

HEBREWS

CHAPTER FIVE

Many friends and family from the southern United States visited us when we lived in Alberta. It probably had more to do with the beautiful Canadian Rockies and the great city of Calgary than spending time with the Howards, but we enjoyed every minute.

These visits often required me to do a little “interpreting” and even “interceding.” I helped Americans figure out their Canadian currency. I converted from metric measure to US measurement and back again. I explained that toboggans are sleds and toques are hats. I played interpreter for a Canadian dry cleaner and one of my very southern speaking visitors. And I even defended a Canadian’s right to use the French term “serviette” for a napkin to a very egocentric American teenager.

I had a unique perspective. As an American who had lived in Canada for a number of years, I understood and appreciated both sides of things. I had been north of the border long enough to teach the Americans what they didn’t know. And since I am an American I could also gently put one in their place when necessary.

Because Jesus Christ became man, He has a unique perspective. Although fully God, Jesus knows exactly what it’s like to be man, because He was also fully man. He alone is qualified to be our intercessor. Beginning at the end of the fourth chapter of Hebrews, the author launches into the High Priesthood of Jesus.

Our Great High Priest

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

These verses are among the most significant in the entire book of Hebrews. The heart of the author’s sermon, these three verses serve as a conclusion to all that has come before and segues into the main section of the book on the high priesthood of Jesus. The author’s main purpose is to encourage his hearers to hold firmly to their faith in the midst of persecution by focusing on the person of Christ, His saving work of their behalf and His current position at the right hand of the Father. These verses clearly voice this purpose.

Look again at 4:14-16. What words/phrases in these verses does the author use to accomplish the following?

- ***Challenge his readers to not turn back?***

- ***Prove that Jesus is the perfect High Priest?***

- *Show the benefits of Jesus as our high priest?*

When we get to chapter seven, we will delve deeper into the role of the high priest in the nation of Israel. But let's take a quick look now. God's people could not come to Him themselves. Because God is holy, His sinful people needed an intermediary, an intercessor. The high priest bridged this gap between the people of Israel and God. Not just anyone could be a high priest. All priests and Levites came from the tribe of Levi, but the high priest had to come from the line of Moses' brother Aaron. The position of high priest was hereditary and usually for life.

Other priests served under the high priest and helped with the required duties. However, there were some duties that only the high priest could perform. The high priest offered the sacrifices on behalf of the people. He spoke to God for the people. God spoke through the high priest to the people. The high priest interceded with God for the people.

According to the book of Hebrews, Jesus is the last and ultimate high priest. God's people no longer have need for any other intercessor.

How does reflecting on Jesus' role as our high priest help us to hold firmly to our faith?

The earthly priests were sinners just like the rest of us. They had to petition God for forgiveness of their own sin before they could intercede for the sin of the people.

According to Hebrews 4:15, what is one significant way that Jesus, our High Priest, is different from the earthly priests?

Jesus never sinned, but He *was* tempted. In fact, Hebrews 4:15 makes a point to tell us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted. Let's take a look at one of those times.

Read Matthew 4:1-11.

What methods did Satan use in his temptation of Christ? What issues or areas of Christ's life did Satan attack?

Can you think of similar instances in your own life where you faced temptation? What are they?

Because Jesus faced temptation, He can sympathize with us in our weakness. However, Hebrews 4:15 makes it clear that Jesus never yielded to temptation. Standing firm is not easy for us. Facing and resisting temptation caused Jesus suffering. (Hebrews 2:18 tells us that Jesus suffered when He was tempted.)

If Jesus was tempted in similar ways that we are, yet did not yield, who do you think suffered more through all their temptations, Jesus or us? Why?

The Spiritual Throne Room

The book of Hebrews is filled with references to the things of the Old Covenant, such as the sacrificial system, the tabernacle, and the high priestly office. Why? And better still, should we care? In Hebrews, we read that all of these things were physical pictures that described spiritual realities. For instance, the sacrificial system pointed to Jesus' ultimate sacrifice. The earthly tabernacle was a man-made copy of the true heavenly one (Hebrews 9:23-24). Studying the physical ones will give us better understanding of the spiritual truths. So, throughout the study we will be hopping into the Old Testament to take a closer look. Let's do that now with the Ark of the Covenant.

Read Exodus 25:10-22. Take a closer look at verses 21-22. What significant thing took place between the cherubim on the cover for the ark?

Read 2 Samuel 6:1-2. What further understanding/information do these verses give us about the ark and its cover?

The ark of the covenant, which housed God's law for His people, sat in the tabernacle (and later in the temple) behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. The Holy of Holies was the physical copy of the heavenly throne room of God. As we learned from 2 Samuel, God sat "enthroned between the cherubim." Knowing this helps us better understand and appreciate Hebrews 4:14-16.

Reread Hebrews 4:14-16.

Picture a majestic throne room and the elaborate throne that it houses. Write your thoughts about the look and feel of this place.

In the ancient days of a monarchy, only certain individuals could approach the king on his throne. If you attempted to approach without the prior order of the king himself, you could face immediate death. Jesus, as our High Priest, does not merely protect us from the fearsome power of our King. He ushers us into His very presence. “Let us approach” in Hebrews 4:16 is in the present tense. This implies an ongoing action. In the ancient world the image of “approaching the throne” was used as symbolic language for prayer.

Reflect on the awesome privilege we have as believers to approach God, our King, continuously. Write your thoughts.

What part does prayer play in our “holding firmly” to the faith we profess?

Read Hebrews 5:1-6.

One special duty that only the high priest could perform was the offering of sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement, observed once a year by Israel, was a special day set aside by God for the people to confess their sins and offer sacrifices for atonement (forgiveness). The sins of the people were symbolically laid on the sacrificial animal. Then the animal was killed and burned. But before the high priest could do this for the people he had to atone for his own sin.

After the animals were slaughtered, the high priest took some of its blood into the temple, into the Holy of Holies. To enter this room was to enter into the presence of God. The only time the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies was on the Day of Atonement to make intercession for his own sins and the sins of the people.

Our Unique High Priest

List all the characteristics of earthly high priests you find in verses 1-4.

Fill out the table below to compare Jesus’ priesthood to the earthly priesthood.

Ways it is similar	Ways it is different

Read Genesis 14:14-20

This is the historical account of the priest Melchizedek. Other than Genesis and Hebrews he is only mentioned in Psalm 110:4, which is quoted in Hebrews 5:6. We really know very little about Melchizedek. But through divine inspiration the author of Hebrews uses Melchizedek as a picture of the priesthood of Christ.

List all the facts about Melchizedek from Genesis 14:14-20

Why do you think the author of Hebrews uses Melchizedek to describe Jesus' high priesthood?

Note: We will return to the topic of Melchizedek in chapter 7 and learn a little more about the mysterious priest.

Read Hebrews 5:7-10

These verses about “the days of Jesus’ life on earth” refer to Jesus’ incarnation. We see again in this section the suffering of Christ as a precursor to His exaltation. Some Biblical scholars see this section specifically as a reference to Jesus’ time in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed and arrested.

Read Matthew 26:36-45

What was Jesus praying for in the Garden? Did the Father hear Jesus’ prayer? (See also Hebrews 5:7.) How did the Father answer?

How does the account in Matthew 26 reflect Jesus' "reverent submission" in Heb. 5:7?

Think about the fact that the Father hears and answers prayers of those who are reverently submitted to Him. How would this apply to your own prayer life?

The Greek work *teleiotheis*, which is translated as "once made perfect" in the NIV, intends to communicate the concept of "finishing" or "completing," not that Jesus was ever "imperfect." Instead, Jesus obediently carried out or finished the entire mission God laid out for Him.

That He "learned obedience" means that the Son arrived "at a new stage of experience," having passed through the school of suffering. Perfection refers to the Son's having "graduated" from that school, accomplishing the mission and making it to the end of that path of passion.

(NIV Application Commentary, Hebrews pg. 191)

What were the results of the Son "learning obedience" and "being made perfect?"

Application

Remember that God has a plan, a mission for your life. Pray and reflect over the next question.

If you were perfectly obedient through reverent submission to God, what could God accomplish through your life? Think of some situations He has placed you in and people He has brought into your life. Pray and ask God how you can be submitted and obedient in these areas. Write down any insights that God gives you.

The author of Hebrews encouraged his readers to approach God's throne of grace with confidence. They desperately needed God's mercy and grace to help them meet the persecution they suffered. They could stand firm, but they could not do it on their own. They had to follow their perfect High Priest into the heavenly throne room and lay their weaknesses at the foot of the throne.

What weaknesses, pain, temptation, or grief do you need to bring into the throne room today? Write your prayer to your King below. Receive the mercy and grace He offers.