

Jesus, Our High Priest

**SAB
PM****READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Hebrews 5 and 7.**

MEMORY VERSE: “Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy¹ for our weaknesses. On the contrary [instead], we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin. Let us be brave, and approach God’s throne, where there is grace. There we will receive mercy² and find grace to help us just when we need it” (Hebrews 4:15, 16, TEV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT: Of all the books of the Bible, the book of Hebrews gives the best explanation of Jesus’ work as our High Priest.

AFTER WORLD WAR I, a German named Max Fladt went to the Rhine River to swim. It was dangerous, because the river had high water. On the other side, French soldiers were practicing with pontoons.³ When one of the pontoons turned over, four soldiers fell in the strong current and fought for their lives. Only two days earlier the French had sentenced to death seven Germans. Should Fladt help these French soldiers? He dived into the waves and saved two Frenchmen. The next day, a French captain visited him and thanked him for his brave action. The captain asked how he could reward Fladt. Fladt answered: “I know an excellent reward. Reward life with life. I am asking you to pardon the seven German men.”

This is what mediation⁴ is all about.

¹sympathy—to share another person’s sorrow and trouble.

²mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

³pontoons—low, flat-bottomed boats.

⁴mediation—working to save others from a worse fate.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What kind of work does Jesus do in heaven? How does Jesus' heavenly work compare⁵ with Aaron's work as high priest? Why is Jesus said to be the same as the priest-king Melchizedek?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 2.

SUN JESUS' PRIESTHOOD IN HEBREWS.

Hebrews uses three words to describe Jesus' ministry (work) in heaven: (1) priest, (2) high priest, and (3) priesthood. None of these words is used for Jesus in the rest of the New Testament. So we must study Hebrews carefully.

The ideas of priest, or priesthood, appear many times in Hebrews. These ideas describe the Levitical priesthood⁶ and the priesthood of Melchizedek.⁷ But Hebrews always focuses on the priesthood of Jesus.

What basic point do the following verses make? Why is this point important for us? Hebrews 2:17; Hebrews 3:1; Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 5:6; Hebrews 7:15; Hebrews 7:17; Hebrews 7:21; Hebrews 8:1.

Hebrews talks about both the messiahship (Jesus as the Savior) and the priesthood (Jesus as High Priest) of Jesus. In the New Testament, Psalm 110 is quoted often, but always just the first

verse. But Hebrews quotes Psalm 110:4 and Psalm 110:1. The Messiah (Psalm 110:1) is also appointed by God as "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). Both the messiahship and priesthood of Jesus appear in Psalm 110 and in Hebrews.

The heavenly priesthood of Jesus is an important part of Hebrews: "The whole point of what we are saying is that we have such a High Priest who sits at the right of the throne of the Divine Majesty in heaven" (Hebrews 8:1, TEV). Jesus the Messiah is Jesus the High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

The idea of Jesus as High Priest appears in other parts of the Bible (1 John 2:1, 2; 1 Timothy 2:5). But Hebrews gives us the clearest and best explanation of Jesus as High Priest.

What do people know about the word *priest* today? Protestants⁸ teach the priesthood of all believers as found in 1 Peter 2:5, 9. What is the priesthood of all believers? How can we be careful not to confuse our priesthood with Jesus' priesthood?

⁵compare—show how things are the same.

⁶Levitical priesthood—All the priests involved in the sanctuary and temple services on earth came from the tribe of Levi.

⁷Melchizedek—a priest-king who lived during Abraham's time (Genesis 14:18-20). Melchizedek is thought to be a symbol of Jesus as Priest-King.

⁸Protestants—members of churches that are not Catholic.

MON JESUS AND THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD.⁹

Jesus' priesthood is different from the Levitical priesthood. But Aaron, the Levitical high priest, is compared¹⁰ to Jesus as High Priest. There are clear differences between them. But in some ways they are the same, and this requires study.

In Hebrews 5, Aaron is shown as a symbol of Jesus. Both Aaron and Jesus are human. Both Aaron and Jesus are chosen by God. And both Aaron and Jesus work to help people. They offer sacrifices. Their ministry (work) and service are "for the sins" of humanity.¹¹



The Israelites hoped for freedom from slavery.

What is different between the Aaronic priesthood and the priesthood of Jesus? Hebrews 5:1-10; Hebrews 9:6-12.

Jesus is human. But He is also the Son of God. Aaron was not the Son of God. This is a very important point in Hebrews 5:5, 6, where a quote from Psalm 2 is followed by a quote from Psalm 110, linking Jesus' sonship with His priesthood. Because Jesus is the Son, God honored Him with the Melchizedek priesthood.

There is also a difference in sacrifices between Jesus and Aaron. Both Jesus and Aaron offer sacrifices. But Jesus' sacrifice is one sacrifice for all people. Because this one sacrifice is forever acceptable, another sacrifice cannot take its place.

Jesus is both Sacrifice and Priest. For this reason, Jesus is far greater than Aaron, who was only a priest. Aaron could never be a sacrifice. Only Jesus could be a sacrifice. Unlike¹² Aaron and all other priests, Jesus was never stained by sin.

The Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Jesus deal fairly with the sinner. But this is true only for the perfect Levitical priest. Examples from the Bible show that Levitical priests could be quite rude, uncaring,¹³ and unfaithful.¹⁴ But Hebrews points out this part of Jesus' ministry: Jesus is sinless¹⁵

⁹Aaronic priesthood—the priesthood that began with Aaron, Moses' brother.

¹⁰compared—to have shown how things are the same.

¹¹humanity—all the people of the world.

¹²unlike—not the same as.

¹³uncaring—not caring.

¹⁴unfaithful—not faithful.

¹⁵sinless—without sin.

Himself. But He sympathizes with sinners. He is merciful¹⁶ and faithful¹⁷ in dealing with them.



Jesus is kind and merciful to sinners.

Also, Aaron served on earth, while Jesus serves in heaven. The earthly and heavenly sanctuaries are connected to each other. But Jesus serves at the real sanctuary, not just in its earthly model.

Leviticus 10:1; Jeremiah 20:1-6; and Matthew 26:3, 4 deal with different priests in the Levitical priesthood. What do these verses tell us about Jesus' ministry being better and greater than Aaron's ministry?

TUE JESUS AND THE PRIESTHOOD OF MELCHIZEDEK.

Read Hebrews 7:11. According to the Old Testament, all the priests were to come from the family of Aaron (Exodus 28:1,

40, 41). So Jesus does not have the “right” to work as priest, because He came from the tribe of Judah, not Levi as Aaron did.

But Jesus is the Son of God, the only One who was God and human at one time. He lived among us and died in our place on the cross. For these reasons, He is the only perfect Mediator.¹⁸ He is the only One who can be our true High Priest.

Paul has to prove from the Bible that Jesus has the right to be both King and Priest. Paul points out that Jesus is “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4, NRSV). This has been fulfilled in Jesus, and in Him alone.

What do we know about Melchizedek? Some people claim he was Jesus appearing in the Old Testament. Only three verses in the Bible deal with Melchizedek: Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4; and Hebrews 5-7. What do these verses teach us about Melchizedek?

Melchizedek is greater than Levi, because Abraham paid tithe to him and blessed him (Hebrews 7–10). Abraham was the great grandfather of Levi. After Melchizedek is named, the new and better priesthood of Jesus is presented. The argument is built on Psalm 110, not on Genesis 14. Psalm 110 shows that the prophecy of a Messianic (Savior) priest is fulfilled in Jesus. Melchizedek's family his-

¹⁶merciful—full of kindness we do not deserve.

¹⁷faithful—full of faith.

¹⁸mediator—a lawyer or a go-between who works to solve problems between two or more people. Jesus is the Mediator between God and us.

tory, birth, and death are not known. Paul is not interested in it. Melchizedek is a type (symbol) of Jesus. The focus is on Jesus, not on Melchizedek.

How are Jesus’ priesthood and sonship related to each other? Hebrews 3:1-6; Hebrews 5:5-8; Hebrews 7:28.

The subject of sonship is very important in Hebrews. Because Jesus is the Son of God, He is better and greater than Moses (Hebrews 3) and Aaron (Hebrews 5). But Jesus is also a Priest after Melchizedek. Jesus is greater than Melchizedek because He is the Son of God.

Melchizedek was both a king and a high priest. Jesus is also a High Priest and King. What hope does Jesus as King offer to us?

WED JESUS AS HIGH PRIEST.

What are some of the characteristics¹⁹ of Jesus the High Priest?

Hebrews 2:17 _____

Hebrews 4:14, 15 _____

Hebrews 5:5, 6 _____

Hebrews 7:24-26 _____

Hebrews 8:1-3 _____

First, Jesus is shown to be faithful, as Moses was faithful. But He is greater than Moses. Then the theme of Jesus’ mercy is developed. Read Hebrews 4:14–5:10.

Jesus’ sinlessness²⁰ also is described in Hebrews 4:14–5:10. Hebrews shows that Jesus is close to us because He is a Brother in human form. But Paul is careful to point out that Jesus was “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15), “harmless,”²¹ “undefiled,”²² and so “separated from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). Jesus’ sinlessness was very important to both His earthly ministry (work) and His heavenly ministry. If Jesus had sinned on earth, He would be of no use in heaven. Jesus is the holy and forever perfect One. But He turns toward us weak and sinful humans.

What does Hebrews show about the time and place of Jesus’ high-priestly ministry? Hebrews 5:5, 6; Hebrews 9:11.

“In Hebrews, Jesus’ priesthood is de-

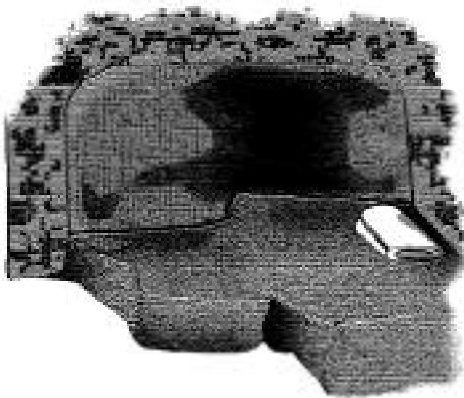
¹⁹characteristics—what one’s character is made of, such as patience, hope, et cetera.

²⁰sinlessness—having no sin.

²¹harmless—does no harm.

²²undefiled—without sin.

pendent on His human form and sacrifice. We may not speak of Him as High Priest until after He arose from the dead. We usually judge the petition (prayer) in the Garden (John 17) as Jesus' high-priestly prayer. But that does not follow the thinking of Hebrews."—Adapted from William G. Johnsson, *In Absolute Confidence* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), p. 93.



Jesus became our High Priest after He rose from the tomb.

Why is Jesus' sinlessness so important for what Hebrews is saying? What does Jesus' sinlessness mean to us? What hope does Jesus' sinlessness give us, (1) that we can be justified²³ and accepted by God, (2) that we can through Jesus live a life of obedience?

THU

JESUS' WORK AS HIGH PRIEST.

Jesus' priesthood is very special. He is a Sacrifice and Mediator at the same time.

No one else in history is both a sacrifice and a mediator. Only Jesus died as our Substitute.²⁴ And only Jesus is our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

Jesus is a very special Mediator. No other person in the universe was both human and God. Being both human and God helps Him to be the perfect bridge between heaven and earth.

The result of Jesus' ministry (work) is also very special. Only through Jesus is there eternal²⁵ life.

Jesus' ministry as High Priest is neutral. This means that Jesus' work does not depend on how we feel or think. Jesus' work does not depend on whether we understand it, know about it, or even believe in it. The Christian life sometimes includes emotions and feelings. But the basis of Christianity is centered only in Jesus' work.

Knowing that we have such a great High Priest working for us in heaven, what should we do? Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 10:22, 23; Hebrews 12:1, 2.

Christians know that their High Priest is with them, even to the end of the world. Day by day, He serves them. And He is about to bring human history to a close in order to establish His kingdom of glory. This extremely positive outlook, this experience of the Lord's presence, helps give meaning to our lives. We are God's children. We are brothers and sisters. We live in order to serve other people just as

²³justified—forgiven; made holy; cleansed from sin.

²⁴substitute—someone who takes another person's place. Jesus took our place on the cross.

²⁵eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

He served other people. Hebrews was written to encourage the people who first read it. It should encourage us.



Knowing that Jesus is our High Priest, we should be concerned for other people.

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “Let faith break through the terrible shadow of Satan and shine on Jesus, our High Priest. He has entered for us within the veil (curtain) of the heavenly sanctuary. It does not matter what clouds cover the sky, what storms stir up the soul, this anchor (faith in Christ) holds firm. And we may be sure of victory.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 127.

“Watch Paul preaching in the synagogue (Jewish church) at Corinth. He talks about the writings of Moses and the prophets. He talks about the coming of Jesus. Listen as Paul makes clear the work of the Savior as the great High Priest of humanity. Through the sacrifice of His own life, Jesus was to make atonement (forgiveness and cleansing) for sin once and for all. Then He was to

take up His ministry (work) in the heavenly sanctuary. Paul helped his hearers to understand that the Messiah (Savior) has already come for the first time. He helped them understand that Jesus’ death was the fulfillment of all the sacrificial offerings and that His ministry in the sanctuary in heaven fulfilled the ministry of the Jewish priesthood.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 246.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Hebrews is basically about Jesus’ high-priestly ministry. This should tell us that His ministry is very important. Discuss what Jesus’ ministry does for us and why His ministry is important.
2. Paul tried to encourage the Hebrews by writing to them about Jesus’ heavenly priesthood for sinners’ sake. Why would knowing about Jesus’ ministry encourage people to remain faithful in times of discouragement?
3. How are Jesus’ death and His high-priestly ministry connected?

SUMMARY: Hebrews tells us about Jesus’ priesthood. Jesus’ priesthood follows the line of Melchizedek. But it still has some connection to the Levitical priesthood. Still, Jesus’ priesthood is far better and greater than both the Levitical priesthood and Melchizedek’s priesthood.