

THE GLORIES OF CHRIST IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

HIS HEAVENLY PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

The last three verses of chapter 4 form a climax to the long parenthesis of 3:7-4:13, proving that Christ can and will lead those who trust Him into the rest of God; yet these same verses are also an integral part of the “chief point” of the epistle, developed in 4:14-10:18. Therefore, they link the introductory portion of the book with the discussion of the main theme in close continuity of thought; for they begin to unfold the person and work of the eternal Son of God (chap. 1) who became the perfect Son of Man (chap. 2) in order that He might be “**a merciful and faithful high priest . . . the Apostle and High Priest of our profession**” (2:17; 3:1). Indeed, these last three verses of chapter 4 might be called a synopsis of the entire epistle; every word in them is significant.

You will note that there is no break in thought between chapters 4 and 5, as indicated by “**for**,” the first word of 5:1. In 4:14-16 the Holy Spirit tells us that we have a Great High Priest at the throne of grace; then in 5:1-10 He proves that our High Priest fulfills all the qualifications and duties required of a Levitical priest according to the Law of Moses.

This proof was vital to the Hebrew Christian, who wanted to be sure that Christ Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament; and it was needed to warn the enlightened, but unregenerated, Hebrew of apostolic times not to go into apostasy, not to continue in the then empty ritual of Judaism. Remember that the Temple was still standing when this epistle was written, and that it was not easy for a Jew to break with his nation in the ceremonial law which his fathers had observed for fifteen centuries. It took courage born of faith in Christ to face the persecution that was sure to follow such a stand.

Before you study carefully this first portion of the heart of the epistle, look again at 4:14-10:18 for a bird’s-eye view of the entire argument.

In proving that Christ fulfilled the qualifications and duties required of an earthly priest, under the Levitical law, the Holy Spirit mentions the fact that He was “**called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek**” (5:6, 10).

But the very reference to this fulfilled prophecy seems to remind the inspired writer that his readers were mere babes in Christ, “**dull of hearing,**” not able to understand these deeper things of God (5:11-14). Therefore, he pauses for another long parenthesis, in 5:11-6:20, filled with warning against apostasy and the encouragement which assurance of salvation gives. In the last verse of chapter 6 he resumes the discussion of Melchizedek as a type of Christ, which theme is developed fully in chapter 7. Thus he proves that, in His person, Christ is better than Aaron, superior to Judaism’s first and, in a sense, her greatest high priest.

Then in 8:1-10:18 he proves that, in His ministry, Christ is superior to Aaron. Therefore, He is superior to all the sons of Aaron—Levitical priests—both in His person and in His work.

Now omitting the parenthesis of 5:11-6:20, think through 4:14-10:18 in outline, and remember always how this heart of the Epistle to the Hebrews presents the official glories of Christ, our Great High Priest:

1. *His heavenly priesthood*, 4:14-5:10
2. *A King-Priest*—better than Aaron in His person, 1:1-28
3. *A Great High Priest*—better than Aaron in His ministry, 8:1-10:18

Truly His official glories as presented on these sacred pages are wonderful! May His Holy Spirit take these things of Christ and show them unto us.

A Great High Priest at the Throne of Grace

4:14-16

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

1. *His name*—“**Jesus the Son of God**” (v. 14)

For the second time in the epistle our Lord’s name, Jesus, is linked with the very throne of God. Once more we are reminded that the Son described in chapter 1 is the Man, Christ Jesus, portrayed in chapter 2. His humanity can never be separated from His deity!

2. *His finished work*—“**passed into the heavens**” (v. 14).

When the Lord Jesus laid aside His glory—*not His deity*—to redeem fallen humanity He walked among men on earth (Philippians 2:5-8). Then, having given His life a ransom for many, having been raised from the dead, He passed through the first heaven which we call the firmament or sky above; through the second heaven, the realm of the stars; and into “**the third heaven,**” which is called “**paradise**” by the apostle Paul (II Corinthians 12:2, 4). That is where God’s throne is, where He and His holy angels and His redeemed dwell.

Now Satan is “**the prince of the power of the air**” (Ephesians 2:2; cf. Ephesians 6:12); he is “**the accuser of our brethren**” (Revelation 12:10). Something of his power may be conceived by the description of the yet future conflict between Satan and his wicked angels and Michael and his holy angels given in Revelation 12:7-9. Therefore, when our Lord passed through the heavens as He ascended into the heaven of heavens, He manifested to angels and demons that He is the Conqueror of Satan and all his hosts.

Having finished the work He came to do on earth, He arose from the grave, triumphant over death, Satan’s mightiest weapon. And He ascended into heaven—as a Man, forever triumphant over the prince of the power of the air. As the God-Man, He is exalted above all His creatures; for He is seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Therefore, as a Priest, ministering for His redeemed, He has all power.

3. *His compassion*—“**touched with the feeling of our infirmities**” (v. 15)

- It was Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, who experienced weariness, hunger, thirst, even the shameful death of the cross,
- It was Jesus who had nowhere to lay His head.
- It was Jesus who was “**tempted in all points like as we are**”—apart from sin!
- It was Jesus—the Man—who was falsely accused, betrayed by His friend, forsaken even by those who loved Him.

4. *His holiness*—“**without sin**” (v. 15)

It was Jesus, the Son of God, who knew no sin (II Corinthians 5:21), who could not be tempted to sin because He was God, absolutely holy. It was Jesus, the Son of God, of whom the Father could say, at His baptism and at His transfiguration, “**This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased**” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; and parallel passages).

The Son, likewise, could say to His enemies concerning Himself:

“**I do always those things that please him [the Father] . . . Which of you convinceth me of sin?**” (John 8:29, 46).

Even the cold, cruel Pilate was compelled to admit, “**I find in him no fault at all**” (John 18:38).

5. *His exalted position*—at “**the throne of grace**” (v. 16)

The eternal, holy God is our compassionate Saviour, seated in the place of all power. His judgment throne has become the throne of grace, a mercy seat for all who will believe that He judged the sinner’s guilt at the cross, paying the penalty in His own body on the tree (I Peter 2:24; John 5:24),

6. The inspired exhortation (vv. 14, 16) —“**Let us hold fast our profession.**” “**Let us therefore come boldly . . .**”

It is as if the inspired apostle were pleading with his fellow Christians, Hebrews, lest they falter under persecution, lest they fail to claim the mercy and grace freely offered by their Great High Priest. Theirs was verily a time of need.

And their Messiah is our Saviour and Lord, **“the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”** (13:8), able and eager to meet our need, whatever it may be (Philippians 4:19).

Chapters 9 and 10 of this epistle unfold the wonders of the blessed truth here stated briefly—**“draw near.”** Our Great High Priest has opened the way into the Holy of Holies, even heaven itself; for the veil of the Temple which was rent in twain was a type of **“his flesh,”** broken for us (10:20; cf. Matthew 27:51; John 14:6).

That is why we may go to His throne-room with boldness, unafraid. That is why we love Him. We are children of the King, with access at all times into His presence. We need no earthly priest to intercede for us; our heavenly Priest invites us to draw near. Our prayers are His delight (Proverbs 15:8). He neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4). Jesus, the Son of God, never fails His own!

God’s Requirements of a Priest Fulfilled in Christ 5:1-10

Two qualifications and two duties of an earthly, Levitical priest are named in verses 1-4; whereas the proof that Christ, in fulfillment of the type, met all these requirements of God is given in verses 5-10.

1. The qualifications of an earthly priest:

a. He had to be **“taken from among men”** (v. 1).

No angel could be a priest; a man, a representative of the people, had to hold that sacred office.

b. *He had to be “called of God”* (v. 4).

- When Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their accomplices rebelled against Moses, seeking to be priests, the earth swallowed them up (Numbers 16).
- When Saul intruded into the priest’s office, he lost his kingdom (I Samuel 13).
- When Uzziah, king of Judah, committed the same sin, he was smitten with leprosy (II Chronicles 26:16-21).

The Jewish Christians knew the significance of Hebrews 5:4: **“And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”**

God caused Aaron’s rod to bud and blossom overnight to prove his divine call to the priesthood, and to silence all who would rebel against the Lord in aspiring to that office (Numbers 17).

Moreover, the life that came to Aaron's dead rod is symbolic of Christ in resurrection, owned of God as High Priest.

2. *The duties of an earthly priest:*

a. He had to offer sacrifices for sins (v. 1).

Because the earthly priest was a sinner, he had to shed the blood of the animal sacrifices by faith in the Saviour to come, "**first for his own sins, and then for the people's**" (7:27; 5:3).

The "**gifts and sacrifices for sins**" (5:1) included the tithes and offerings of the people.

b. He had to "**have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way**" (v. 2), Remembering that he himself was "**compassed with infirmity,**" the earthly priest had to be compassionate, sympathetic toward his erring brethren.

c. He prayed for his people (cf. Luke 1:8, 9; Hebrews 1:25).

Although this duty of the priest in Israel is not mentioned in the passage before us, every Hebrew knew that intercession to God on behalf of the people was an important part of the priest's ministry. As he stood before the golden altar in the Holy Place, his prayers went up with the cloud of incense, as it were, to the very presence of God. Moreover, the high priest, on the Day of Atonement, took the golden censer in his hand when he entered the Holy of Holies to talk with the Lord God, to confess Israel's sin, and to pray for his people. Thus the cloud of incense, representing his prayers, ascended before the Shekinah Glory above the mercy seat. Intercession for his brethren was a fundamental part of the service of an earthly priest.

3. *The qualifications of a Levitical priest fulfilled in Christ:*

Here the order is reversed: the passage before us first tells us that the earthly priest was taken from among men; then it tells us that he was called of God. But our Lord's having been called of God is mentioned first (vv. 5, 6); then His humanity is once more proved (vv. 7-9).

And why is the order reversed here?

Because from all eternity His official glory as "**a priest forever**" was established in the purpose of God; then, "**when the fullness of the time was come**" (Galatians 4:4), He became Man in order to be a Priest—in order to "**be touched with the feeling of our infirmities,**" in order to die as a sacrifice for sin, and in order to be able to intercede for His redeemed as One who, from experience, knows their sorrows.

a. Christ was "**called of God . . . a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek**" (vv. 5, 6, 10).

"**So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest**" (v. 5).

As a Man He did not seek the priesthood; rather, He shrank from it in Gethsemane. As God, He planned to die for sinners; but as a Man, He “**learned . . . obedience by the things which he suffered**” (v. 8). From all eternity He had known unbroken fellowship with the Father and with the Holy Spirit; therefore, He shrank from that awful hour when He who knew no sin should be made sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21), when for the first time His Father’s face would have to be turned away from His beloved Son. That is why He cried out on the cross,

“**My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

Our Lord “**glorified not himself to be made an high priest**”; but the Father, who declared the eternal Sonship of the second person of the Holy Trinity centuries before His virgin birth in Bethlehem’s manger, prophesied also that His eternal, only begotten Son should be “**a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek**” (vv. 5, 6; cf. Psalm 2:7; 110:4). This is the second time in this epistle that Psalm 2:7 has been quoted and applied to Christ (cf. 1:5).

Although, in the eternal counsels of God, Christ was a Priest forever, He was called to the priesthood, in fulfillment of the prophecy, at His baptism on the ground of His personal holiness. His High Priestly work did not begin until He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin on Calvary. Therefore, He was not “**called**” (v. 10), literally, “*saluted*” or “*addressed*,” by the Father as High Priest until He had finished His work of redemption, risen from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high. All heaven must have bowed in worship as the Father saluted the Son in His official glory as “an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”—eternal, unchanging, all-powerful!

Since the Holy Spirit does not explain how Melchizedek was a type of Christ until chapter 7 is reached, we shall wait till we come to that portion of the epistle to consider this subject in detail.

b. *Christ was “**taken from among men**”* (vv. 7-9).

In chapter 2 the fact is established that Christ’s perfect humanity was prophesied in the Old Testament; in 5:7-9 the proof is based upon His earthly experience. And here we are treading on holy ground. That He was “**taken from among men**” is proved by the following human experiences of the Man of Sorrows:

(1) *By His prayers* (v. 7)

The scene is the Garden of Gethsemane. Some of the words the suffering Saviour uttered there were these: “**O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt**” (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:35, 36; Luke 22:42; cf. Psalm 40:6-8; Hebrews 10:5-7).

The Holy Spirit gives us a few glimpses of the prayer-life of our Lord.

- In Galilee He rose “**a great while before day . . . departed into a solitary place, and there prayed**” (Mark 1:35).

- When the multitudes crowded around Him, He “**withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed**” (Luke 5:16).
- Before He chose the Twelve, He spent “**all night in prayer to God**” (Luke 6:12).
- After He had fed the five thousand, He “**went up into a mountain apart to pray**” (Matthew 14:23).
- Before Peter’s great confession, the Lord was “**alone praying**” (Luke 9:18).
- “**As he prayed**” on the mount of transfiguration, “**his face did shine as the sun**” (Luke 9:29).
- When the seventy returned to Him with joy, He uttered one of His few recorded prayers (Luke 10:21).
- As He was “**praying in a certain place, when he had ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray**”; and He gave them the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:1).
- At the tomb of Lazarus He prayed, and this prayer is recorded (John 11:41, 42).
- Shortly before the last Passover He uttered another brief, recorded prayer which was answered by “**a voice from heaven**” (John 12:27-30).
- He told Simon Peter that he had prayed for him (Luke 22:32).
- His great intercessory prayer is written in John 17.
- In Gethsemane He “**kneeled down, and prayed**” (Luke 22:41)—“**fell on his face, and prayed,**” Matthew tells us (26:39).
- And on the cross He prayed for His enemies (Luke 23:34).

Since prayer is a human experience, surely the Lord’s prayer-life proves that He was perfect Man. And what an example it is to His “brethren”!

(2) *By His tears* (v. 7)

“**With strong crying and tears**” the Saviour prayed in Gethsemane; His humanity was very real. At the tomb of Lazarus also, and over His beloved Jerusalem He wept (John 11:35; Luke 19:41). Who can know the fullness of His compassionate love?

(3) *By His trust* (v. 7)

“**In that he feared**” might be paraphrased, “*In that he had reverential trust*” in His Father (cf. Hebrews 2:13).

(4) *By His obedience* (v. 8)

Again we are reminded of such passages as Philippians 2:5-8 and Hebrews 10:5-7. Remember what was said in Lesson 2 of this text concerning Christ’s “**being made perfect**” as the Saviour; and that He was always morally perfect.

(5) *By His suffering* (v. 8)

We can never enter fully into the sufferings of our Lord, but we can thank Him for such love. Because of these human experiences our heavenly Priest was qualified for His heavenly ministry on earth.

Through the School of suffering and humiliation, for more than thirty-three years, He was learning from personal experience the trials, griefs and temptations of His brethren. He had divested Himself of His glory robe and was clad, like Aaron on the Day of Atonement, in the white linen of His personal purity, in order to make propitiation. And now, having made propitiation, He is a Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, and has put on His garments of glory and beauty again. He is thus qualified to assure “**eternal salvation**” to all them who obey Him (v. 9).

4. *Christ fulfills the duties of a Levitical priest—“exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”!* (Ephesians 3:20):

a. He offered Himself once for all as a sacrifice for sin (Cf. 5:1 with 5:9; 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10, 12, 14, 18).

b. He deals compassionately with the ignorant and erring. Compare 5:2 with the compassion of Christ, as manifested in His life on earth, as well as in His continuing, gracious ministry for His redeemed. His patience and His faithfulness are without bounds.

c. “**He ever liveth to make intercession for them . . . that come unto God by him**” (7:25; cf. Romans 8:34). Remember always that John 17 is the kind of prayer our Great High Priest is pleading at the throne of grace.

Gethsemane

5:7, 8

As we consider the glories of Christ portrayed in Hebrews 4:14-5:10, we find ourselves pondering once more the deep mysteries of 5:7. We have seen that it evidently takes us into the Garden of Gethsemane. Here we get one of the few instances which are like a window opened into the inner life of the Lord Jesus.

The Scripture record of His earthly experiences is very economical about what passed secretly between His holy soul and the Father. We have the record of the outward circumstances through which His feet went, though even this is not complete. The closing chapter of His crucifixion is the exception; it is the most detailed story in the four Gospels. How precious the glimpse of His unruffled communion with the Father, as recorded in Matthew 11:25, 26, in an hour of testing; and His prayer-victory in the garden, when His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground! (Luke 22:44).

He who had overcome the seductions of the tempter in the wilderness by the Sword of the Spirit, wielded by Him who was the exponent of the words He used in the conflict, overcame the terrors which the enemy paraded before Him in the garden.

He took the awful cup of wrath our sins helped to fill, though He did not drink it till, forsaken of God, He bore the judgment of the divine holiness against sin on the cross. He prayed to One who was “**able to save him from** [or, ‘out of] **death,**” and He was heard “**in that he feared.**”

That deliverance out of death came by His resurrection. He buried in submission and meekness His will in the will of the Father; and having broken the powers of darkness in death, finally emerged in resurrection triumph. As Hebrews 5:5-10 indicates, the Gethsemane experience, through which Christ passed, was part of the training to which He voluntarily submitted as a preparation for His present High Priestly ministry.

Surely a glory more excellent than the pride and pomp and pageantry of this world shone from the weeping and prostrate Lord Jesus then. He expressed it in these words after He had emerged from the prayer-battle,

“The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

Never before was the will of God honored and loved as in that hour! Thus in perfect calm He was led from the garden as a lamb brought to the slaughter, and He opened not His mouth in the hands of those who slew Him. Thus He became the Great High Priest who ministers still on behalf of all them that obey Him (v. 9) by accepting His finished work on Calvary; ever living, interceding for His own, He ministers in the true tabernacle (8:2) in that **“city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”** (11:10).

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16).

Assignment for Exam 4

1. Read prayerfully all the Scripture references given in these pages.
2. Can you name the two qualifications and three duties of an earthly priest, and show how Christ fulfilled these requirements of the Levitical law?
3. Fill in Exam 4.

CHAPTER FOUR

NOTE: PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT THE MOODY CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL FOR GRADING OF YOUR EXAMS – IF YOU WISH TO COMPLETE THEM, CONSIDER THEM AS AN OPEN BOOK EXAM

1. In the right-hand margin write “True” or “False” after each of the following statements. (16 points)

- a. As Great High Priest, Christ intercedes for us at God’s right hand. _____
- b. As Man of Sorrows, Jesus experienced weariness, hunger and thirst. _____
- c. As Son of God, the Lord Jesus was able to sin. _____
- d. Christ overcame Satan in the wilderness by using the Word of God. _____
- e. Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane was not answered. _____
- f. The “cup” which Jesus drank was the bodily suffering which accompanied His death. _____
- g. The terrors paraded before Christ in Gethsemane were of no significance. _____
- h. It was not really God’s will that His Son should die. _____

In the blank space write the letter of the correct answer, (12 points)

(1) We may now approach God

- (a) With boldness
- (b) With a sacrifice
- (c) With an earthly priest to speak for us
- (d) With great timidity _____

(2) Jesus demonstrated His victory over Satan by

- (a) Remaining on earth for a time
- (b) Setting up His kingdom on earth
- (c) Passing through Satan’s territory as He ascended into heaven
- (d) Going back to heaven by way of Hades _____

(3) The expression “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2)

- (a) Is a title of the risen Lord
- (b) Has to do with Michael the archangel

- (c) Is a name given to Satan
- (d) Is a prophetic reference to aerial warfare during the battle of Armageddon _____

The expression, “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” means that (5 points)

- (a) Christ cannot sympathize with us, since He is in heaven
- (b) We have no high priest at all
- (c) Christ was our High Priest when He lived on earth
- (d) Christ is now in heaven as our sympathetic High Priest _____

Complete the following statements. (10 points)

- a. Satan’s mightiest weapon is _____
- b. “I find no fault in him” was spoken by _____
- c. “The third heaven” is called _____
- d. The veil of the Temple was a type of Christ’s _____

5. Fill in the following outline facts. (10 points)

a. Name God’s requirements of an earthly, Levitical priest.

(1) His qualifications

- (a) _____
- (b) _____

(2) His duties

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____

b. Show how Christ fulfilled God’s requirements of a priest.

(1) His qualifications

- (a) _____
- (b) _____

(2) His duties

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____

6. Give the five proofs of the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus, as set forth in Hebrews 5:7, 8 concerning His earthly experience. (10 points)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

7. Fill in the blanks.

a. Name seven occasions when our Lord prayed during His earthly ministry. (10 points)

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____
- (4) _____
- (5) _____
- (6) _____

b. According to the record of the four Gospels, on what three occasions did the Lord Jesus weep ?

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____

8. How would you explain these passages? (12 points)

a. "Though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect. . ." (5:8, 9).

b. “He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (5:9).

9. Write from memory Hebrews 4:14-16. (15 points)

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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