

# Chapter Five

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The chapter break in our English Bibles (as well as in the traditional Greek text) is unfortunate, for as we noted earlier, this section began in 4:14 and continues through 7:28.<sup>1</sup> The primary theme of this pericope is the heavenly high priestly service of Yeshua, a theme that continues into chapter 10. Thus, chapter five simply continues to expound the fact of Yeshua's high priestly position as well that which He accomplishes in fulfilling His role as the high priest of His people.

**1–3 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.**

One reason we should feel free to approach the throne of grace or the “seat of grace” with boldness (4:16) is simply that a high priest is, by nature and office, one who understands and sympathizes with those who bring the offerings and sacrifices.

The primary posture of a priest in general is that he has his face toward God and his back to the people. This is the picture drawn for us by our author: “...taken from men...appointed in things pertaining to God...” The priest must therefore be a representative of the people for whom he intercedes. He concerns himself both with sacrifices and offerings as they are required at the hand of the sinner. “Gifts” (*δῶρον, dōron*) is the more comprehensive term of which “sacrifices” (*θυσία, thusia*) is a subset. Most likely, our author uses the two terms together to signify the broad scope of sacrifices and offerings prescribed in the Torah.

What is most on the heart of our author is the issue of sin and how the sinner is made clean or righteous before God. For him, the particular work of the high priest on Yom HaKippurrim (Day of Atonement) is the focus, as chapter nine makes clear. He is therefore particularly concerned with the sacrifices and offerings which are “for sins,” even though there were both sacrifices and offerings (e.g., the thank offer-

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1 See the outline, pp. 21-23 above.

ing, and the freewill or votive offering) which were given apart from the issue of expiation or atonement.

Thus, in this context, the function of the high priest, viewed as it is against the background of sin and its severe penalty, is of utmost importance. This is a "life and death" issue, and the function of the high priest stands at the apex of success or failure. It is, therefore, a most strategic work.

But what is obviously in the mind of our author is to outline the basic requirements of a high priest in order to show both how Yeshua Himself must conform to these requirements but even more how He is unique in regard to His high priesthood, i.e., after the order Melchizedek rather than having His priesthood as a matter of physical lineage, i.e., being from the family of Aaron. Yet even though Yeshua is obviously not from the family of Aaron, it was still the requirement of a high priest that he be "taken from among men." The point is obvious but nonetheless important: a high priest represents those for whom He offers sacrifices and gifts. As such, he must be like those he represents.

An essential characteristic of high priesthood is that the holder of this office is *chosen from among men*: only one who is himself man is fitted to serve as the representative of his fellow men before God. No angel, for example, would be capable of assuming such an office. It is particular as man that a high priest is qualified *to act on behalf of men*.<sup>1</sup>

Our verse goes on to state what would have been obvious to any Jewish community, that the high priest is selected "from men" and "appointed on behalf of men." But the emphasis our author wishes to give is seen in that both of these verbs are passive. The point is clear: a high priest does not select himself nor does he appoint himself. This bespeaks an attitude of humility.

Once again, we can see how our author is portraying Yeshua as in stark contrast to the priesthood of the late 2nd Temple period. The greed and the misuse of authority which characterized the high priests in the Apostolic era was not the model prescribed by Moses, nor that which was revealed to him on the mountain.

If we ask how Yeshua qualified in these two respects, i.e., taken from man and appointed to serve, the answers are ready at hand. Our author is showing why the incarnation was necessary, for in Yeshua

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1 Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 175.

becoming man, He qualified to serve as a high priest. What is more, that He came as a servant, having set aside the glory He had with the Father, speaks to the depth of His humility in receiving the duties of a high priest. And, at Yeshua's *mikveh*, we hear the heavenly voice proclaiming: "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased,"<sup>1</sup> clearly a public appointment of Yeshua by the Father to the tasks for which He was sent.

*he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided...* – The function of the high priest on behalf of sinning people flowed from a realization that he himself was a sinner. It was for this reason that he was to be taken from among his own people (Ex 28:1). It was utterly necessary that he not "put down" the sinner as he brought sacrifices for sin. On the contrary, he would deal gently with those who were bringing sacrifices for their sins, since he himself regularly sacrificed on behalf of his own failings.

The people are characterized as "ignorant" and "misguided." "Ignorant" (ἀγνοέω, *agnoeō*) refers to lacking knowledge while "misguided" (πλανάω, *planaō*) talks of being mis-taught or even deceived. It was the priestly function not only to intercede for the people, but also to teach them the truth about how God intends for His people to worship Him in all phases of their lives. It seems very probable that our author is giving these qualification in order to show the stark contrast to the priesthood which served in the final days of the Temple. This priesthood was besmirched by appointing men in no way qualified to function in such a strategic position. From the assassination of Onias III in 171 BCE (which constituted the end of the Zadokite high priesthood) onward to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the high priesthood was in the hands of rogues who discharged their functions as priests with little or no regard for the laws which God had prescribed. This demise of the priesthood in the 2nd Temple era is perhaps best exemplified by Alexander Jannaeus who declared himself both high priest and king from 103 to 76 BCE. So egregious were his actions that Josephus recounts how, on one Sukkot, the people pelted him with *etrogs* during the water-pouring ceremony!<sup>2</sup>

This same mistrust and suspicion of the high priest generally characterizes the perspective of the early Messianic Jews as well, at least as their history is recorded in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Inevitably, it is the "chief priests and scribes" who stand against the righ-

1 Matt 3:17; Mk 9:7.

2 Josephus, *Ant.* xiii.372f; cp. also b.*Sukkot* 48a.

teous teachings and works of Yeshua. Even a wise saying of Caiaphas (Jn 11:47-53) is attributed to prophecy, not to a spiritual understanding of a man who knew God.

But the high priesthood of Yeshua is in great contrast to the fallen office of the late 2nd Temple period. Yeshua, Who clearly “bore our griefs and carried our sorrows” was well known to have experienced the woes of life and the sorrows they bring. He is able to sympathize because He too was “beset with weakness.” The incarnation therefore silences all who might claim that Yeshua does not know our woes because He has never experienced them. Taking upon Himself our weaknesses, and walking in our fallen world has marked Him forever as One Who is “acquainted with grief.”

*and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.* – Having qualified and been appointed to the office of high priest (the Greek text begins this verse with “on account of this...”, καὶ δι’ αὐτῆν), the officer himself was obliged to perform for the people what no one else could perform. Sins, if they were to be cleansed (i.e., atoned), required that the high priest faithfully fulfill his sacred duties. It was not a matter of choice but of obligation. There was one way and only one way that sin could be wiped away, that this was through the sacrifice of the Great High Priest, Who was constantly foreshadowed by the tabernacle and Temple sacrifices. As the priest offered up to God the sacrifice, it looked forward to, and even symbolized in every detail, the final sacrifice of Yeshua, Who, by His death, would offer the infinite payment which alone could satisfy the righteousness of the Father and obtain eternal atonement for those He would save.

The identification of the high priest went one step further than merely participating in weakness with those he represented. He was also, himself, a sinner. It is at this point that our author will make a parallel in contrast with Yeshua rather than one of similarity. While He is, in every way, a gentle and understanding high priest, He is, nonetheless, entirely pure and without spot. Not so with the earthly high priest. Though he was selected from the people, he was nonetheless one of them. He was himself a sinner, and therefore in need of the same cleansing sacrifice that any commoner required. It was in the course of his own spirituality (i.e., his recognition of sin and the need to deal with his own sin as God had commanded) that he was able to sympathize with those who came regularly to the Temple seeking their on cleansing. Indeed, it was out of his own sense of weakness that he was to minister to the needs of the people.

**4 And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.**

Having noted that one qualifying attribute for a worthy high priest is that he would have empathy for the common sinner, our author goes on to consider a second qualification, namely, that he does not usurp his own authority to acquire the office but is rather divinely called to his station of service. This, of course, raises the question: “How was the high priest chosen in the 1st Temple and early 2nd Temple?” Who made the choice and how did they make it?

We know how this was accomplished at the beginning—Aaron was appointed and confirmed by God Himself (Ex 28:1ff; Lev 8:1ff; Num 16:5; 17:5; 18:1ff; Ps 105:26). The same was true of his heirs and successors (Num 20:23ff; 25:10ff). Exactly how the appointment of the high priest was determined in the 1st and early 2nd Temple periods, however, is not delineated in the biblical text. It even appears that in times of emergency, some who were not descendants of Aaron took up the intercessory and sacrificial ministry assigned to the priests, Samuel being an obvious example.<sup>1</sup>

What we do know is that in the late 2nd Temple period, those appointed to the office of high priest were not even from the line of Aaron! Josephus gives the primary data<sup>2</sup> and Bruce offers a clear summary:

After the deposition of Onias III in 174 B.C., Jason and later Menelaus were appointed to the high priesthood by Antiochus IV; Alcimus was appointed by Demetrius I in 162 B.C.; the Hasmonaean Jonathan was appointed by Alexander Balas, putative son of Antiochus IV, in 152 B.C.; his brother Simon and his successors were appointed by decree of the Jewish people in 140 B.C. (1Macc 14:41). With the fall of the Hasmonaean house the high priests were appointed successively by Herod the Great (37–34 B.C.), Archelaus (4 B.C.–A.D. 6), Roman governors (A.D. 6–41), and members of the Herod family (A.D. 41–66). The last high priest, Phanni, son of Samuel, was appointed by popular ballot during the war against Rome (c. A.D. 67).<sup>3</sup>

1 It is interesting to note the parallel between Samuel and Moses made in several biblical texts: Jer 15:1; Ps 99:6 (Lxx 98:6), and note Heb 11:32.

2 *Ant* 20.10.

3 F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 92, n. 19.

Once again, it is clear that our author is seeking to establish the fact that the heavenly high priesthood of Yeshua fulfills the picture foreshadowed in the original Aaronic priesthood which stood in direct contrast to the degraded high priesthood in the final centuries of the 2nd Temple.

The primary point our author intends for us to see is that even as Aaron was appointed by God to his office and ministry, so those who followed him were likewise to be divinely appointed. As such, a genuine high priest was not someone who usurped the office, but one who received it legitimately, as the appointment of God Himself.

The issue of the legitimacy of the high priest was an important one in the time our epistle was written. There is strong evidence that at least one fact that caused the Qumran society to leave Jerusalem to live in the desert of the Dead Sea was their disgust over the deeply corrupt priesthood which controlled the Jerusalem Temple. So corrupt was the Levitical priesthood, that, in the view of the Qumran society, it rendered all of the Temple and the sacrifices offered there unclean and unfit for the pure in heart. They awaited, therefore, the coming of the eschaton when righteousness would return to the office of priest, and the Temple worship would once again be restored to its proper place and function.

Our author likewise upholds the biblical standards of the high priesthood, using these to judge the validity of Yeshua's office. He has shown that Yeshua qualified on the first account through His incarnation through which He is one with those He represents, sharing in the same sorrows and testings which they experience. Now our author points to the fact that Yeshua qualifies in a second category, namely, that He was appointed to the office of high priest and did not "take<sup>1</sup> the honor to Himself."

**5–6 So also Messiah did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."**

To prove the divine appointment of Yeshua to act as a high priest, our author quotes two texts from the Psalms: 2:7 and 110:4. Psalm 2 has

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1 The use of λαμβάνω (*lambanō*), "to take" in v. 4 forms an *inclusio* with the use of the same verb in v. 1, "For every high priest taken from among men...."

already been used by our author in his opening chapter (1:5<sup>1</sup>) where the coronation of God's king is clearly messianic, and thus significantly applicable to Yeshua. The reiteration of Ps 2:7 in this context is clearly done to stress the royal office of Yeshua, that is, His kingship. Psalm 110 is also incorporated into our author's opening statements (1:13) where the text stresses the reigning rule of Messiah.

Interestingly, the Judaisms of the 1st Century evidence the belief that there would be more than one Messiah. The Pharisees (at least as they are represented in the later Bavli) refer to "Mashiach ben Yosef" and "Mashiach ben David."<sup>2</sup> Messiah the son of Joseph was considered the suffering Messiah, while Messiah son of David was the ruling or kingly Messiah.

The Qumran society, which may have left Jerusalem for the desert region of the Dead Sea to separate themselves from the apostate priesthood of the Temple, indicate in their writings that they awaited two messiahs, one from the line of David and the other from Aaron's line:

And they shall be governed by the first ordinances in which the members of the Community began their instruction, until the coming of the Prophet and the Anointed (Messiah) of Aaron and Israel. (IQS 9.110-11)

Here, the sectarians of the Qumran society speak of two Messiahs, and the age when both will be ruling—one as a priest and the other (apparently) as king.

Our author, however, wants to make it clear that Yeshua fulfills both of these roles, and that it is impossible to consider a second messiah. Once again, the person of Yeshua as Immanuel must be in our author's mind. To admit of two messiahs is to negate that Messiah is Immanuel, God in the flesh. For our author there is one and only one Messiah, and He is the very Son of God. Thus, that Yeshua is the King Whom God has installed upon Mt. Zion (Ps 2:6-7) means that He is likewise the great High Priest Who alone can abide in the very glory of the Father's presence and not be consumed. He is, like Melchizedek, both king and priest.

... just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." – Psalm 110:1, like Ps 2:7, was quoted in chapter one as referring to Yeshua. Here, verse four of the

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1 For a fuller discussion of the use of Ps 2:7 in the context of Yeshua's Messiahship, see the remarks there, pp. 34–37.  
2 E.g., b.Sukkah 52a-b.

Psalm is highlighted and is the first mention of Melchizedek in our epistle but by no means the last! In fact, he will be named seven more times by the end of Hebrews. As we will see, our author brings the Melchizedekian priesthood forward in order to establish Yeshua's legitimate claim to the office of high priest.

Furthermore, Ps 110 is clearly a favorite of our author, seeing that he quotes from it no less than 7 times in our epistle: Heb 1:3, 13; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21. This not doubt has to do with the fact that Psalm 110 reveals the Davidic Messiah to be both a king and a priest.

Traditionally Psalm 110 is considered a Davidic Psalm, as attested by the Psalm heading and confirmed by the words of Yeshua (Matthew 22:44) and the Apostles (Acts 2:34). Therefore, King David is appointed as a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (v. 4). The Hebrew phrase, however, utilizes a term not often found in the Tanach: אַתָּה כֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל דְּבַרְתֵּי מַלְכֵי־צֶדֶק, *ata cohen l'olam al devarti malki-zedek*. The uncommon Hebrew word is *divarti* from the root *divrah* meaning "a legal plea," "manner," or "with regard to." How is it used in our text? Since the word *divarti* has the same consonants as the Hebrew word meaning "word" (*dabar*), the rabbis understood the verse to mean: "after the words of Melchizedek" rather than "after the manner of Melchizedek." Since Melchizedek blessed Abram, the rabbis took this to mean that Abraham was his superior, and that he had therefore transferred the priesthood to him through the "words" of his blessing. But such an interpretation does not fit the Psalm, for the One who gives enthronement to David in the opening verse, is the same One who divinely appoints him as priest in verse four. David's priesthood is "after the manner" of Melchizedek, not something given to him by Melchizedek. Moreover, if the Psalmist had intended "after the words of Melchizedek," he would have used the plural construct of דְּבָרִים, i.e., דְּבָרַי, not דְּבַרְתֵּי. As the Hebrew stands, it must be translated "after the manner of Melchizedek."

JPS's translation is possible from the Hebrew of the MT. "You are a priest forever, a rightful king according to my decree" takes מַלְכֵי־צֶדֶק, "king of righteousness," not as a proper noun, but as a substantive, interpreting צֶדֶק, "righteous/righteousness" as an adjectival absolute of the construct מַלְכֵי, "king." In theory this is possible (consider Lev 19:36, "just balance" [אֲזַנֵּי צֶדֶק], "just weights" [אֲבָנֵי צֶדֶק], etc.). Obviously, the JPS follows the Targum here, which has:

The Lord has sworn and will not turn aside, that you are appointed leader in the age to come, because of the merit that you were a righteous king.

But in light of the fact that the JPS translates מֶלְכִי־צֶדֶק in Gen 14:18 as “Melchizedek,” one has to presume that the translation of the current text by the JPS has been heavily influenced by the Christian application of Melchizedek to Yeshua.

As noted, the rabbinic interpretation of Psalm 110 is applied to David as an admonition not to usurp the throne from Saul. But this interpretation misses the irony contained in the narrative of David’s rise to the throne. The contrast is between Saul, who acted as priest and was punished as a result, while David as king does the same thing (acts as a priest) yet is blessed.

David’s rise to the throne of Israel followed the demise of Saul. The kingdom was taken from Saul because in acting as a priest, he failed to destroy the Amalekites and all their belongings. Since Saul had offered sacrifices instead of waiting for Samuel, and because he kept in his possession those things that were “under the ban” (i.e., dedicated to God), he was stripped of the throne and it was given to David (1Samuel 13:14f). Saul, as king, had acted as a priest, and this was not allowed.

We are stunned, therefore, when David, duly crowned as king over all Israel, dons a linen ephod as he brings the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, offering whole burnt and peace offerings (2Samuel 6:14ff). Yet though his predecessor had met with stern judgment for acting out the part of a priest, David is blessed! Why the difference? The only answer available, given to us by Psalm 110, is that like Melchizedek, David was appointed to the offices of both king and priest (and cf. 2Sam 8:18 where David’s sons are called כֹּהֲנִים, *kohanim*, “priests”). In like manner, Yeshua, son of David, yet the Master of David, was appointed as Priest to His people. With the ability to see the whole picture, we recognize that both Melchizedek and David foreshadowed the Messiah. Messiah was the goal to which these unique historical figures pointed. And this is the argument of the book of Hebrews.

Obviously, claiming a legitimate high priesthood for Yeshua on the basis that He is one like Melchizedek, raises a number of questions, and these our author will address in the subsequent chapters. But the one that is most often considered a major difficulty is simply that priests must come from the tribe of Levi and high priests must descend from the family of Aaron. Clearly, Yeshua is related to neither of these, being from the tribe of Judah and the family of David.

In an attempt to overcome this seeming difficulty, some have attempted to derive the lineage of Yeshua from both Levi and Judah, thus giving Him a direct claim to the Aaronic priesthood. According to Hippolytus, an early church father, Yeshua is descended both from Levi

and Judah, based upon Gen 49:8 and *The Testament of Simon* 7:2, as well as Moses' blessing of Levi (Deut 33:8–9).

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. (Gen 49:8)

And now, my children, be obedient to Levi and to Judah. Do not exalt yourselves above these two tribes, [because from them will arise the Savior come from God]. For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as high priest and from Judah someone as King. (*Test. of Simon* 7.1-2)

Of Levi he said, "Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, whom You proved at Massah, with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; Who said of his father and his mother, 'I did not consider them'; and he did not acknowledge his brothers, nor did he regard his own sons, for they observed Your word, and kept Your covenant. (Deut 33:8–9)

But this attempt to link Yeshua to Levi, and other similar strategies (such as those put forward by the Seventh Day Adventists) misses the mark completely, for our author, recognizing the lineage of Yeshua as from Judah, makes His priesthood to rest upon the Melchizedekian order, a priesthood which is itself above that of Aaron, which does not depend upon lineage but upon God's specific and sovereign choice and appointment.

The implications of Yeshua's priesthood as based upon the Melchizedekian office are taken up in the subsequent chapters. For now, our author simply wants us to recognize that Yeshua is functioning in the office of high priest not because He usurped the office, nor even that He received it as the normal progression of a generational office, but because He was chosen and appointed by God Himself in like manner to Melchizedek. Thus, Yeshua's high priestly office is the result of direct appointment even as was the case with Moses and Aaron.

**7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.**

Having dealt with the issue of legitimate appointment to the high priestly office, our author proceeds to the qualification of Yeshua's