

Jesus Intercedes for Us

Heb 4:14 - 5:10

SS Lesson for 01/18/2015

Devotional Scripture: Rom 8:29-35

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Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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Doctrine:

1. The qualifications for human high priests were to mediate between men and God, to sympathize with his fellow sinners, and to be called by God to the office (5:1-4).

A. The work of the high priest: As a mediator, he offers gifts and sacrifices for sins on behalf of men in things pertaining to God (5:1).

B. The identification of the high priest with the people: He can sympathize with them, since he is a fellow sinner (5:2-3).

C. The appointment of the high priest: He does not take it upon himself, but must be called by God (5:4).

2. Jesus perfectly fulfills and exceeds the qualifications for the high priest (5:5-10).

A. The appointment of Jesus as high priest: He did not take it upon Himself, but God appointed Him as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:5-6).

B. The identification of Jesus, our high priest, with us: He prayed and learned obedience through what He suffered (5:7-8).

C. The work of Jesus, the perfect high priest: He is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (5:9-10).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines and explains how and why **Jesus Intercedes for Us**. The **study's aim** is to understand Jesus' nature and role as our High Priest and to discover that Jesus is a compassionate intercessor. The **study's application** is to bring our requests to God with a greater awareness of Jesus as our High Priest and intercessor. (*Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*).

Key Verse: Heb 4:15

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Having completed his exposition of Psalm 95 and Israel's failure to enter rest, the writer brought this section of warning to a conclusion that is both sobering and comforting. God's Word is a solemn instrument of divine judgment, but His throne is both gracious and merciful.

The lesson he had just taught from the Old Testament Scriptures was not a mere historical tale. Instead, as had already been made clear by much he had said, it was powerfully relevant to his audience. **For the Word of God is living and active.** Not only that, its penetrating power is greater **than any double-edged sword** and reaches the innermost being of a person so that **it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.** In doing this, it is able to discriminate successfully between what is spiritual in man and what is merely "soulish" or natural (**it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit**), and does so even when these often-contradictory inner elements are interwoven as closely as **joints and marrow.** The inner life of a Christian is often a strange mixture of motivations both genuinely spiritual and completely human. It takes a supernaturally discerning agent such as the Word of God to sort these out and to expose what is of the flesh. The readers might think that they were contemplating certain steps out of purely spiritual motivations when, as God's Word could show them, they were acting unfaithfully as did Israel of old. Let them not suppose, therefore, that their motives would go undetected for **nothing is hidden from God's sight.** Instead, **everything is uncovered and laid bare before... Him.** In saying this, the readers were reminded that, like all Christians, they would someday stand before the judgment seat of Christ where they **must give account** to God for their lives (cf. Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). If at that time their lives are seen to be marked by the kind of failure they have been warned against, the writer implied they will suffer loss of reward (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-15). In this context the loss they suffer will be that of their inheritance-rest. But this need not be so. On the contrary there is every reason to **hold firmly to the faith we profess** in view of the fact that the believers' **great High Priest... has gone through the heavens.** Only once previously (2:1-3:6) had the writer referred explicitly to the priesthood of Jesus, though it was implicit in 1:3, but now he was preparing to undertake an extensive consideration of that truth. But before doing so, he wished to suggest its practical relevance to his readers whom he exhorted to "hold firmly to the faith." They had to know that the priesthood of their Lord offered them all the resources they needed. The One who served as **High Priest** on their behalf had been where they were and had **been tempted in every way, just as they were.** Though unlike them He **was without sin** (cf. 7:26; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 3:5), never responding wrongly to any of His temptations (nor could He, being God), yet as a man He could feel their reality (much as an immovable boulder can bear the brunt of a raging sea) and thus He is able to **sympathize** (lit., "to feel or suffer with") **with their and our weaknesses.** It may indeed be argued, and has been, that only One who fully resists temptation can know the extent of its force. Thus the sinless One has a greater capacity for compassion than any sinner could have for a fellow sinner. With such a High Priest, it follows that believers should **approach the throne of grace with confidence** (cf. 3:6; 10:19, 35). In a book filled with lovely and captivating turns of expression, few excel the memorable phrase "throne of grace." Such a conception of the presence of God into which beleaguered Christians may come at any time, suggests both the sovereignty of the One they approach (since they come to a "throne") and His benevolence. At a point of contact with God like this Christians can fully expect to **receive mercy and find grace to help... in... time of need.**

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In his influential 1962 book *Diffusion of Innovations*, author Everett Rogers sought to explain the rates at which new ideas and technology spread. At one extreme of his scale are the innovators (2.5 percent of the people) and early adopters (13.5 percent). As those labels suggest, people in these categories readily embrace change. At the other end of the scale are the laggards (16 percent). A motivational speaker described these as people who buy push-button phones only because rotary-dial phones are no longer available! We see both extremes—and everywhere in between—in the pages of the New Testament as people are confronted with the new covenant brought by Jesus. Even after embracing the change, some eventually abandoned what they had previously accepted. The people being addressed in the book of Hebrews seem to have been Jewish Christians who were wavering in this regard (Hebrews 3:12; 5:11–6:12; 10:32–35; etc.). Central to the message of Hebrews is the fact that while the Jewish system was good for its intended purposes, it had to be superseded by the new, Christian system, which was far superior in every way. But what about the Jewish priesthood? Didn't priests, especially the high priest, perform vital functions? There had been high priests for centuries and centuries, all the way back to Aaron, the brother of Moses. How were the functions of this priesthood to be covered in the new system? The author of Hebrews provided the answer.

Outside the book of Hebrews, the man Melchizedek is mentioned by name in only two places in the Bible: Genesis 14:18 and Psalm 110:4. Genesis 14 notes this man's encounter with Abram (Abraham) after the latter had won a small military victory. As Abraham and his men returned home, they were met by "Melchizedek king of Salem," who brought them bread and wine, plus a blessing for Abraham. In turn, Abraham gave that king a tenth of the spoils of the battle. Melchizedek was more than a king, however, for Genesis 14:18 refers to him as a "priest of God Most High." This is the first time in the Bible the term priest is used. Here was a priest who had nothing to do with Aaron or the tribe of Levi (from which all Israelite priests descended), for he predated both by hundreds of years! Regarding Psalm 110, Jesus identified himself as one of the two Lords in the opening line "The Lord says to my Lord" (see Matthew 22:41–45), and Psalm 110:1b–3 goes on to describe his kingly authority. Then Psalm 110:4 declares "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'" Leadership in ancient Israel was typically understood to be vested in the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. Usually those were distinct functions that did not overlap (compare 2 Chronicles 19:11; 26:16–20). But there were exceptions. Ezekiel was both a prophet and a priest (Ezekiel 1:3). King David performed the functions of a priest on one occasion (2 Samuel 6:16–18), as did King Solomon (1 Kings 8:62–64). Jesus ended up being the ultimate exception, as we shall see. The author of Hebrews (whose identity is not conclusively known) is a master of the Old Testament, knowing well all the data on Melchizedek. The author presents the data with regard to Jesus using a technique called typology as he draws on patterns from the Old Testament to understand the events and people of the New Testament.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

A Sympathetic Intercessor (Heb 4:14–5:3)

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.

3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.

A intercessor who deserves our confidence (14)

Deserves our confidence because He is faithful (Heb 3:6)

6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

Deserves our confidence because we are partakers in Him (Heb 3:14)

14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

Deserves our confidence because Jesus is faithful (Heb 10:23)

23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Deserves our confidence because He has armor that will help me stand against Satan (Eph 6:10-13)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

A intercessor who understands us (15-16)

Understands because He was tempted (Luke 4:2)

2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

Understands because He was made like us (Heb 2:17-18)

17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Understands because we are His sheep (John 10:14-15)

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me- 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Understands because He knows His own (2 Tim 2:19)

19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

Understands because of love (1 Cor 8:3)

3 But the man who loves God is known by God.

Understands because He humbled Himself and was obedient (Phil 2:6-8)

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!

A intercessor who is qualified (5:1-3)

Qualified because He was appointed

Appointed as Christ (Acts 3:19-20)

19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

Appointed as judge (Acts 10:42)

42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

Appointed as head of everything for the Church (Eph 1:22)

22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

Appointed as heir of all things (Heb 1:2)

2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Appointed because of His faithfulness (Heb 3:1-2)

3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.

Appointed by the oath of God (Heb 7:28)

28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

Qualified because He offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice

Offered Himself because of the love of God (John 3:16)

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Offered Himself as a sacrifice of atonement (Rom 3:25)

25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-

Offered Himself once for all (Heb 9:26)

26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Offered Himself to make us holy (Heb 10:10)

10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Offered Himself for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2)

2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

A Specially Anointed Intercessor (Heb 5:4-6)

4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You."

6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek";

The need for an anointed calling (4)

A calling because the Law required it (Num 18:5-7)

6 I myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD to do the work at the Tent of Meeting. 7 But only you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain. I am giving you the service of the priesthood as a gift. Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death."

A calling that God provided to Jesus (John 8:54)

54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.

A calling to be like Melchizedek (Heb 7:14-16)

14 For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16 one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.

A calling that came from heaven (John 3:27)

27 To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven.

Jesus' calling was a vocation to the work of the priest (Barnes Notes)

Jesus was not ambitious; that he did not obtrude himself into the great office of high priest; he did not enter upon its duties without being regularly called to it. Paul claimed that Christ held that office; but, as he was not descended from Aaron, and as no one might perform its duties without being regularly called to it, it was incumbent on him to show that Jesus was not an intruder, but had a regular vocation to that work.

The evidence of Jesus' anointed calling (5-6)

Evidenced by being God's Son

As acknowledged by God (Matt 3:16-17)

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

As proclaimed in the Psalms (Ps 2:7)

7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

As proclaimed in the gospel (Acts 13:32-33)

32 "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers 33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'

A Son sent by God (Rom 8:3)

3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,

A Son superior to angels (Heb 1:3-5)

4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. 5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"?

A Son, who if acknowledged, brings the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 John 4:15)

15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

A Son who provides the overcoming of the world (1 John 5:5)

5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

As acknowledged by Peter (Matt 16:16)

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Evidenced by being a priest in the order of Melchizedek

A priest of God Most High (Gen 14:18-20)

18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20 And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

A priest forever (Ps 110:4)

4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

A priest designated by God (Heb 5:10)

10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

A priest who enters on our behalf (Heb 6:20)

20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

A Sacrificing Intercessor (Heb 5:7-10)

7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"

Sacrificial suffering (7-8)

Suffering prophesied in Scripture (Luke 24:45-46)

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

Suffering foretold by the prophets (Acts 3:18)

18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.

Suffering by the author of our faith (Heb 12:2)

2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Suffering that make Jesus perfect (Heb 2:10)

10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Suffering that was predicted (1 Peter 1:10-11)

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Suffering that Jesus gave as an example for us (1 Peter 2:20-21)

20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Suffering in His body (1 Peter 4:1)

1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

Sacrificial saving work (9-10)

A salvation that God appointed through Jesus (1 Thess 5:9)

9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A salvation Jesus will bring with Him at His second coming (Heb 9:28)

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

A salvation through justification by Jesus' blood (Rom 5:9)

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

A salvation that is gained through belief in Jesus (John 6:40)

40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

A salvation that bring eternal life (John 11:25)

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

A salvation that is hidden in Jesus (Col 3:3-4)

3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Steven Cole

Hebrews is the only book in the New Testament to teach that Jesus is our high priest. I would guess that if you were honest, many of you would admit to thinking, "Couldn't we study something more practical? I'm struggling in my marriage! I'm trying to raise kids in this evil world! I'm wrestling with personal problems! And now we're going to plunge into six chapters dealing with Jesus as our high priest? Can't you find something more relevant to preach on?"

On this matter, Donald Hagner (*Encountering the Book of Hebrews* [Baker Academic], p. 82) offers a helpful word:

Until one gains an adequate sense of the overwhelming majesty of the thrice-holy God and simultaneously a true sense of one's sinfulness and unworthiness (as Isaiah did [Isa. 6:1-5]), one is not in a position to understand or appreciate the importance of priests and their work. Our failure on these two points probably is what makes the idea of priesthood unfamiliar and without apparent significance or meaning. One of the reasons that the Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New Testament is exactly here, since on the one hand, it provides us with a sense of the sovereignty, majesty, and power of God, and on the other hand, it confronts us with the reality of human failures and needs. In the light of these two points, the importance of sacrifices and priests readily emerges.

This is one of the most important spiritual truths that you can learn: *Growth in the Christian life requires gaining a clearer understanding of who God is and who you are, which drives you in desperation to the cross of Jesus Christ.* This is why Paul gloried in the cross (Gal. 6:14): he saw God as the one who dwells in unapproachable light, he saw himself as the chief of sinners, and he saw the cross as the place where he found mercy (1 Tim. 6:16; 1:14-16).

This is the point that John Calvin makes so eloquently in the opening chapters of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. by John McNeill [Westminster Press]). His opening sentence is: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." McNeill comments (1:36, footnote 3), "These decisive words set the limits of Calvin's theology and condition every subsequent statement." Calvin begins by showing that none of us will seek God until we first become displeased with ourselves as sinners. He also argues (1:37) that...

... [M]an never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy—this pride in innate in all of us—unless by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity. Moreover, we are not thus convinced if we look merely to ourselves and not also to the Lord, who is the sole standard by which this judgment must be measured.

Thus if you want to know the significance of this central theme of the Book of Hebrews, you must ask God for a clearer understanding of His absolute holiness and majesty, and for a deeper insight into your own sinfulness and uncleanness apart from Christ. This will lead you into a deeper appreciation of what Jesus did for you on the cross as the high priest who entered the holy place, not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with His own blood (9:11-14). And, you will find that a deeper appreciation of God's holiness, your own sinfulness, and the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice is one of the most practical doctrines in the Bible, because it humbles your pride. Pride is at the root of every relational conflict and just about any sin that you can name.

With that as an introduction, I am again going to follow the Puritan method of first explaining the doctrine and then giving its "use," or application. The theme of our text is:

Jesus Christ perfectly fulfills the qualifications for the kind of high priest that we all need.

Doctrine:

1. The qualifications for human high priests were to mediate between men and God, to sympathize with his fellow sinners, and to be called by God to the office (5:1-4).

"For" (5:1) points back to 4:14-15 to show that our high priest fulfills the requirements of the priesthood. In 5:1-4, he lists three qualifications for Aaronic priests: their work (5:1); their identification with the people (5:2-3); and, their appointment (5:4). In 5:5-10, he shows in reverse order how Jesus fulfills and exceeds these, as a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

A. The work of the high priest: As a mediator, he offers gifts and sacrifices for sins on behalf of men in things pertaining to God (5:1).

If men are not sinners, separated from a holy God, then there is no need for priests. They were appointed (5:4 will show that God appointed them) "on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." No Jew was free to enter the Holy of Holies to meet directly with God. Even the high priest could only go in there once a year on the Day of Atonement, and very carefully at that, or God would kill him instantly. Every Jew knew that he desperately needed a mediator between him and God, and the high priest was that God-ordained mediator.

"Gifts and sacrifices" probably here is a general description of all of the designated offerings (Philip Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans], p. 175). The task of making such offerings was reserved for the priests. Israel's first king, Saul, took it upon himself to offer sacrifices, and for this presumption, God removed the kingdom from Saul's descendants and gave it to David (1 Sam. 13:1-14). Later, King Uzziah, who was otherwise a godly king, presumed to take incense and offer it before the Lord. As a result, God struck him instantly with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21). The priests alone were designated to make offerings to God on behalf of the people.

Note that these offerings were "for sins." The entire Jewish sacrificial system, but especially the Day of Atonement, underscored the problem of human sinfulness in the presence of the holy God. Without the appropriate sacrifice, sinners could not approach God or be reconciled to Him. God designed all of this to point ahead to the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who offered Himself as the perfect and final sacrifice for our sins.

This means that you cannot be reconciled to God until you see your great need as a sinner before His holy presence. It is that awareness of your true condition that causes you to cry out, with the publican in Jesus' story, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner" (Luke 18:13). The gospel is not, "If you've got a few problems, try Jesus. He can help you." The gospel has to do with our fundamental alienation from God because of our sins, and the gracious provision that God has made in His Son.

B. The identification of the high priest with the people: He can sympathize with them, since he is a fellow sinner (5:2-3).

An effective mediator truly understands the condition of those he represents. The Jewish high priests could understand the problem of sinners because, before they could go into the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the people, they had to offer a sacrifice for their own sins (Lev. 16:6; Heb. 7:27; 9:7). An awareness of their own weaknesses enabled the Levitical priests to “deal gently with the ignorant and misguided.” The Greek word translated “deal gently” meant to take “the middle course between apathy and anger” (Leon Morris, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelien [Zondervan], 12:47). The priest should not act indifferently toward sin, but neither should he be harsh with repentant sinners, since he knew from personal experience how prone we are to sin.

C. The appointment of the high priest: He does not take it upon himself, but must be called by God (5:4).

Although in the first century the Jewish high priesthood had degenerated into a political appointment, the author overlooks that and goes back to the original intention. God called Aaron to the office of high priest (Exod. 28:1-3), and he served as the example for all that followed. God’s appointment of Aaron to this office was confirmed during the rebellion of Korah, who accused Moses and Aaron of appointing themselves (Num. 16:1-35). God showed the rebels and all of Israel that He had appointed Moses and Aaron by causing the ground to open up and swallow the rebels and their households. When some in the congregation grumbled at this judgment, a plague broke out and killed over 14,000.

That was a sober lesson that no one may dare to approach God in the way of man’s own choosing. The only way to approach God is through the way of God’s choosing, through His ordained mediator. In the Old Testament, that mediator was the high priest. But the fact that all of these priests were themselves sinners pointed to the inadequacy of that old covenant and the need for the perfect high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Jesus perfectly fulfills and exceeds the qualifications for the high priest (5:5-10).

The author shows here how Jesus not only fulfilled the requirements for the Aaronic priesthood, but superceded them by being a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (a theme he will expand on in chapter 7). He presents Jesus’ qualifications in reverse order to those of the high priest:

A. The appointment of Jesus as high priest: He did not take it upon Himself, but God appointed Him as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:5-6).

The author cites again (see 1:5) Psalm 2:7 to show that even though the Christ is the Son of God, in a unique relationship with the Father, He did not glorify Himself by taking the office of high priest unto Himself. Rather, God designated Him as such, and not just a priest in the limited human sense of the Aaronic priests, but “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Ps. 110:4). Psalm 110:1 shows that the Son’s exalted position is to sit at the Father’s right hand in the place of sovereign rule. But Psalm 110:4 shows that in this Messiah, the offices of King and Priest will be united, as He is designated a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. The point of the two quotations here is to show that Jesus did not presume to take the office of high priest by His own authority, but God appointed Him to this place.

B. The identification of Jesus, our high priest, with us: He prayed and learned obedience through what He suffered (5:7-8).

These verses elaborate on 4:15, that Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses because He has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Similar to the Levitical priests, Jesus could identify with the weaknesses of the people. But, unlike these priests, He had no sin of His own. “In the days of His flesh” refers to Jesus’ earthly life, but verse 7 especially points to Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane as He wrestled with the imminent prospect of taking our sins upon Himself. Jesus’ intense struggle in the Garden was not just over the thought of the physical agony of crucifixion. Rather, He was struggling with the thought of being separated from the Father as He bore our sin. This was so intense that He literally sweat blood.

None of the gospel accounts report Jesus’ “loud crying and tears,” but this information probably came directly from one of the apostles who were present. It shows us that even though Jesus is fully God, and the cross was central to God’s predetermined plan (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28), the actual implementation of that plan was not easy. It was not just playacting a role! Jesus’ suffering in the Garden and on the cross was more intense than we can ever imagine, because we do not know what it was like to be one with the Father from all eternity until that dreadful hour.

There is debate about the content of Jesus' request. If He was asking to be saved from death, in what sense was His prayer heard, since He was not delivered from that awful death? Probably Jesus was asking to be sustained through the agony of bearing our sins, and to be brought through death into resurrection and complete restoration with the Father. The word "piety" (NASB) is better rendered "reverent submission" (NIV). It refers to His reverential submission to the will of the Father when He prayed, "not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

When it says, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered," it does not mean that He was formerly disobedient. The first phrase is better translated, "Son though He was." It points to His position as God's unique Son (5:5). Jesus "learned obedience" in the sense that He experienced what obedience means through what He suffered. He was always obedient to the Father's will, but the proof of obedience is revealed in situations where obedience is not pleasant. Suppose that when my children were younger, I told you, "I have obedient kids. Let me prove it to you: Kids, eat your ice cream." You would say, "That's no test of obedience!" The real test would be, "Kids, clean your rooms!" Jesus experienced obedience to the maximum when He went to the cross.

The author's point is that Jesus is our perfect high priest in that His prayers and obedience through His sufferings show that He can sympathize with us in our sufferings. Therefore, we should obediently persevere in trials through prayer.

C. The work of Jesus, the perfect high priest: He is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (5:9-10).

"Having been made perfect" does not imply that Jesus was imperfect previously. Rather, the idea is that His experience of obediently suffering unto death qualified Jesus as the Savior (we saw the same idea in 2:10). "Eternal salvation" is contrasted with the temporary nature of the Old Testament sacrifices, which could never make perfect those who offered them (10:1-4). The word translated "the source" (NASB, NIV; "author," NKJV) of eternal salvation means "the cause." The cause of our salvation is not that God foresaw that we would believe. The cause of our salvation is that the triune God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

Jesus became the cause of salvation "to all those who obey Him." This is not teaching salvation by works. Rather, to have saving faith is to obey Jesus, who commanded, "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Paul refers to "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; see also 1 Pet. 1:2). You cannot separate saving faith from obedient faith, or unbelief from disobedience (Heb. 4:18-19; 4:6, 11). Those who truly believe in Jesus as Savior live in obedience to Him as Lord. Those who claim to believe but who live in disobedience to Him are not truly saved (Matt. 7:21-23).

Then (5:10) the author comes back to God's designating Jesus as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, which places Him in a category by Himself, above the Levitical priests. He will develop this further in chapter 7, after the extended exhortation of chapter 6. His point, then, in this section is to show that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfills and exceeds the qualifications of the high priest in the Old Testament. To go back to that old system would be to return to a severely inferior system and to abandon the high priest that we desperately need.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-15-kind-priest-you-need-hebrews-51-10>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

There have been many times in my ministry when a visitor to my church asked to see a priest. On one occasion, a young man met me after the Sunday service and said, "Father, I need to confess." I quickly realized that he was coming from a Roman Catholic background, and he wanted someone to hear his confession as a Catholic priest might do. I told him that I was not a priest, but that I would be glad to talk and pray with him. We did just that in my office. His problem was that he was getting married that week, but he still had strong feelings of attraction for a woman other than his fiancée. In his own way, he was suffering in his attempt to be righteous. Rugged individualism is not the Christian way when it comes to spiritual matters. We all need someone to listen to us and to pray for us. This is partly why a specialized category of priests is valued in some branches of Christianity. But in the New Testament era we do not need this kind of priest to make intercession. We are all priests (1 Peter 2:9), and we all can pray for each other, something Paul asked his readers to do for him (see Ephesians 6:19). Even so, we ultimately and always rely on Jesus, our faithful and eternal high priest, to intercede for us at the very throne of God.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. We have a High Priest who is perfect but still understands our temptation (Heb. 4:14-15)
2. We should be confident that God will give us grace, because Jesus intercedes for us (vs. 16)
3. The person in the position of the high priest must be appointed by God (5:1-4)
4. Jesus was appointed to the position of high priest. He did not solicit it, even though He deserved it (vss. 5-6)
5. The Father hears Jesus' prayers because of Jesus' perfect obedience (vss. 7-8)
6. Jesus' work of obedience accomplishes our salvation (vss. 9-10)