

After declaring the superiority of Jesus over Moses, the writer of Hebrews now begins to compare and contrast the priesthood of Jesus to the Levitical priesthood that had been established under the Mosaic Law. As our great high priest, Jesus welcomes us into His presence to find mercy and grace when we ask for forgiveness for our sins.

Hebrews 4

14 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.

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest” – The writer of Hebrews has already identified Jesus as our high priest twice. He described Jesus as “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17) and as “the Apostle and High Priest of our profession” (Heb. 3:1). **“that is passed into the heavens”** – Jesus was not a high priest serving in the earthly tabernacle in Jerusalem (which still existed at the time Hebrews was written). Jesus had been crucified, raised from the dead, and had now ascended to the Father. However, the earthly priest once a year would pass behind the veil inside the temple into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement in order to make atonement for the people. In comparison, Jesus Christ had passed into the heavenly Holy of Holies to offer His own blood in atonement for us.

“Jesus the Son of God” – Our great high priest is Jesus, Who is also the Son of God.

“let us hold fast our profession [that which one professes or confesses]” – Understanding that Jesus is our great high priest and that He has passed into the heavens to make atonement for us, we should hold tightly to what we have confessed (our belief in Christ).

15 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.

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling [to be sympathetic] of our infirmities [weaknesses]” – Jesus is not a high priest Who is unsympathetic concerning the weaknesses of our sin nature. He understands what we are going through when we are faced with temptations. **Psalms 103:12-14** “*As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*”

“but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” – Satan had tempted Jesus during the 40 days in the wilderness and when he had failed to cause Jesus to sin, he left temporarily (Luke 4:13 “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season”). Satan did not give up trying to tempt Jesus into sin and came back time and time again with various temptations. As a result, Jesus faced every temptation that we may face without sinning. Thus He understands what temptation is and how easy it is to yield and has sympathy toward us when our weaknesses cause us to sin. **Heb. 2:18** “*For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour [help] them that are tempted.*”

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

“Let us therefore come boldly [freedom; confidence] unto the throne of grace” – This “boldness” is not arrogance but confidence in the knowledge that God will forgive us when we sincerely ask Him. In the day that this was written, an offense against a king often resulted in death and an appeal to the king for mercy was likely to fail. Jesus doesn’t sit ready to scold us when we sin because He knows what it means to be tempted and how easily our sin nature yields to temptation since He also was in human flesh. Instead He invites us to come to Him freely with confidence instead of cowering in fear that we might be rejected.

“that we may obtain mercy” – Our sin is still a serious matter, but the writer doesn’t say that we should come to God to attempt to obtain mercy for our sins. He says that we will obtain mercy because that is why Christ came. **Rom. 8:32** “*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*”

“and find grace” – In addition to mercy, we will also find God’s grace as He forgives us of our sin. Again, this is not stated as only a possibility that might happen if we are lucky but as a definite result when we come to God for forgiveness.

“to help in time of need” – When we sin we have allowed the weaknesses of our flesh to prevail as we give in to temptation. When we come to God for forgiveness, He gives us mercy and grace and these things help us resist the temptations. **Heb. 2:18** “*For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour [help] them that are tempted.*”

Hebrews 5

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

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained [appointed; set in place] for men in things *pertaining* to God” – The office of high priest in the Levitical system was only through appointment by God. No man could appoint himself nor could another man appoint him. God chose Aaron as the first high priest and the office passed down by lineage through Aaron’s descendants. Also, each high priest was “taken from among men.” He was a man and understood the weaknesses of being a man, therefore he could have compassion on those for whom he was offering sacrifices (v. 2). He was a man ordained by God “for men” in the things of God. His purpose was to minister to the spiritual needs of the people.

“that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” – The way the high priest ministered to the people was through the offering of gifts and sacrifices on the behalf of men. It was the high priest who made atonement for the sins of the people with blood on the mercy seat once a year on the Day of Atonement.

2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

As a man himself, the high priest is also “compassed” (*encircled; surrounded; encumbered*) with the same sinful weaknesses as the people to whom he is ministering. Thus, he is able to have compassion on those who are uneducated in the things of God (“ignorant”) and those who have gone astray (“out of the way”) from following Him. The high priest will compassionately offer sacrifices for these and try to lead them back to the LORD.

3 And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

For that reason (he is a sinful human being), the high priest must not only make sin offerings for the people, but for himself as well. He is no different from the people in the sense that he also is a sinner in need of atonement.

4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

“And no man taketh this honour unto himself” – The office of high priest is not an elected office nor is it one that a man can volunteer to take. It is not an office governed by man.

“but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” – The only way a man can become high priest is to be called by God, as Aaron was. God called Aaron by name to be the first high priest and only his descendants can be high priest.

5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.

“So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest” – Men attempt to exalt themselves all the time, but Jesus never attempted to exalt Himself other than to state what glory His Father had already given Him. **John 8:54** “*Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God.*” Jesus did not decide one day to be a high priest, but He obeyed His Father in accepting the office and offering Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

“but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee” – Jesus did not make Himself a high priest but He was made a high priest by the same Person Who declared Him to be His Son. The writer quotes Psalm 2:7 again to remind us that Jesus is the Son of God.

6 As he saith also in another *place*, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

“As he saith also in another *place*” – The writer has mentioned that God has called Jesus as a high priest and reminded us that Jesus is the Son of God. He now quotes from a Messianic psalm (Psalm 110:4) to point out that God had previously determined that the priesthood of Jesus would be different than the Levitical priesthood established under the Mosaic Law. The writer will deal in more detail with the Jesus’ connection to Melchisedec later in chapter 7, but we should notice a few things in the current context.

“Thou *art* a priest for ever” – The quote from Psalm 110:4 says that the Messiah (Jesus) is a priest forever. Levitical priests could only serve a limited amount of time because they were mortal but Jesus Christ is an eternal great high priest, continually interceding for us with the Father (**Heb. 7:25** “*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*”).

“after the order of Melchisedec” – The priesthood of Jesus is not something He inherited by being a descendant of Aaron. Jesus’ human heritage was through the tribe of Judah, specifically the Davidic line. Jesus was in line to inherit the crown over Israel. Melchisedec was the king of Salem (the city whose name was later changed to Jerusalem) and also a priest (**Gen. 14:18** “*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God*”). Jesus’ priesthood follows the example of Melchisedec being a priest and king. Jesus Christ is our priest and king.

Verses 7-14: Christ executed the office of high priest through the things He suffered by going to the cross. The experience of suffering helped Him grow complete as the author of our salvation in obedience to His Father. The writer has much more to say about the comparison of Jesus to Melchisedec but he finds them difficult to express since He knows that they are slow to believe the gospel and what he will have to say. He speaks of the irony that, as Jews, they ought to know the scriptures and yet their understanding of them is still at the level of an immature child.