

XI. Christ Our High Priest

February 20/21/22, 2018

Hebrews 5:1-10

Aim: To see that Jesus Christ is our superior High Priest who fulfills all the requirements of priesthood: in His selection by God to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek; in His solidarity with the pains and sorrows of humanity; and in His service in offering up Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our salvation.

Schreiner: What is the logical relationship between 4:14-16 and 5:1-10? The main point in 4:14-16 is that believers should hold fast their confession and draw near to God to receive grace and mercy. In 5:1-10 we discover why believers should hold fast the confession. They have a better high priest, one who is appointed by God and is a Melchizedekian priest. Turning away from such a priesthood, as 5:11-6:8 explains, is disastrous.

Phillips: Hebrews 5:1-10 forms one unit of thought, focusing on the similarity between the high priesthood of Aaron in the old covenant and the high priesthood of Jesus Christ in the new covenant. The teaching presented here lays a foundation for what is to come. Later chapters focus at length on the differences between Christ and Aaron, and especially the supremacy of Christ's priesthood. But first we must comprehend the basic continuity between Christ and Aaron. To that end, Hebrews 5:1-10 sets forth first the qualifications of a high priest, then the requirements that priests be appointed by God, and finally how both of these are fulfilled in Christ.

Schreiner: Many scholars recognize that this passage is a chiasm, although the exact pattern differs. A. In the OT high priests were chosen among human beings to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins (v. 1). A'. Jesus, on the other hand, is a Melchizedekian priest (vv. 9-10). Indeed, His priesthood, in contrast to OT priests, was perfect, and hence He secured 'eternal salvation' for His people. B. Verses 2-3 convey the solidarity of the high priest with the people. Since the high priest is also weak and sinful, he identifies with the people and needs to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well. B'. Jesus is also able to identify with His people as a high priest (vv. 7-8), not because He was a sinner but because of the intensity of His sufferings. He learned to obey in His suffering, and hence believers can be assured that He knows the travails of human experience. C. Finally, in the OT one did not choose to be a high priest (v. 4). Aaron was called by God to serve as a priest. C'. Similarly, Jesus did not honor Himself and decide to serve as a high priest (vv. 5-6). The author appeals to two OT texts (Ps. 2:7; 110:4) to support the notion that God appointed Him to be a priest like Melchizedek.

A. The Old Covenant High Priest (5:1-4)

Bruce: Our author makes two points about the general qualifications which any high priest must satisfy, before he goes on to speak more particularly of Christ's qualifications to be His people's high priest. A high priest must be (a) able to sympathize with those whom he represents, and (b) divinely appointed to his office. How these two conditions apply to the Aaronic priesthood is briefly set out.

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews begins by explaining the qualifications of a high priest. We might see this as a job description, setting forth the conditions necessary for this employment, the nature of the work, and lastly the purpose of the high priest.

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1. The High Priest's Service (5:1)

a) Represent Men (5:1a)

¹For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God...

Schreiner: The author begins by explaining the conception of high priest found in the OT. High priests were selected from men and were appointed to represent human beings before God with gifts and sacrifices that atone for sins. An angel would not qualify for the office since it is 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 the special privilege and responsibility to serve as mediators between human beings and God. The origin of the priesthood is traced to Exodus 28-29, which records the instructions for Aaron and his sons to serve as priests for Israel.

MacArthur: A priest had to partake of the nature of the persons for whom he officiates. A true high priest, therefore, had to be 'taken from among men'; that is, he had to be a man. God did not choose angels to be priests. Angels do not have the nature of men. They cannot truly understand men and they do not have open communication with men. Only a man could be subject to the temptations of men, could experience suffering like men, and thereby be able to minister to men in an understanding and merciful way. Only a man could rightly minister on behalf of men.

Bruce: A high priest represents men and women 'where their responsibility to God is concerned'; it is necessary therefore that he should be a human being himself. Aaron and his successors, who represented the nation of Israel in the presence of God, were Israelites themselves, conversant with the conditions under which their people lived, exposed to the same pressures and trials.

Phillips: The word 'men' is used twice in close proximity, with obvious emphasis. The high priest is taken out of mankind to act on behalf of mankind in things pertaining to God. The condition of entering the high priesthood, then, is to be human, because the nature of the work is to represent other humans through the offering of 'gifts and sacrifices.' A key idea here is that of representation: the priest had to be a human in order to represent other humans, because it is humans who stand condemned before God for sin. The priest was a mediator, not only representing the sinful people before God, but actually bringing them back into fellowship with God through his work on their behalf.

Hughes: Solidarity, oneness with humanity, was fundamental to priestly ministry and is explicitly stated in verse 1. No angel, no celestial being, no deceased soul could function as high priest. He had to be a living human being—a mortal like everyone else. The reason, of course, is that his primary function was representative—'to act on behalf of men in relation to God.' Thus, his shared humanity, his community of nature, was everything! To be sure, he needed to be linked to God. But what is emphasized here is that he must be well-linked to humanity.

b) Offer Gifts and Sacrifices (5:1b)

...to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

Schreiner: High priests carry out their office with gifts of thanksgiving and devotion that are offered up to God. We see examples of such gifts in burnt offerings (Lev. 1:1-17), grain offerings (2:1-16), fellowship offerings (3:1-17), and thank offerings (Lev. 7:12-13, 15; 2 Chr. 29:31; Ps. 50:14). High priests also offered sacrifices to atone for sins. The burnt offering also

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atoned for sin (Lev. 1:4), as did sin offerings (Lev. 4:1-35) and restitution offerings (Lev. 5:1-19). Transgressions were particularly atoned for on the Day of Atonement when sins committed during the entire year were forgotten (Lev. 16:1-34).

Bruce: The high priest's duties are here said to be the presenting of his people's gifts and sin offerings to God. 'Gifts' is the more comprehensive term; it would normally include 'sacrifices' but not be coextensive with them. But 'gifts and sacrifices' appears to be used by our author as a general expression in the sense of 'offerings'; here the particular class of offerings intended is indicated by the added words 'for sins.' And it emerges clearly in the course of his later argument that the particular sin offerings which he has in mind are those presented annually on the Day of Atonement; that was the occasion above all others on which the high priest in person was required to discharge the sacrificial functions.

Phillips: The purpose of this calling and work is all too clear, namely, to deal with the problem of sin. The high priest is appointed by God to represent sinners before God by means of atoning gifts and sacrifices. Particularly in view is the annual sin offering on the day of atonement, which summed up the whole priestly enterprise.

2. The High Priest's Solidarity (5:2-3)

a) *Weakness* (5:2)

(1) His Compassion (5:2a)

²*He can deal gently...*

Schreiner: The solidarity of the high priest with human beings is featured here. 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 was also stained with sin. The verb 'deal gently' (*μετριοπαθεῖν, metriopathein*) indicates that the priests avoided anger (at least ideally), since they themselves were sinners. The term is not precisely synonymous with 'sympathize' (*συμπαθεῖσαι, sympathēsai*) in 4:15, for the latter has the notion of helping whereas here the focus is on the high priest's identification with the people.

Bruce: In order to fulfill these duties worthily, a high priest needs not only to pay heed to the precise performance of the several ritual details, but also to have inward feelings which are in keeping with his sacred work. This is something which commands our instant approval. The Greek verb translated 'deal considerately' (*μετριοπαθεῖν, metriopathein*) denotes in general 'the golden mean between indifference and mawkish sentimentality.' Here it indicates more particularly forbearance and magnanimity on the part of people who are subject to great provocation and who could, if they wished, give way to unmoderated anger and meet the provocation with the utmost severity. Aaron is credited with exemplary forbearance in face of the repeated provocation and envy of those on whose behalf he served as high priest (cp. Num. 14:5; 16:22, 47ff.; Ps. 106:16)—although in this respect, as in most others, he falls behind his brother Moses (cp. Num. 12:3).

MacArthur: *Metriopatheō*, besides meaning 'to deal gently,' also means to treat with mildness or moderation. In the context of Hebrews 5:2, it can carry the idea of being in the middle of things—in two ways. First is the meaning of being in the midst of, being fully involved. The other is that of taking a middle ground—of knowing and understanding, but of avoiding extremes. A person with this characteristic would, for example, show a certain balance between

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irritation and apathy in the face of wrongdoing. He would be patient with the wrongdoer but not condone the wrong, be understanding but not indulgent. A better example would be in relation to grief or danger. A person who is either too sympathetic or too apathetic cannot help someone in trouble. The one who is too sympathetic will himself be engulfed by the problem, becoming too grief stricken or too scared to be of help. On the other hand, the one who is apathetic possibly will not even recognize a problem someone else is having and, in any case, will not be concerned about helping. In the middle is the person *metriopatheō* describes. He can fully identify with the person having a problem without losing his perspective and judgment. A true high priest needed this characteristic.

Hughes: The next quality for the human priesthood is sympathy or compassion. The ideal high priest had an inner disposition that enabled him ‘to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward.’ He did not elevate himself above them, but ministered with sympathetic grace as a priestly sinner on behalf of other sinners. In the ideal high priest, an awareness of weakness, coupled with his awareness of sin, produced the ability to ‘deal gently with the ignorant and wayward.’ And in this we have something most beautiful, because the word translated ‘deal gently’ was used classically to define a course of conduct that was the middle course between *anger* and *apathy*, between being *incensed* at sin or *laissez-faire* about sin. It means ‘wise, gentle, patient restraint. Such a high priest was compassionate and sensitive. He dealt gently with his people.

(2) His Constituents (5:2b)

...with the ignorant and wayward...

Schreiner: ‘Those who are ignorant’ (*τοῖς ἀγνοοῦσιν, tois agnoousin*) probably refers to those who committed sins out of ignorance (Lev. 4:2, 13; 5:18; Num. 5:22-29) and those ‘going astray’ to those wandering from the things of God. Defiant sins are not included here, for such sins are equivalent to apostasy against which the author warns, and he makes clear that there is no forgiveness for such rebellion (see Num. 15:30-31; Dt. 17:12-13).

MacArthur: The ones with whom the priest is to ‘deal gently’ are those who are ‘ignorant and misguided,’ that is, those who sin through ignorance. The priest ministered only in behalf of those who sinned in ignorance and thus went astray (cp. Num. 15:28). In all of the Old Testament economy, there is absolutely no provision made for the unrepentant, deliberate, and defiant lawbreaker. There is none (cp. Num. 15:30).

Bruce: The objects of his gentle forbearance are those who are ignorant and going astray—probably we should understand a hendiadys here and take the phrase to mean ‘those who go astray through ignorance.’ It was for such people—for those who succumbed to the moral infirmities which are common to mankind—that sin offerings were prescribed in the law (Num. 15:28). No such provision was made for the deliberate and defiant lawbreaker.

Phillips: The priest deals gently with ‘the ignorant and wayward.’ Surely this includes every believer. It is in our ignorance and waywardness that we sin against God. This also seems to recall the Old Testament distinction between, on one hand, those who sin in ignorance and weakness and, on the other, those who commit high-handed or openly rebellious sins (see Num. 15:22-31; Lev. 22:14-16; Ps. 95:7-11). The difference today would be between believers who, despite their faith in Christ as Savior, still struggle with sin, and those who reject the gospel and sin without repentance. Sinning believers are forgiven through the saving work of Jesus. But unrepentant, unbelieving sinners have no one to bear their sins but themselves. How wonderful

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that ‘the ignorant and wayward’ find a compassionate high priest who will gently lead them into God’s grace.

(3) His Condition (5:2c)

...since he himself is beset with weakness.

Schreiner: The high priest is able to identify with those who sin, for he himself is beset by ‘weakness.’ The word ‘weakness’ (*ασθενιαν, asthenian*) here includes the notion of sinfulness. The high priest, then, is able to deal gently and compassionately with sinners since he shares the same human condition as they.

Bruce: But with those who erred through ignorance the high priest might well sympathize, for he was prone to the same weaknesses himself. This was manifest from the records of several priests of Old Testament times (not to speak of those of the Hellenistic and Roman eras).

Phillips: The high priest must be ‘beset with weakness.’ The Greek text literally puts it, ‘since he is *clad with weakness.*’ Although Jesus had no sins, He puts on human frailty, and thus is able to treat sinners with understanding and without harshness.

Hughes: As to why he could be so gently disposed, our text suggests that it is because of two inner awarenesses. First, he was aware that he himself was ‘beset with weakness.’ He shared in the universal ‘community of weakness’ of all mankind. This, of course, has primary reference to moral weakness, but it also means human weakness generally. He was subject to weakness in *body*: He sometimes became ill—He suffered trauma—He got tired—He sometimes ate too much—He was aging. He was subject to weakness of *intellect*: He sometimes felt stupid—there were things that were simply beyond Him—He made mistakes [DSB ??]. He was also subject to weakness of *emotion*: sometimes He lost control—He was sometimes depressed—the feelings of others at times controlled Him. Indeed, He was part and parcel of the universal ‘community of weakness.’

MacArthur: So the emphasis here is on sympathy. The high priest was meant to have sympathy toward those who ignorantly went astray. Since the Jewish high priest himself was a sinner, he had the natural capacity, and he ought to have had the sensitivity, to feel a little bit of what others were feeling.

b) Sin (5:3)

³*Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.*

Schreiner: It is clear from this verse that the weakness of the high priest includes his own sin. Therefore, he is required to make an offering for both his own sin and for the sin of the people (cp. Lev. 9:7; 16:6). The phrase ‘must make a sin offering’ (*προσφερειν περι αμαρτιων, prospherein peri amartiōn*), which is literally translated ‘to offer concerning sins,’ is rightly translated by the HCSB as designating a sin offering. The close parallels between 5:3 and Lev. 16:6 support this interpretation. Aaron offered a bull for a sin offering for himself. Further, the phrases in Greek regularly refer to the sin offering in Leviticus (Lev. 4:3, 14, 28, 35; 5:6-9, 11, etc.). The high priest identifies with the people, for he transgresses just as they do and must offer sacrifices for his own sin.

Bruce: No wonder then, that the high priest had to present a sin offering for himself as well as for his people. This is specifically provided for in the directions for the Day of Atonement. Only

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after Aaron had presented a bullock as a sin offering to make atonement for himself and his family, in accordance with the prescription of Lev. 16:6, could he proceed with the atoning ritual itself.

Hughes: Second, he was aware that he, though high priest, was a sinner, for he had ‘to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.’ Specifically, on the Day of Atonement, while decked out in his spectacular priestly robes, he had to kill a bull for his *own* personal sins and his family’s sins. In slaughtering the bull, he would lay his hands on its head and confess his sins. It was only after taking care of his own sins that he dared offer sacrifice for his people on the Day of Atonement. The ideal high priest knew he was a sinner through and through—and thus was equipped to ‘deal gently’ with his sinful people.

Phillips: A priest had to be human to represent other humans, but he also had to be human to identify with them. The human priests of Israel were able to deal gently with the sinful people because they were in the same boat. They were sinners, as was demonstrated by the offerings they made for their own sins. The writer of Hebrews has been keen to remind us that Jesus did not have any sins or failures (4:15), but also that He is able to sympathize with us nonetheless, because of His personal acquaintance with temptation and human weakness.

c) Met by Christ

Phillips: The obvious point of all this is that Jesus qualifies for such a priestly ministry. What particularly qualifies Him is His full humanity, both in nature and in experience. The New Testament often emphasizes the divine nature of Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God—not merely a man like the rest of us, but God in the flesh. The writer of Hebrews made this point quite clearly in chapter 1. The emphasis here, however, is on the human nature of Jesus. Indeed, the main reason the divine Savior, the Messiah, had to become man was to fulfill this priestly role. He must be one of us in order to represent us, and He must have shared our experience to identify with us in our trials.

Phillips: How can God’s Son represent and identify with us? The first answer is the incarnation, when the second person of the Trinity took up human flesh to undertake our cause (2:14). Jesus’ death on the cross counted for men because it was men who owed God the debt, and in Christ it was a man who paid it. It was His divine nature that made Christ’s blood infinitely valuable and able to propitiate God’s wrath, but it was His human nature that He offered it for us. If it had been angels He came to save, then He would have come as an angel; since He came to be the Savior of men, it was a man that he came (2:17). The incarnation stands behind the atonement. It was because Jesus was a man that He represented men while dying on the cross.

Phillips: What about the matter of identifying with us in our weakness? This has been a major emphasis of the writer of Hebrews, a key aspect of Christ’s high-priestly ministry (cp. 2:10; 4:15). Read the Gospels—Jesus’ birth from the maid Mary, His life among men, and His cursed death before God—and you will see that He is abundantly fit both to represent and identify with us.

3. The High Priest’s Selection (5:4)

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

MacArthur: A true priest could not be just any man. He had to be ‘appointed’ by God (see v. 1). It was not an office that a man could fill simply because of his own plans or ambition. He had to be God’s man—not simply in the sense of being faithful and obedient to God but in the sense of

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being selected by God. He was ‘appointed on behalf of men’ (v. 1), but *by* God. From the beginning of the priesthood, the priests not only were to minister for God but by His appointment (see Ex. 28:1).

Schreiner: No one chooses to be the high priest. It isn’t a democratic office in which one puts forward his name, nor it is an elected office in which people choose the high priest. The high priest is called and chosen by God, just as Aaron was chosen by Him. The calling of Aaron as high priest is evident from Ex. 28:1.

Bruce: If one qualification in a high priest is his ability to sympathize, another is his being called by God to this honorable service. No person can of his own accord set himself up as high priest, nor can he hold office validly by the gift of any earthly authority (Had our author been minded to review the history of the Jewish high priesthood during the last two centuries or so of its existence, he could have illustrated this last point very effectively!) Aaron, the first of Israel’s high priests, occupied his office by divine appointment (Ex. 28:1ff.; Lev. 8:1ff.; Num. 16:5; 17:5; 18:1ff.; Ps. 105:26), and so did his heirs and successors (Num. 20:23ff.; 25:10ff.).

Hughes: The third and final qualification is straightforward—the high priestly position must spring from divine selection. All Israel’s priests were to come only through divine appointment (Ex. 28:1-3; cp. Lev. 8:1ff.; Num. 16:5; 20:23ff.; 25:10ff.). Attempts to do otherwise met with catastrophic judgment (cp. Num. 16:16-40; 1 Sam. 13:8ff.; 2 Chr. 26:16-21). No genuine priest ever arrogated himself to the high priestly office. All were sovereignly chosen. Therefore, a proper priest was filled with deep humility. His work was never a career. It was a divine calling.

Phillips: Jesus Christ meets the qualifications to be our mediator and high priest. But someone may be qualified for a position without actually having the authority to hold it. Qualification is a prerequisite, but there must be an appointment to the office if the work is to be acceptable and binding. In verses 4-6 we see that Jesus is not only qualified to be our high priest, but that God has also appointed Him to this office. This matter of appointment is important for two reasons. The first is that it determines the way the office is carried out. A true high priest is not one who has acted to elevate himself in the eyes of men or of God. A true priest is motivated solely by a desire to honor God and serve men, without concern for personal advancement. This ought to be true of ministers of the gospel. Few things are worse than ministers who put themselves forward for prestigious posts, seeking praise and even worldly riches.

Phillips: This is an important reason why this office comes only by appointment, but the second reason is, if anything, more important. The high priest must be appointed by God, not only so that he will serve selflessly, but also so that we might know that God Himself has authorized His ministry in this capacity.

Schreiner: In NT times Herod and the Roman authorities chose the high priest, but such a political move offended Jews devoted to the OT, for they were convinced that the high priest should be in the line of Zadok, so that no human being could appoint the high priest.

Bruce: No one can read the history of the Second Temple without being conscious of the preposterous situation which made a man like Alexander Jannaeus (Hasmonaean king and high priest, 103-76 BC) his subjects’ representative before God in the most solemn moments of national worship. The character of the man made him hopelessly unsuitable for the high priesthood. Indeed, from the fall of the house of Zadok (when Onias III was assassinated in 171 BC; cp. Dan. 9:26a; 11:22) to the destruction of the temple 240 years later there were few

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high priests in Israel who manifested the personal qualities so indispensable for their sacred office. Our author, however, in all that he has to say about Israel's priesthood and sacrificial worship has the literary data of the Pentateuch in mind and not the facts of more recent history.

B. The New Covenant High Priest (Hebrews 5:5-10)

Hughes: The ideal high priest was a man of incomparable attractiveness. Could anything or anyone ever exceed this ideal in attractiveness or efficacy? The answer is a resounding 'Yes!'—Jesus Christ!

Bruce: The same two qualifications as are requisite in any high priest are present in Christ; in His case, however, our author presents them in reverse order: (a) His divine appointment, and (b) His ability to sympathize with His people.

1. The High Priest's Selection (5:5-6)

Phillips: On what basis do we believe that Christ's death atoned for our sins? Because God appointed Him to this task, and thus has accepted Christ's work in this holy office. When Jesus entered the heavenlies, bearing His own blood as the sacrifice for our sins, why does that have any relevance for us? Certainly He is qualified, but that is not enough. He represents us because God has appointed Him as our high priest. Moreover, why should God listen to Christ's prayers for us? Surely He loves His Son, and Christ is sympathetic. But God accepts Christ's intercession because He appointed Him to this very work; as our high priest, Christ fulfills God's own will and appointment for our salvation. Therefore, it is important for the writer of Hebrews to prove that Jesus was in fact appointed to this office, which he does by citing two Old Testament verses.

Hughes: Jesus too was a product of divine selection. Not only was Christ divinely chosen, but He was chosen for two offices—the ultimate *royal* office and the ultimate *priestly* office, as is shown by two Old Testament Scriptures.

a) *Appointed the Son of God (5:5)*

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"...*

Schreiner: Just as Aaron didn't appoint himself as high priest, neither did Jesus the Christ. He didn't seek His own glory and exalt Himself to be high priest. As the Son of God, He was appointed by God as the words of Psalm 2:7 attest. Hebrews doesn't pinpoint the moment when Jesus became high priest. Certainly he functioned as a high priest on earth since His once-for-all sacrifice atoned for sin. At the same time, He did not enter into the full exercise of that office until 'He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven' (8:1; cp. 1:3).

Bruce: Even Christ, the Son of God, did not assume the high-priestly dignity by His own initiative; He was called to it by God, who acclaimed Him as His Son in the words of Psalm 2:7, already quoted in 1:5. In that previous verse, the 'today' in our author's mind is the day of Christ's enthronement—the day when the Most High gave public notice that He had exalted the crucified Jesus as 'both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36). And, says our author, the same God who acclaimed Jesus as His Son has also acclaimed Him as perpetual high priest.

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Hughes: His *royal* office was prophesied in Psalm 2:7 (cp. 1:5), in which the mind of the writer of Hebrews refers to Christ's enthronement as 'both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36). This is an implicit statement that Jesus is eternal King!

Schreiner: For proof that God appointed Jesus as a high priest, the author appeals to Ps. 2:7, a verse which he cited in 1:5 to support Jesus' superiority to the angels as the Son. It is a bit surprising that the author turns to Ps. 2:7, for the text says nothing about Jesus as a priest; it emphasizes His kingship instead. Further, as we saw in the discussion of 1:5, the verse refers to Jesus' resurrection, to His being installed at God's right hand as Lord and king over all. It seems that the author quotes Ps. 2:7 because Jesus is a priest-king like Melchizedek. In other words, Jesus is a particular kind of priest, a priest who also serves as a king just as Melchizedek did.

Phillips: The first quote of Psalm 2:7 already appeared in Hebrews 1:5. The burden of this verse is not the establishment of Christ's nature as Son of God, but His public declaration and confirmation as Son and heir. As Paul explains in Romans 1:4, Jesus 'was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.' The resurrection and ascension were the fulfillment of this Old Testament citation and the occasion of His appointment to enter heaven as Son, heir, and high priest.

Schreiner: Scholars have long discussed when Jesus became the high priest. The reference to Ps. 2:7 could suggest that He became such at His exaltation, but the emphasis on Christ's death on earth indicates that He served as a priest during His earthly ministry. The author of Hebrews does not answer precisely when Jesus' priestly ministry began. Hebrews focuses on Jesus' death and exaltation as a high priest. Perhaps we could say that Jesus' obedience and ministry were crucial for His priestly sacrifice, but we must admit that the author doesn't specify when Jesus' priesthood was inaugurated, though the emphasis on His death indicates that we can't restrict His priesthood to the time of His exaltation. It is certainly the case that Jesus, on His exaltation, was installed as the heavenly high priest.

b) Appointed a Priest Like Melchizedek (5:6)

...⁶as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

Schreiner: When we consider the context of Psalm 110, it is clear that David prophesies about the coming of a future king, for He will sit at God's right hand ruling and reigning (Ps. 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 (cp. e.g., Psalms 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 He is not a priest in the line of Aaron. His priesthood stems from an entirely different order, for He is a Melchizedekian priest. The word 'order' doesn't signify a line of succession as if there were many Melchizedekian priests; it refers to the nature of Jesus' priesthood.

Phillips: The second citation is more enigmatic, for here we encounter the first of nine references in Hebrews to Melchizedek, who first appeared in the story of Abraham (Gen. 14). There, Melchizedek was described as king of Salem (probably Jerusalem) and 'a priest of God Most High.' After his victory over the eastern lords, Abraham came and offered a sacrifice to this priest-king, who prefigured Jesus Christ. A thousand years after Abraham, Melchizedek's name surfaces again in Psalm 110, and with no real explanation. This is a messianic psalm; it begins with the Christ being enthroned. Verse 4 simply informs us that the Messiah will also be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. After Psalm 110, Melchizedek never appears again until the book

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of Hebrews, where he serves as a type of Christ as a priest-king, and as an eternal priest who serves on the basis of his own indestructible life. There will be more to come about Melchizedek, but here the point is clear. These two Old Testament passages show that Christ ‘did not exalt Himself to be made a high priest’ (v. 5), but was appointed by God’s own oath. God’s appointment of Christ as high priest is an oath that can never be changed or rescinded.

Schreiner: Jesus’ appointment as high priest is confirmed by Ps. 110:4, where David prophesies that the one who is his Lord (Ps. 110:1) is also a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Here we have the first mention of Melchizedek in the letter. 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 Ps. 110:4. In fact, this is the only other text in the OT that mentions this mysterious and puzzling character.

Bruce: Melchizedek makes his appearance in Gen. 14:18 as king of Salem (traditionally, and in all probability rightly, identified with Jerusalem; cp. Ps. 76:2) and priest of God Most High (*El Elyôn*).

Hughes: Jesus’ *priestly* office was prophesied, says our writer, in Psalm 110:4. This was a bombshell statement to his hearers because, while Psalm 110:1 had been applied to Christ by others (and even in 1:13), this is the first time Jesus was ever identified with the mysterious priesthood of Melchizedek! It is especially important here to realize that Melchizedek, according to Genesis 14, was both *king* of Salem and *priest* of God Most High (Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:1). So our author gives us a stupendous truth: Jesus is both eternal King and eternal priest. And it all came to Him by the ordaining word of God the Father. Jesus did not seek it, neither did He clutch to the office of king and high priest (cp. Phil. 2:6-7). His only goal was to glorify God the Father.

Bruce: Our author takes up verse 4 of Psalm 110 and applies it to Jesus in a way which, so far as we can tell, was unprecedented in the early church. Here they are assured that Jesus, who was acclaimed by God as the Davidic Messiah in Ps. 2:7, was also acclaimed by God as high priest in Ps. 110:4. Christians acknowledge not two Messiahs, but one, and that one is both king and priest. But if the Messiah of David’s line is high priest as well as king, He cannot be a ‘Messiah of Aaron’; Aaron belonged to the tribe of Levi, whereas David and his house belonged to the tribe of Judah, ‘a tribe of which Moses said nothing in connection with priests’ (7:14). No appeal can be made to those scriptures which establish the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood to support the claim that Jesus the son of David exercises a high-priestly ministry on His people’s behalf. But there is no need to appeal to those Scriptures, for here is another scripture which speaks of another priestly order, and designates the Davidic king as priest of this order. For aught we know to the contrary, the writer to the Hebrews was the first to identify the union of the anointed priest and the anointed king of the new age in such a way as to provide the fulfillment of the divine oracle in Ps. 110:4. The promised prince of the house of David is, by the same divine right, perpetual priest of Melchizedek’s order. The implications of this are unfolded in detail in Hebrews 7.

Schreiner: Hebrews, of course, sees in Jesus the fulfillment of these prophecies. In the previous verse Ps. 2:7 is cited to support the notion that Jesus is the risen and exalted King. The citation of Ps. 110:4 indicates that He is more than a king. He is a king-priest. Jesus is a Melchizedekian priest. Indeed, there is also an indication here of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for He serves

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as a priest ‘forever.’ In any case the main point of the verse is that God appointed Him as a Melchizedekian priest. Jesus did not take that honor upon Himself.

2. The High Priest’s Solidarity (5:7-8)

Hughes: Not only is Jesus superior as to His divine selection to be king and priest—He is also superior in His priestly solidarity with His people.

MacArthur: Jesus Christ was sympathetic with men—He was identified with them, understood them, felt with them. He *was* Himself a man, just as surely as any high priest that served in the Tabernacle or Temple.

a) *He Prayed to His Father* (5:7)

(1) Days of His Flesh (5:7a)

⁷*In the days of his flesh...*

Bruce: His second qualification is His ability to sympathize with those whose cause He maintains. We have already been assured that Jesus is faithful and merciful as His people’s high priest because He was made like His brothers in every respect—that He sympathizes with His people’s weaknesses because He was exposed to all the tests and trials which they have to endure (cp. 2:17ff; 4:15ff). Now these statements are elaborated. The tests and trials befell Him ‘in the days of his flesh’—an expression which emphasizes the conditions of human weakness of which He partook during His earthly life and which does not imply that His human condition came to an end with His exaltation to the right hand of God.

Schreiner: Just as the high priest could identify with human beings, so too could Jesus. Even though He was without sin, He knew the anguish of human experience. He pleaded with God to deliver Him from death and God answered His prayers because of His piety. The phrase ‘during His earthly life’ reads literally ‘in the days of His flesh’ (ESV). The word ‘flesh’ (*σαρκος*, *sarkos*) denotes the frailty and weakness characterizing life on earth. As one who was fully human, Jesus shared with other beings ‘flesh and blood’ (2:14) and was plagued with the sorrows and heartaches of human existence.

MacArthur: ‘The days of His flesh’ were an interlude in the life of Jesus Christ, who existed before and after His earthly life. But they were an extremely important and necessary interlude.

Phillips: What was the *context* for Jesus’ attainment of righteousness? Jesus attained righteousness ‘in the days of His flesh.’ ‘Flesh’ is a fairly comprehensive term, depicting human weakness, subjection to danger and want and temptation, as well as obligation to the law of God. In other words, the context in which Christ fulfilled all righteousness was no different from that in which you and I are compelled to live, except that Jesus was sinless and His pilgrimage through His world was if anything more arduous than ours.

(2) Prayers and Supplications (5:7b)

...Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death...

Schreiner: He ‘offered up prayers and petitions’ (NIV) during His life on earth, for He, like any other human being, was completely dependent on God. He looked to God to meet His needs and to answer His pleas, praying ‘with loud cries and tears.’ The intensity of grief and sorrow

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described here recalls Jesus' experience in the garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36-45). Such a reading is certainly possible, but the author is suggesting that sorrow and tears were a regular experience for him in the 'days' (plural) 'of His flesh.' The readers were experiencing suffering and persecution, but Jesus knew suffering as well. They weren't encountering anything that was foreign to His own time on earth.

Bruce: While Gethsemane provides 'the most telling illustration' of our author's words, they have a more general reference to the whole course of our Lord's humiliation and passion. More than that: they have been influenced by the language of the twenty-second Psalm. The author's present intention is to insist that Jesus has been qualified for His high-priestly service by His agony and tears, His supplication and suffering, throughout which His trust in God never failed.

Hughes: Here we see that the prime example of Jesus' solidarity (His participating fully in the human condition) was His agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Mark tells us Jesus was 'greatly distressed' (Mk. 14:33). The idea here is that of terrified human surprise. As He considered the cup He must drink He was astonished with horror. Mark also tells us that Jesus said, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death' (Mk. 14:34), for His sorrow was so deep, it threatened death to His human body. Amazingly (in the light of redemptive history), He was repeatedly asking that if possible the 'hour' and the 'cup' (metaphors for His death) might be avoided! How could He desire something contrary to the Father's will? The answer is: Jesus was truly God and truly man. As a man He had a human will and voluntarily limited His knowledge. His prayer was not to do something other than the Father's will, but He did say in prayer that if there were a possibility of fulfilling His messianic mission without the cross, He would opt for that. As a man Christ cried for escape, but as a man He desired the Father's will even more. Christ asked that the cup be taken away because He was truly man. His authentic solidarity with humanity was the soil for His terrible agony.

MacArthur: Among other things, 'He offered up both prayers and supplications,' because of the anguish He faced in becoming sin for those who believed in Him. In the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed and agonized so intensely that He sweat great drops of blood. His heart was broken at the prospect of bearing sin. He felt the power of sin and He felt temptation. He cried. He shed tears. He hurt. He grieved. What He had always known in His omniscience, He learned in a new way on earth by experience. He could not have been a fully sympathetic high priest had He not experienced what we experience and felt what we feel.

Phillips: What can we say about the *obedience* by which Jesus Christ fulfilled the law? Our passage says Jesus 'offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears.' Jesus stood up to all of Satan's trials, no doubt often praying and crying out to God for help. He did not sin in thought, word, or deed, under temptations graver than any we will ever know.

(3) He Was Heard (5:7c)

...and he was heard because of his reverence.

MacArthur: When Jesus prayed to 'the One able to save Him from death,' He was not hoping to escape either the cross or the grave. It was for this very purpose that He came to earth (Jn. 12:27). A more accurate translation of Hebrews 5:7 is '...to save Him *out* of death.' Jesus was not asking to be saved from dying, but to be saved out of death—that is, to be saved from remaining in death. He was not asking to avoid the cross but to be assured of the resurrection

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(cp. Ps. 16:8-11). Jesus was heard by His Father ‘because of His piety.’ The Greek word *eulabeia*, translated ‘piety,’ can mean reverential fear or awe. It carries the idea of being devoutly submissive. Jesus recognized God as sovereign and committed Himself to the Father.

Schreiner: Jesus’ prayers for deliverance from death were answered: ‘He was heard because of His reverence.’ The word for ‘reverence’ is only found in Hebrews in the NT (cp. also 12:28) and occurs only twice in the OT (Jos. 22:24; Pr. 28:14). The word has the meaning of ‘reverence’ or ‘awe,’ which is also translated as ‘devotion’ (NET) or ‘reverent submission’ (NIV). God answered Jesus’ prayers because of His fear of God, because He had given His life completely into God’s hands. But how did God answer His prayer to be delivered from death? Certainly not by sparing Him from death, for He endured the cruelty of death by crucifixion. His prayer was answered at the resurrection by deliverance from the realm of the dead, for when God raised Him from the dead, He was rescued from death once for all.

Bruce: That He was ‘heard for His godly fear’ (RSV) is the best interpretation of a phrase which has been understood in a variety of ways. What is in view here is our Lord’s devotion and submission to the will of God. The fact that the cup was not removed qualifies Him all the more to sympathize with His people; when they are faced with the mystery and trial of unanswered prayer they know that their high priest was tested in the same way and did not seek a way of escape by supernatural means of a kind they do not have at their disposal.

Hughes: Our text here in Hebrews tells us ‘He was heard because of His reverence.’ His reverence for the Father determined that His humanity would do nothing but please the Father. His prayer was, of course, answered, for though His body died, He was saved *out of* death—and so the Father’s will was done.

Phillips: God heard Him not merely because He was His only Son, but also ‘because of His reverence.’ Back in verse 3 of this chapter we were told that the high priests of Israel offered sacrifices for their own sins. Only then did God hear their prayers and receive their ministry. But Jesus did not call to the Father on the basis of the blood of bulls and goats; His whole life, and especially His obedience in the events surrounding His terrible death, was the sacrificial offering that consecrated Him as our high priest. His prayers and ministry are received by God because of His constant reverence and perfect obedience.

b) He Learned Obedience (5:8)

⁸*Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.*

Schreiner: Even as God’s Son, Jesus learned obedience through His sufferings. Even though He is specially related to God, He learned obedience in His sufferings. The word ‘learned’ (*εμαθεν, emathen*) suggests a process. There is no suggestion Jesus ever disobeyed (cp. 4:15; 7:26), as if He had to learn to obey because He disobeyed previously. The verse emphasizes Jesus’ humanity. He learned how to obey in the anvil of human experience, as He experienced life day by day. In particular He learned obedience in His sufferings. His first aim was not His own pleasure and comfort but the will of God.

Bruce: Son of God though He was, even He was granted no exemption from the common law that learning comes by suffering. In what sense did the Son of God learn obedience ‘by what He suffered’? We know the sense in which the words are true of us; we learn to be obedient because of the unpleasant consequence which follow disobedience. It was not so with Him. He set out from the start on the path of obedience to God, and learned by the sufferings which came His

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way in consequence just what obedience to God involved in practice in the conditions of human life on earth. Perhaps the obedient Servant of the Lord in Is. 50:4-9 was in our author's mind. The sufferings which Jesus endured were the necessary price of His obedience—more than that, they were part and parcel of His obedience, the very means by which He fulfilled the will of God.

MacArthur: Often the best, and sometimes the only, way to learn sympathy is by suffering ourselves what another is suffering. Suffering is a very skilled teacher. Jesus had to learn certain things by suffering. He was given no exemption from hardship and pain. Even though He was God's Son, God in human flesh, He was called to suffer. He learned the full meaning of the cost of obedience, all the way to death, 'from the things which He suffered,' and God therefore affirmed Him as a perfect High priest. That is the kind of high priest we need—one who knows and understands what we are going through.

Phillips: Our passage emphasizes that it was in the midst of pain and struggle, in the shadow of death, that Jesus learned obedience. Two episodes especially come to mind: first, His anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He anticipated the wrath of God upon the cross, and second, His death by crucifixion. In the garden Jesus prayed with tears and great anguish, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death' (Mt. 26:38), He said to the disciples. Great was His struggle on that dreadful night. In the context of the greatest dread imaginable, Jesus prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will' (Mt. 26:39). This was reverent submission like no other, and for it God has received Jesus as our high priest.

Bruce: The Christians for whom this letter was intended found that the maintenance of their faith and loyalty exposed them to trial and suffering which they could escape by renouncing their confession—or possibly even by drawing less public attention to it. But the question for them to face was: were they to fall back and lose everything or press on to perfection? Our author urges them to press on, in spite of all the suffering it may involve, and he sets before them the example of Jesus, who set His face 'like a flint,' refusing to turn back, and was thus made 'perfect through sufferings.' His example and His present aid might well encourage them too to persevere; no hardship could befall them in which He did not sympathize with them.

3. The High Priest's Service (5:9-10)

a) He Provided Salvation (5:9)

(1) Perfected by Suffering (5:9a)

⁹*And being made perfect...*

Schreiner: Jesus was perfected by His sufferings and thereby became the source of salvation for those who submit to Him. The phrase 'after He was perfected' (*τελειωθεις, teleiōtheis*) is closely related to Jesus' obedience in verse 8, for He was perfected through His suffering and obedience. The word 'perfected' is also used in 2:10 where we read that Jesus was made 'perfect' (*τελειωσαι, teleiōsai*) through sufferings.' After speaking of Jesus' offering Himself in death, 7:28 declares that Jesus as the Son 'has been perfected (*τετελειωμενον, teteleiōmenon*) forever.' Conversely, 'the law perfected (*ετελειωσεν, eteleiōsen*) nothing' (7:19). The 'gifts and sacrifices' of the old covenant 'cannot perfect (*τελειωσαι, teleiōsai*) the worshiper's conscience' (9:9; cp. also 10:1). The perfection of Jesus in Hebrews is tied to His sufferings and death, His obedience, and His exaltation.

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Bruce: As we have already been told in 2:10, it was through sufferings that He was made perfect—fully qualified to be the Savior and High Priest of His people. To suffer death for God’s sake is itself described as the attainment of perfection, and the death of Christ is of course bound up with His being ‘made perfect’ in the present context; but the essence of the perfection which our author has in mind consists in the twofold fact that by His suffering and death Christ (a) became to all who obey Him ‘the source of eternal salvation’ and (b) was ‘acclaimed by God as high priest after the order of Melchizedek.’ One can clearly recognize the motif of humiliation and suffering followed by exaltation in glory.

MacArthur: In His suffering and death, Jesus fulfilled the third requirement for high priest. He offered the sacrifice of Himself and thereby became the ‘perfect’ High priest and the source of eternal salvation. Jesus went through everything He had to go through, and accomplished all He needed to, so that He could be such a perfect High Priest. He was not, of course ‘made perfect’ in the sense of having His nature improved. He was eternally perfect in righteousness, holiness, wisdom, knowledge, truth, power, and in every other virtue and capability. Neither was His nature nor His person changed. He became perfect in the sense that He completed His qualification course for becoming the eternal High Priest.

Schreiner: Jesus was perfected in His experience by learning obedience in His sufferings. His perfection was an abstraction until He obeyed God in the concrete realities and travails of everyday human experience. His sufferings and death equipped and qualified Him to serve as a priest. He learned what it was to please God as a child, a teenager, and an adult. He wasn’t qualified to serve as priest as a young boy or teenager. It is certainly fitting to see an eschatological dimension to Jesus’ perfection as well. He fulfilled what God intended for human beings in His suffering and is now crowned as God’s king-priest. In His testing and obedience, Jesus exemplified what God intended when He created human beings.

(2) Source of Salvation (5:9b)

...he became the source of eternal salvation...

Schreiner: Only those who obey Jesus will experience eternal salvation. They will experience eschatological salvation because Jesus ‘is the source’ (*αἴτιος*, *aitios*) of such salvation. As the one who suffered and was perfected, He grants salvation to those who follow Him. The term ‘source’ here is akin to a different word for ‘source’ (*αρχηγός*, *archēgos*, 2:10; 12:2) used elsewhere in Hebrews.

Bruce: The expression translated ‘the source [or “cause” or “author”] of salvation’ (*αἴτιος σωτηρίας αἰώνιου*, *aitios sōtērias aiōniou*) is found in classical Greek; Philo also uses it—with regard to Noah, for example, and to the brazen serpent of wilderness days. Here it has practically the same meaning as ‘the pioneer of their salvation’ in 2:10. The salvation which Jesus has procured is an ‘eternal’ one.

MacArthur: By His death, Jesus opened the way of ‘eternal salvation.’ All the priests of all time could not provide eternal salvation. They could only provide momentary forgiveness. But by one act, one offering, one sacrifice, Jesus Christ perfected forever those who are His.

Phillips: Hebrews says that Christ became the source of our salvation. The first thing we should notice is the verb ‘became.’ Until something happened, until something was attained, Christ was not the source of our salvation, the basis for our entry into heaven. So what did Jesus do that enabled Him to become the source of salvation? Verses 7-9 set forth Christ’s actual attainment

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of righteousness, His full achievement of the holiness expressed in the law of God, during His day in the flesh on this earth. This then, is the *result* of Christ's obedience. Now the way to God that was closed by sin is opened by Christ's righteousness.

(3) Those Who Obey (5:9c)

...to all who obey him...

Schreiner: Jesus' suffering has a representative and saving character. Those who 'obey him' will experience salvation. According to Hebrews there is no salvation apart from obedience. The wilderness generation perished (3:18) because of their disobedience. They did not enter Canaan 'because of [their] disobedience' (4:6; cp. 4:11). We saw in 3:12-4:11 that faith and obedience are inseparable, even though they are distinguishable. Jesus as the Davidic king and as the high priest grants salvation to His brothers and sisters who belong to Him (2:5-18). Since He is their brother and king and priest, His obedience becomes their obedience, His perfection is granted to them. They are rescued from the punishment that will be meted out on the wicked eschatologically.

Bruce: The salvation which Jesus has procured, moreover, is granted 'to all those who obey Him. There is something appropriate in the fact that the salvation which was procured by the obedience of the Redeemer should be made available to the obedience of the redeemed. Once again the readers are encouraged to persevere in their loyalty to Christ, in whom alone eternal salvation can be found.

MacArthur: The obedience mentioned here of 'those who obey Him' is not that regarding commandments, rules, and regulations. It is not obedience to the law. It is 'the obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5). God wants us to obey Him by believing in Christ. True obedience, just as true works, is first of all true believing.

Phillips: For whom is Christ the source of salvation? The answer is clear: 'He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.' What does it mean to obey Jesus Christ unto salvation? He Himself gave the answer in John 6: 'Then they said to Him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent"' (Jn. 6:28-29). If you trust in His saving work, Christ will become your Savior. His sacrifice will pay the debt of your sins, and His will be the righteousness in which you are clothed before the throne of God.

Phillips: But do not think all of this is easy. Not only must you confess your need of Christ's blood and righteousness, but you must also repudiate your works, stained with sin as they are and altogether unable to save. You will have to repudiate your religious attainments, your faith in church-going, your proper upbringing, or your status in the world—your trust in anything except the saving work of Jesus Christ. Indeed, you will have to repudiate the world and all its sinful pleasures. Turning from sin is not the means of your salvation, but it is a necessary result of it, for there is no fellowship between light and darkness.

b) He Fulfilled the Priesthood of Melchizedek (5:10)

...¹⁰being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Schreiner: Jesus was the source of eternal salvation (v. 9) because He was made perfect by His obedience (vv. 8-9) and because He was designated as a priest after the order of Melchizedek (v. 10). The salvation of the readers is founded on Jesus' priesthood. The author explains in detail

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how Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood accomplishes salvation for the readers in 7:1-10:18. Actually, it was his desire to explain the nature of Jesus' priesthood in 5:11, but he pauses to warn the readers since he is concerned about their spiritual state.

Bruce: 'All those who obey him' have a high priest designated for them by God Himself, 'after the order of Melchizedek.' Our author reverts to Melchizedek at the end of this section of his argument because he intends to go on now and elaborate the significance of his high-priestly order.

Schreiner: The author contrasts the old and new priesthood in these verses. We and the readers live under the new priesthood, the Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus Christ. And the new is far better than the old, for Jesus bestows eternal salvation since He reigns at God's right hand and serves as a priest forever. God appointed Jesus as a Melchizedekian priest, and the appointment was fitting, for Jesus in His suffering and anguish obeyed God. He wasn't spared from the misery that besets humanity. His suffering extended to His death. We have a high priest who identifies with us, but more importantly, we have a high priest who is able to save and deliver us.

For next time: Read Hebrews 5:11-6:3.