

# CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO AARON AND THE LEVITICAL ORDER

## GOLDEN TEXT

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.”  
(Hebrews 4:14)

## USEFUL PRACTICE

As the son of God and High Priest, Jesus effectively intercedes for his church.

## SCRIPTURE READING

**Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-14**

14 - Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

15 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

16 - Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

5.1 - Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

2 - He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.

3 - This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

4 - And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

5 - In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."

6 - And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

7 - During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

8 - Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered

9 - and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

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

11 - We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.

12 - In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

13 - Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.

14 - But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

## **GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

To point out the priesthood of the Lord Jesus as superior to the Levitical order and that, therefore, He had authority to inaugurate a new order.

## **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

**I. To biblically demonstrate** the nature of the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus Christ;

**II. To teach** that the priesthood of Christ was higher in service;

**III. To express** the theological importance of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus.

## INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the priesthood of Jesus begins to be exposed from Hebrews 4:14-16. In this section the author presents Jesus as "the great high priest who has ascended into heaven." Jesus, therefore, was a great, merciful and compassionate High Priest. In the section of Hebrews 5:1-10, the sacred author presents a detailed discussion about priesthood assignments and qualifications. His intention is to show that the priesthood of Jesus overcame the Aaronic priesthood and the Levitical order in greatness and qualification. The human priests were fraught with weaknesses and defects, and therefore could do little for men. However, Jesus, as High Priest, was of a higher and perfect order and, on account of this, capable of pitying and helping those who turn to Him. Finally, the author ends by censuring the believers for their ignorance in the face of a doctrine of such great relevance.

### I - A HIGHER PRIESTHOOD IN QUALIFICATION

**1. For better representing men before God.** The writer of Hebrews shows that the Old Covenant high priest was chosen from among his peers (Heb. 5:1). With this exposition the author wants to draw attention to the mystery of the incarnation when God is humanized to deal with men. Even because, as a certain theologian states, "it is necessary for a man to be chosen to represent men in dealing with their sins against God." (in a free translation). Jesus, our High Priest, is the one who presented us before God. Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, which offered offerings and sacrifices, Jesus offered his own life as an offering to God on our behalf (Heb. 4:14-16).

**2. For better understanding the human condition.** To better understand the human condition, the author proceeds with his exposition of the priestly function. The high priest was one taken from among the people and with the ability to understand the human condition. The term "have compassion" (Hebrews 5:3, 3) translates the Greek word *metriopatheia*, which means choosing a middle ground in order to avoid extremes. A priest who dealt with the demands of the Law and, at the same time, with human weaknesses, needed at all times to avoid extremes. This became more emblematic when he needed to make sacrifices for the sins of others and his own. He could not be complacent

with sin or act with extreme severity. In the mind of the sacred author only Jesus, the perfect High Priest, could fulfill this requirement.

**3. For the position he held.** A high priest was not a person who wanted to be one, but he whom the Lord called (Heb. 5:4). The context makes it clear that the word "honor" has the sense of "office" or "position" and is related to the priestly ministry the Lord delegated to someone. Being a minister of the altar was something extremely honorable, of great importance and of great responsibility. Both Aaron and his sons were chosen directly by God for this ministry (Exod. 28:1; Ps 105:26). Jesus, our High Priest, was in all things superior and more honorable than Aaron, because he belonged to a higher priestly order and had been sent from heaven for this mission.

## **II - A HIGHER PRIESTHOOD IN SERVICE**

**1. Because of the royalty and the purpose he lived for.** In his exposition on the priesthood of Christ, the author combines Psalm 2:7 with 110:4. These quotations serve for the sacred author to argue in favor of the divine sonship and the royalty of the priesthood of Jesus. Respected experts in the Old Testament point out that the type of "messiah" the Jews of Jesus' time expected was of a political-religious nature. However, the texts of the Psalms show that Jesus Christ was not a political or merely religious messiah, but the Messiah acclaimed by God in Psalm 2:7 and recognized by the Father as High Priest in Psalm 110:4: the Messiah whom Christians recognize as the Son of God, King and High Priest of the New Covenant. Our Christ, even as Son of God, did not glorify himself nor seek honor for himself, but exercised the priesthood through the will of the Father (Phil. 2:5-7).

**2. Because of the holy life that he had.** The first part of verse seven of chapter five of Hebrews is used by the sacred author to refer to the pious life of Jesus. Intercession, compassion, prayer and supplications are qualities present in a true priest. The author emphasizes that the facts he raised occurred when Jesus still exercised his earthly ministry, thus revealing his holy living. The interpreters point out that these facts are related to the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33-36), as the Gospels tell us and serves to show that such a holy, pious and compassionate priest is capable of having compassion on human weaknesses and those who suffered.

**3. Because of the submission he showed.** The expression "and was heard in that he feared." (Hebrews 5:5, KJV) is translated in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) as "and he was heard because of his

reverent submission." The reason for the difference in the translations is the word *eulabeia* used by the author. This word only appears twice in the Greek New Testament, and the two occurrences are found in Hebrews: one here in chapter 5 and the one in Hebrews 12:28. In Hebrews 12:28, both the KJV and the NRSV translate it as "reverence." There is no doubt that this last sense must be maintained here. *Eulabeia*, therefore, keeps the sense of a pious and reverent fear. The fearing life of Jesus led him to endure suffering for humanity and thus to complete the atoning work for all.

### **III - A HIGHER PRIESTHOOD AS TO THE THEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE**

**1. A transcendent doctrine.** The last part of the section of Hebrews 5:11-14 opens a parenthesis created by the author to draw attention to the theological importance of this doctrine - the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The understanding of this doctrine was of paramount importance for Christian living, but the lack of growth on the part of the readers made it difficult for the author to understand it. It was a doctrine that far transcended those principles that formed the Christian faith. It required maturity, which would have been possible only if they exercised their minds in the meditation on the Word.

**2. An essential doctrine.** If on the one hand this doctrine was by its nature transcendent, on the other, it formed the core of the Christian faith. Its understanding brings substance to our faith. No wonder the Hebrews were indolent, discouraged, and weak. They had no substantial faith (Heb. 5:13, 14). When one does not have enough maturity in the Christian life it becomes difficult and sometimes impossible to make the right choices.

### **CONCLUSION**

The end of chapter four of Hebrews and the whole of chapter five bring relevant aspects about the priestly system in biblical days. We have seen that the author first presented the qualifications that were required of a priest and then contrasted them with the perfect High Priest, Jesus. The Son of God lived our whole human condition and, as a perfect priest, is enabled to intercede for us. This is a doctrine that we should all know well.