The Book of Hebrews

Chapter 5

As we started Hebrews, we have noted that the author is striving to bring clarity to the Jewish Christians regarding the person and Godhood of Jesus. This is an attempt to help clear up many misconceptions the Jewish Christians are getting as they are being misled by the Jewish priesthood who are desperately moving against the Christian movement, and trying to resume their former power over the Jewish people. There is also, the Romans who, under despotic rulers striving to gain control over any supposed opposition against their rule.

He first started off with the idea that Jesus was above the angels in that He, Jesus, as God created the angels, and that the angels served Him. This is a refutation of doctrine that seemed to have filtered into the Hebrew religious writings. However, with Jesus coming as man to mankind, His creation, He came as a man, and although His angels announced Him and served Him on occasion, ie; they announced Him at His conception and at His birth, and then attended to Him at His wilderness temptations, yet He was a little lower than the angels in position.

Does that make sense? That, although He was above all things, because He created all things, he then comes down from His position in Heaven and becomes a human part of the creation He made, being tempted in all things but remaining sinless despite the temptations. This would place Him below the angels because He would then, be mortal, and would suffer and die because of all the sins of His human creation that rejected Him in the first place. (oh, this can get complex) Being mortal then places Him a little lower than the angels. But then He rises from the dead and assumes His rightful place at the Right Hand of God, and goes back to being part of the Godhead.

Now we have taken care of the first argument of Christ’s position regarding angels, next we come to Christ’s position regarding Moses who was the ‘father of the Hebrew nation’ as Abraham was ‘father of the Hebrew people’. Moses was faithful to the whole ‘House of Israel’ but Jesus created the House of Israel. The writer is emphasizing the fact that Jesus was Lord over all, not some angel, or prophet or some good teacher.

With that part out of the way, the writer next refines the comparison of Jesus as the High priest, and that is what this chapter we will study, gets into. The Hebrew people have always had ‘priests’ at various levels, and from the time of Moses when his brother, Aaron, was appointed as priest and high priest, the priesthood has had full authority over the people, and how they lived. But what sets the high priest apart from the other priests? Let’s see what the writer has to say about this.

Hebrews 5: 1 through 4; (read)

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.”*

The office of priest arose in mankind well before Aaron. The earliest priest mentioned in the Bible was Melchizedek who presided over Abraham. We have no clue where he came from, or who he represented except he did bless Abraham in God’s name. And we also find priests with most other nations including Egypt. I suppose there has to be a central, religious leader who keeps the particular belief of the people in order so that any worship does not descend into chaos.

The writer explains that all religious leaders, ie: priests and especially the High Priest are chosen from men, by men and are ordained by God to do those things ordered by God in His Law. Now the priests in general are to take care of the things demanded by Law in the temple and worship areas, and the High Priest is the man who has the direct communication, who intercedes between God and the people in the Holy of Holy’s. The High Priest takes the Event of the Sacrifices as performed by the other priests on behalf of the people into the Holy of Holy’s as the atonement gifts.

Originally there was just one High Priest but by Jesus time there were many and they took turns attending to the work regarding the Holy of Holy’s. If we remember from our histories, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was one such a high priest. It was during the dime of Elizabeth’s pregnancy that he was serving in the Temple as High Priest, and when during this time the Angel came and visited him and told him of the things to come, and about the birth of his son John. Because both he and Elizabeth were old, he did not believe, and therefore, he was made mute until the birth occurred.

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

This goes to the humanity of all men that being chosen of the people and from the people, the high priest is just as fallible as his constituents and in being so, has true understanding or should have true understandings, of their feelings, desires, temptations, and their falling into sin, either willfully or ignorantly. This should be for our religious leaders today, don’t you think?

Sometimes I wonder if we don’t hold up our ministers and priests today, to a far higher standard than they really should be. They are, after all, just men (and women in some cases), and are just as able to fall into temptation and into sin as we all are. I can remember years ago, at a party attended by some religious leaders, (I won’t tell the denomination) where at least two of the Church leaders got falling down drunk, as there were alcoholic beverages being served, and they all imbibed to various amounts. Acted pretty foolishly too.

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

Therefore, within the Jewish Faith, being bound by the same Law as the people, the High Priest IS bound to offer sacrifices for himself and his sins just as the people are bound to offer sins for their transgressions. The Law of the Day of Atonement required a sin offering of a bull and a ram for the High Priest himself, and for the people an offering of two he-goats and a ram, per person. Throughout Leviticus there are Laws aplenty regarding the sins of the people and the sins likewise of the priesthood and the resultant sacrifices and atonement gifts. So, it was accepted that even the leadership sinned and needed atonement.

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

First of all, there were qualifications for the priesthood as well as for the high priest. In Leviticus 8 through 10 list the principles of the priesthood. Secondly, the line of the priesthood was to come from Aaron’s line only, but over the years that changed, although according to some scholars when it came to the High Priest, efforts were made to keep that line intact.

Therefore, the writer intimated that not every person was qualified to take this job, in fact there was a limited pool to choose from. The job of priest or pastor was and still is a calling. Even today the priest or the pastor of any Church must consider it a calling, a placing on the heart for service to God. I have seen too many who truly thought they could take on the role of pastor without considering the massive responsibilities that go with the job.

B] Hebrews 5: 5 through 11; (read)

1] “*For 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.’”*

We are now getting to the point of these passages by the writer. He has explained the role and qualifications of the High Priest and now aligns Jesus with the role of High Priest.

Jesus did not come intending to be the High Priest to the people. He did not appoint Himself to the job, but God the Father did. The writer then points to Psalm 2:7 to show the validity of the statement. God, Himself, has placed Jesus in this place in this time for this job.

2] “*As He also says in another place, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek;’”*

Let’s look at this Melchizedek. Who is he? He is first mentioned in Genesis 14 where he meets with Abraham has a meal with him and departs blessing him. Scholars believe Melchizedek means King of Salem, or king of peace or the city Salem. He was also referred to as priest of the Most High God, so we have a pick. He is a mystery figure and is referred to as having no beginning and having no end.

Then He is next mentioned in Psalm 110: 4, where Jesus is declared to be a ‘priest forever’ according to the order of Melchizedek, because nothing is ever mentioned about Melchizedek, his birth or his death or anything else about him. However, he is the king and he is THE priest, so in Salem (if that is where he is from) he is everything to the people, political ruler and religious leader. Just as a side bar, some writings have Melchizedek as possibly the son of Noah, named Shem (which would really make him old when he meets Abraham. There are listed, about 10 generations between Shem and Abram or about 300 years+ .

With Shem being 100 years old when he sired his son Arphaxad, and on down to Abram, there being 300 + years then Shem outlived Abraham, having lived over 600 years. (And remember they really lived a very long time back then.)

3] *“-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, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by things which He suffered.”*

This is referring back to Jesus, now, saying that Christ did not come expecting to be the high priest right away, but by His life he learned to be human first, and to be obedient as His human brothers and sisters were. In other words, He had to grow and learn through discipline and pain just as every other man and woman has to learn. He, as human, had to call on God through His suffering because He did believe and had that relationship with God His Father Who could and did save Him.

The writer is just referring to Jesus humanity to be called to the High priesthood, and through His Godhood, He was eminently qualified for the calling.

4] “*And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest,’ according to the order of Melchizadek.’”*

Once Jesus completed His mission of coming to earth, living as a man and dying as the final sacrifice, thus fulfilling the Law requirements as the atonement for mankind He returns to His rightful place at the Right Hand of God and this is the perfection, in that be becomes what He always was. Through this perfection process Jesus then authors the salvation to all mankind to all would believe on Him and accept Him as their Lord and Savior. That He has become that great High Priest being the intervening Priest between God and Man. That as God and as High Priest, He then has no beginning and no ending as Melchizedek.

The writer is attempting to drive points home to a people afraid of the times and events around them. Isn’t it reassuring that we have a heavenly Father who really cares about us, and longs to have that relationship with us, that we are brought to that point where we KNOW that we have God’s promise fulfilled and we can stand on that promise. Then realize that there are so many who do not have that assurance because unbelief keeps the wall standing in front of them thus never seeing the promise that is before them.

5] “*Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.”*

I can hear the arguments by these people, “But they say” or “how can a loving God allow these things to happen” or another, “these churches have all these hypocrites.” Ever heard these arguments? This is what the writer faces as the seeds of doubt and fear have taken hold of so many that their ears refuse to hear and to understand. “But those Romans will arrest us and kill us!” But what has Jesus promised you? Eternal Life in Him? “The priests will excommunicate our families, and make our lives miserable!” But Jesus says to you, ‘come unto me all you who carry all these heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Always excuses.

C] Hebrews 5: 12 through 14; (read)

1] “*For by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come in need of milk and not solid food.”*

WOW! Is that not a statement for today? The writer states that after all the time that has elapsed between the peoples conversion and the present time, that they have not even learned enough to explain the Christian faith to their children much less neighbors. That they don’t have the understanding of what God’s promises are for their life even under this pressure?

We can guess that some of these people are not recent converts but probably original converts during Jesus life and after, so some probably have been in the fold maybe 25 to 30 years, and yet they are no further ahead in their simple understanding of God’s Word than when they began.

How many are in this situation today? How many go to church and have done so for years, and yet when asked to teach little children the simple stories of the Bible they beg off because they really don’t know what they should have been taught? We feel totally inadequate, because we never got that ‘meat’ of the scriptures that makes us strong in our faith.

2] “*For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.”*

We can just continue in the thought from the previous verse. How many of us, went to Sunday school as a child, but then begged off during our teen years with the excuse of having to work or study for tests. We then married and had children and as good parents took the kids to Sunday School, and went back home for breakfast and coffee, and showed up for Church.

What we have learned are the simple Bible stories that begin the framework of understanding of God’s plan from His creation, but little else. I have found many who are in Church cannot give me a simple idea of their Salvation. How they received it, or what it means.

3] “*But solid food belongs to those who are full of age, that is those who by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

I can remember when our girls were small, with each daughter we wondered when it was wise to start them on semi-solid foods weaning them off their formula onto a pablum. This is a question so many young parents are faced with and also when we as young Christians are ready for more advanced study in Scriptures, having grown up on the milk of the Scriptures, and then over the years how we delve into the more intriguing parts of Scripture. Then as we are into the advanced class, how many of us are prepared to branch out and begin to teach others about all the things we have learned along the way.

We have become assured of our salvation by our learning and study of Biblical truths and through these truths we came to that commitment to Jesus Christ, and with that commitment we have gained our Salvation. Now dear friends having gained that salvation are we not ready to show that path to someone else?