

In search of...

Truth & Right

Volume 10 Issue 32

August 9, 2015

Great High Priest

The writer of the book of Hebrews implies the superiority of Jesus over the priesthood of Aaron when he refers to Him as our "great high priest" (Heb. 4:14). Then, he sets forth the fact that Jesus is able to sympathize with our "infirmities," since He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Because He is our sympathetic "great high priest," He has made it possible for us to approach "the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16).

Ignoring the chapter division, the author is going to substantiate his point by comparing the qualifications of Jesus as our sympathetic "great high priest" to the qualifications of human high priests (Heb. 5:1-10). The qualifications for human high priests are two-fold: sympathy (Heb. 5:2) and a calling (Heb. 5:4); in like manner, Jesus had both sympathy (Heb. 5:7) and a calling (Heb. 5:5-6). In a nutshell, this is the summary of the first ten verses of this chapter. As a matter of fact, the author uses a Hebrew poetic pattern to

substantiate his argument—instead of ABAB, he uses ABBA:

A—priests are required to have human compassion (Heb. 5:2).

B—priests are required to have a heavenly calling (Heb. 5:4).

B—Jesus had a heavenly calling (Heb. 5:5-6).

A—Jesus had human compassion (Heb. 5:7).

In the first verse, the author describes how high priests were chosen and what they did with three phrases:

- First, they were "taken [selected] from among men," evidently reinforcing the humanity of Jesus.
- Second, they were "ordained for men in things pertaining to God" ["appointing to act on behalf of men" ESV], pointing again to the humanity of Jesus.
- Third, the high priest "offers both gifts and sacrifices for sins,"

which Jesus did in atoning for the sins of humanity.

Because the Hebrews author is comparing Jesus with the high priests under the Levitical system, then when the author uses present tense in his Greek verbs in this first verse, scholars point out that the temple in Jerusalem was still conducting sacrificial offerings, implying that the letter was definitely written prior to AD 70 and the fall of Jerusalem.

The selection, appointment and duty of the high priest all emphasize his similarity with those whom he represented: "...for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). Knowing what it is like to face temptation, the high priest is able to "bear gently with the ignorant and the erring." The expression "bear gently" is a Greek word for which there is no exact English equivalent. The word conveys that the high priest was to take the middle ground between apathy and anger. He was called upon not to be indifferent toward the moral failures of his people, but at the same time, he was not to treat them too harshly for such lapses. What a wonderful attitude for us to adopt with others! Some Christians treat sin in a nonchalant fashion, while others act mercilessly toward sinners. The key is to find the balance between these two extremes. As someone who was tempted with the same weaknesses and sinful behaviors, the high priest had to offer sacrifices for his own shortcomings (Heb. 5:3), which is why the high priest offered a bull for his own sin offering before he offered

anything on behalf of the people on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:11).

Moreover, the high priest had a calling (Heb. 5:4), because God selected Aaron and his sons to serve as a high priest (cf. Exod. 28:1). In like manner, Christ did not assume the high priesthood Himself, but was called to the office by God (Heb. 5:5), and quoted two Hebrew passages to support such.

- The first passage is Psalm 2:7, which the author also quoted back in Hebrews 1:5, speaking of the official installment of Jesus to perform the duties of the Messiah.
- The second passage is Psalm 110:4, portraying Him as the great High Priest; in fact, this is one of the most important Messianic psalms that we have, because this psalm sets forth the Messiah as Prophet, Priest and King. Not only did it establish the Messiah's priesthood, but also says that He would serve in the order of Melchizedek and not Aaron; Melchizedek predates Aaron (cf. Gen. 14:18-20).

In the second point, not only did Jesus have a divine calling, but He also was qualified to serve as a high priest because of His compassion (Heb. 5:7-10). In fact, these verses provide a window into the events at Gethsemane that we do not have in the gospel accounts. We really see His emotional side (Heb. 5:7). One cannot read this verse and not realize that Christ suffered and agonized for us!

As a matter of fact, Christ

prayed in the Garden three times, and the author here says that He was "heard" (Heb. 5:7). This word usually indicates that prayers were not just heard, but they were answered. This presents a problem for some interpreters, because they cannot fathom God answering His own Son, "No."

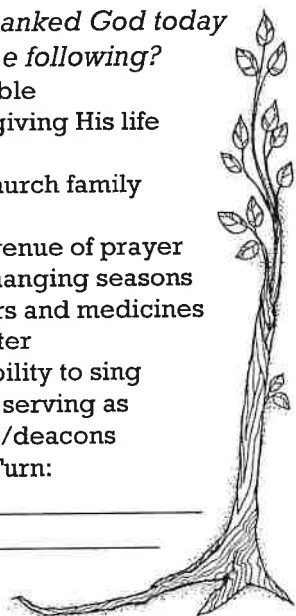
Jesus found strength to carry out the will of the Father because of His reverent submission (Heb. 5:8-9), which ought to tell us something about our prayer life. In fact, the author of Hebrews may not only have been talking about Gethsemane, but he may have also been alluding to the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11) when he declared that Jesus "learned obedience." This does not mean that He turned to obedience from disobedience, but that He learned to obey God in a way that He had never done before—as a human. Moreover, the author used a play on words, because this word "learned" (*emathen*) rhymes with the Greek word for "suffered" (*epathen*). In other words, he once again uses his literary skills to further his argument.

Finally, Jesus attained His ultimate goal on Calvary (Heb. 5:9), and hearkened back to Psalm 110:4 to conclude his restatement (Heb. 5:10). Therefore, Jesus Christ is our "great high priest"—He is sympathetic, empathetic and compassionate!

God gave you a gift of
86,400
seconds today. Have
you used one to say
THANK YOU?

*Have you thanked God today
for any of the following?*

- The Bible
- Jesus giving His life for us
- Our church family
- Jobs
- The avenue of prayer
- The changing seasons
- Doctors and medicines
- Laughter
- The ability to sing
- Those serving as elders/deacons
- Your Turn:



This bulletin is published by the
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Pleasing to God

V X F B C T I P M F Q E G T A F Q N S R
 I N K X E R X L Q D X W B G O J B D H U
 A V X O C S E V B D M B H U Q Z M T R J
 C B A N O T H E R B F E L F I B J H S G
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 A Y Q B O U Q U O J F W N E A S U L J Q
 J K E D A B S T A I N J I F Q G Y Y P V
 K W Z Y B O Z L F K V P H O R R L S B Z
 G F Q C S J L L G C U W A R N E D J O Y
 V I V X W H R K E D O V P E G S C R K K
 G K E E A E E W B S U Z P A S S I O N G

DIRECTIONS: Look up the scripture in the Bible, and find the answer in the crossword above.

- 1 Thess. 4:1, "Finally, then, _____, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus
 1 Thess. 4:3, ...that you _____ from sexual immorality;
 1 Thess. 4:4, that each one of you know how to _____ his own body
 1 Thess. 4:5, not in the _____ of lust like the Gentiles
 1 Thess. 4:6, that no one _____ and wrong his brother
 1 Thess. 4:6, because the Lord is an _____ in all things,
 1 Thess. 4:6, as we told you beforehand and solemnly _____ you.
 1 Thess. 4:7, For God has not called us for _____,
 1 Thess. 4:8, _____ whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God,
 1 Thess. 4:9, you yourselves have been taught by God to love one _____,
 1 Thess. 4:11, and to aspire to live _____,
 1 Thess. 4:12, that you may walk properly before _____