Most Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement.
- Under **that** covenant the high-priestly offering on that day won **forgiveness** for the people. Yet they were still **locked out** of the presence of Yahweh.
- But under **Jesus'** high priesthood, the people of God find a much better situation.
- They **themselves** may enter the very presence of God on a **continual** basis, and can do so "**with confidence**" — a word that can also be translated as "bold frankness," which in both Hellenistic Judaism and early Christian usage is related especially to the believer's approach to God in prayer.

<sup>16</sup> *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to **help in time of need**.*

- Christians, therefore, should draw near to God with unabashed openness since God alone is the true source of mercy and grace.
- Because of these provisions we can expect God will *“help [us] in [our] time of need.”*
- The author may have in mind the trial of persecution being faced by his readers, a trial that was tempting them to reject God’s mercy in Christ.
- The author assures them that if they remain faithful to their confession and approach God through Jesus’ high-priestly work, God will come through with help in a timely fashion.

# Outline of Hebrews

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- A. Jesus Is a Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14-16)
- B. Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)
- C. Warning and Assurance (5:11-6:20)
- D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
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# Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)

*<sup>1</sup> For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup> He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. <sup>3</sup> Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. <sup>4</sup> And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.*

# **Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)**

*5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,*

*"You are my Son, today I have begotten you"  
[Psalm 2:7b]*

*6 as he says also in another place,*

*"You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." [Ps 110:4b]*

# Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)

*<sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*

# Jesus Was Appointed By God as the Perfect High Priest (5:1-10)

## - High Level Overview -

- ***Universal Principles of High Priesthood (5:1–4)***
  - These verses are axiomatic in that they draw on universally understood (within a biblical framework) principles related to the office of high priest. As such they do not address **Jesus'** priesthood but rather the office of high priest as designed under the ***old covenant***. The last of these principles shows that one becomes a high priest ***only*** by ***God's appointment***.
- ***The Appointment of Christ as High Priest (5:5–6)***
  - As the next step in the discussion, verses 5–6 proclaim that Christ has been ***appointed*** as high priest by God. This is shown by using ***two*** OT quotations: Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:4.
- ***The Path to Christ's Appointment (5:7–10)***
  - The unit concludes with a powerful treatment on what might be called the “path of appointment” that the Son had to walk in order to qualify for being designated high priest by God—a path of obedience to suffering and death.

<sup>1</sup> For every high priest **chosen from among men** is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer **gifts and sacrifices** for sins.

- The author begins by explaining the concept of “*high priest*” as found in the **Old Testament**.
- High priests were “*chosen from among men*” and were appointed to represent human beings before God with “*gifts and sacrifices*” that atone for sins.
- An angel, for example, would not qualify for the office since it was restricted to human beings.
- High priests must be human beings since they are chosen to **represent** human beings **before God**.
- In other words they have a special privilege and responsibility to serve as **mediators** between human beings and God.

<sup>2</sup> *He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.*

- This verse describes the ***solidarity*** of the high priest with human beings he represents before God.
- The high priest does not belong to a different class of humanity.
- He is able to relate and minister to those who are ignorant and led astray since he also was stained with sin.
- The verb “*deal gently*” indicates that the priests avoided anger (at least ideally), since they themselves were sinners.
- Those who are “*ignorant*” probably refers to those who committed sins ***unintentionally*** (Lev 4:2, 13; 5:18; Num 5:22-29) and “*wayward*” to those wandering from the things of God.
- ***Defiant*** sins are not included here, for such sins are equivalent to the apostasy against which the author warns, and makes clear there is ***no forgiveness*** for such rebellion (see Num 15:30-31; Deut 17:12-13)

<sup>2</sup> ...he himself is ***beset with weakness***. <sup>3</sup> Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice ***for his own sins*** just as he does for those of the people.

- The high priest is able to identify with those who sin, for he himself is “***beset with weakness***”, which, as verse 3 indicates, includes his own sinfulness.
- Therefore he is required to make an offering ***both “for his own sins”*** and for the sins of the people.
- So, the high priest is able to deal gently and compassionately with sinners since he shares the same human condition as they do.

<sup>4</sup> *And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.*

- The author of Hebrews next proclaims that the office of high priest is not one for which a person can *enlist*; God himself confers the honor by appointment (e.g., Ex. 28:1; Lev. 8:1; Num. 16:5).
- In other words, the position of high priest derives from *divine* rather than *human* authority.
- God initiated the role of high priest, and any high priest thereafter must be “*called by God*” in order to be considered the authentic and authoritative representative for the people before God.

<sup>5</sup> *So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" [Psalm 2:7b]*

- Just as Aaron didn't appoint himself as high priest, neither did Jesus.
- Jesus didn't seek his own glory and exalt himself to high priest.
- As the Son of God, he was “*appointed*” by God as the words of Psalm 2 attest.
- The **humility** of Jesus comes to the forefront here.
- He didn't seek his own glory, but the glory of God (cf. John 8:50, 54), and God exalted him and appointed him as high priest because rather than pursuing his **own** honor, he sought the glory of God.
- For proof that God anointed Jesus as high priest, the author appeals to Psalm 2, a verse that he cited in Heb 1:5 to support Jesus' superiority to the angels as the Son.

<sup>5</sup> *So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" [Psalm 2:7b]*

- It's a bit surprising that the author turns to Psalm 2:7, for the text says **nothing** about Jesus as **priest**; it emphasizes his **kingship** instead.
- The author **may** have quoted Psalm 2:7 because Jesus is a priest-king like Melchizedek.
- In other words, Jesus is a particular kind of priest, a priest who serves as king just as Melchizedek did.
- Scholars have long discussed **when** Jesus became high priest, but the author of Hebrews doesn't tell us precisely when Jesus' priestly ministry began.
- Clearly Jesus' obedience and earthly ministry were crucial for his priestly sacrifice and, it is certainly the case that Jesus, upon his exaltation, was installed as heavenly high priest.

<sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." [Ps 110:4b]

- Here we have the first mention of "*Melchizedek*" in this letter.
- Jesus' appointment as high priest is confirmed by Psalm 110:4, where David prophesies that the one who is his Lord (Psalm 110:1) is also a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.
- Melchizedek first appears in the biblical story in Gen 14:18-20 where Abraham gives him a tenth of the spoils won in battle and Melchizedek blesses him.
- Melchizedek then vanishes from the scene until his name suddenly appears in Psalm 110:4. In fact this is the only other text in the OT that **mentions** this mysterious and puzzling character.

<sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." [Ps 110:4b]

- When we consider the context of Psalm 110, it is clear that David prophesies about the coming future king, for he will sit at God's right hand, ruling and reigning (110:1)
- He will rule with his "scepter" over his enemies (110:2)
- He will crush and destroy his enemies (110:5-7).
- The king is certainly a Davidic king, fulfilling the promise of a future Davidic ruler (cf. e.g., Psalm 89, 132).
- Psalm 110:4, however adds ***another dimension***: The future ruler is not only a ***king***, but he is also a ***priest***, and yet ***not*** a priest in the line of ***Aaron***.
- Jesus' priesthood stems from an ***entirely different order***: he is a ***Melchizedekian*** king-priest.
- In any case, the main point of this verse is that God ***appointed*** him as a Melchizedekian priest. Jesus did not take that honor on himself.

<sup>7</sup> ***In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.***

- Rather than Jesus' appointment to high priesthood being conferred simply by virtue of his relationship to God, the path to appointment was one of suffering, obedience, and endurance.
- The phrase "*in the days of his flesh*" makes an overt reference to Jesus' incarnation in general, but the rest of verses 7–8 hints at a ***specific*** event—Jesus' agonizing surrender to the Father's will in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:40–46).
- Although some commentators have found fault with linking this passage to the Gospel garden accounts, others have understood "*him who was able to save him from death*" as a clear allusion to Jesus' request for the cup of suffering to pass him by.

*<sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with **loud cries and tears**, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his **reverence**.*

- While the outcome of Gethsemane may suggest that God did not “hear” that prayer in the sense of exempting Christ from going to the cross, God did “hear” it, affirming the righteousness of his Son’s reverent submission through the **resurrection**.
- The “*loud cries and tears*”, although not part of the Gethsemane accounts, probably stem from one or more “prayers of the righteous sufferer” found in the Psalms.
- Both the psalms of righteous suffering and the Gethsemane accounts portray “**reverence**”. This word renders a Greek word which can also be translated “fear (in the sense of reverence) of God, piety.”
- The Father attended to the Son’s cries because of Jesus’ posture of **complete abandonment** to the Father’s will.

<sup>8</sup> *Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.* <sup>9</sup> *And being made perfect...*

- Even though he is God's Son and has a special relationship with God, Jesus still had to learn obedience through his sufferings.
- The word “*learned*” suggests a process.
- There is no suggestion that Jesus ever *disobeyed* (cf. 4:15; 7:26), as if he had to learn to obey because he disobeyed previously – any more than saying that he became a “*merciful and faithful high priest*” (2:17) means he was formerly callous or faithless.

<sup>8</sup> *Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.* <sup>9</sup> *And being made perfect...*

- This verse emphasizes Jesus' humanity. He “*learned obedience*” as he experienced life day by day. In particular, he learned obedience in his sufferings.
- When suffering strikes, human beings are inclined to do whatever it takes to avoid it. Jesus, however, learned how to trust God and do his will in the midst of his suffering.
- Likewise, Jesus was “*made perfect*” in his sufferings.
- As we saw when we looked at a similar statement in Heb 2:10, in the Greek OT (Septuagint), the word translated “*perfect*” (*teleioo*) often signified the act of **consecration** when a priest was ordained for the performance of his priestly duties (e.g., Ex 28:41; 29:9,29,33; Lev 16:32, etc.)
- In other words, Christ’s sufferings and ultimately his death equipped and qualified him to serve as our high priest.

<sup>9</sup> And being made perfect, he became ***the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him***, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

- These last two verses proclaim the happy result of the Son's being prepared through his suffering: He became "***the source of eternal salvation***."
- This verse closely links Christ's perfection process to his death on the cross, where our great high priest offered up himself as the sacrifice for sin.
- For it is only through his death on the cross that Christ was able to offer the "***salvation***" referred to here.
- Salvation comes, however, to those whose lives are characterized by ***obedience*** to him.
- Just as Jesus "learned obedience" in his earthly suffering, he calls people to respond in obedience to his will.

<sup>9</sup> *And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,* <sup>10</sup> *being designated by God a high priest **after the order of Melchizedek.***

- Just as Jesus persevered, reverently conforming his will to that of the Father in spite of extreme suffering, so Christians are called to total obedience to God's will; this call does not change – even when we experience suffering and persecution.
- This section concludes with the author reiterating that as a result of the Son's suffering, he has been appointed by God to fill the position of high priest *“after the order of Melchizedek.”*
- This final statement plays an important role as a transition to the discussion of Melchizedek beginning in Heb 7:1.

# Class Discussion Time



## \*Class Discussion Time

- One of the issues that any sincere student of the Bible must grapple with is the degree to which there is continuity versus discontinuity between the new and old covenants. As we have seen, this is an issue that the author of Hebrews is particularly keen on addressing, since his audience is on the verge of throwing off their new covenant beliefs and, in the process, their commitment to Jesus himself.
- The author of Hebrews shows high regard for the OT scriptures, citing them as the authoritative word of God. He also gives serious attention to OT instructions, such as we saw today in the principles governing the appointment and function of the OT high priest.

## \*Class Discussion Time

- But at the same time, throughout this book, the author shows a stunning contrast between the old covenant, which anticipated its own obsolescence and the things of the new covenant which far outshine the old.
- Today at least two contrasts immerged:
  - The old covenant high priest who had to offer sacrifices for his own sins versus Jesus, the new covenant high priest, who is utterly sinless
  - The old covenant people who were locked out of access to God's presence except for the high priest who represented them before God once a year on the Day of Atonement versus new covenant believers who are invited to enter the presence of God on a continual basis
- Were you struck by these contrasts as we examined the text today? Do you think we sometimes take for granted the privileges we have as new covenant believers?

# \*Class Discussion Time

- What motivates me in my pursuit of God?
- In his little essay “God in the Dock,” C. S. Lewis wrote:
  - *The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that Man is on the Bench and God in the dock.*
- This does not represent the worldview of Hebrews. According to our author, God’s decree should mean something to us; it should constitute the motive for action in our lives. We must sit up and take notice of what God has said and its implications for our lives.

## \*Class Discussion Time

- As an appropriate application of Hebrews 5:1–10, therefore, we might begin by reflecting on our current motivations for engaging in Christ-following. Why are you doing what you are doing? Is the fact that God has appointed Jesus to a position of honor in which we are called to “obey” him significant for us as motivation for continuing in our commitment? Or are we more moved by the call of our world’s system of values (even in our pursuit of Christianity)?