



NG Study Guide: Hebrews 4:14-5:10 “Jesus is A Greater High Priest” [10.22.23]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: No human mediator or intercessor can represent you to God like Jesus. So, come to Jesus and receive God’s mercy and grace.

Subject: Jesus is greater than the Levitical priests

Object: Come boldly to Christ for mercy and grace

Context: *Hebrews* is written to Jewish Christians who were being discriminated against for their faith, scorned by family and friends. The letter repeatedly exhorts believers to appropriate and appreciate the greater reality of Jesus, remain steadfast in their faith, and experience the greater glory Jesus offers compared to any claimed substitute.

Hebrews is especially relevant today to anyone contemplating deconstructing their faith, because the author systematically establishes that Jesus is superior to any claimed substitute.

A. Jesus’ Priesthood is Perfect (4:14-16)

¹⁴ Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1. Jesus has perfect empathy (14-15)

Jesus is called a *great High Priest* (14, 2:17, 3:1) which doesn’t seem to be an adequate superlative. The essence of the argument is that Jesus is our High Priest in *heaven* and is the unique *Son of God*, so *hold fast our confession* (i.e. Don’t drift from the faith). The rest of the verses in this section (4:15-5:10) provide support. First, Jesus has perfect empathy. Jesus became human so that he could *sympathize with our weaknesses* (14). The Greek and Roman gods lacked compassion or empathy for humanity, but Jesus embraces humanity to understand our struggles perfectly. The Levitical priests (the Old Testament Jewish priests were all from the tribe of Levi, the first High Priest being Aaron the brother of Moses, Exodus 28), ideally had empathy but it wasn’t perfect. We may not appreciate just how important empathy is (i.e. Over time, no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care). You can cast all your cares upon Jesus, because He cares for you (1Peter 5:7).

2. Jesus is without sin (15)

Jesus *was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*. The Levitical priests, as well as Catholic and Anglican priests, and Protestant pastors, and Mary the mother of Jesus are all imperfect intercessors.

3. Jesus offers perfect access to God (16)

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

Jesus provides the way to draw near to God with confidence. To appreciate the access it is helpful to understand how access was limited per the Mosaic Law. Only the Jewish priests entered the temple, worshipers were outside the temple. Inside the temple, or Holy Place, was the Holy of Holies where the ark of the covenant and its mercy

seat. The Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the temple by the veil, a curtain about nine inches thick. The High Priest was the only person who could enter the Holy of Holies, and he could only enter one day a year on Yom Kippur the day of Atonement. A rope was tied around an ankle of the priest, because if God judged the priest and the priest died no one could enter the Holy of Holies to retrieve him.

a. Approach God with confidence

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil tore from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). In effect, God was offering access to Jesus' followers to approach with *boldness* or without fear. Again, this is a remarkable concept. For example, in the Book of Esther we see Esther a Persian queen afraid to approach her own husband the king, because he had not summoned her. If she approached the king without an invite she could lose her life unless he extended his scepter (symbol of authority) (Esther 4). In contrast, in Christ you can approach with bold confidence not fear of reprisal or rejection.

God's throne is described as *the throne of grace*. Grace is unmerited favor. God wants to bestow goodness that we don't deserve. Mercy is not getting the judgment we deserve. Yes, God's throne will be a place of judgment for those who reject Christ, but God wants us to know His grace and mercy (Exodus 34:6).

b. Receive mercy + grace to help in time of need

All of humanity yearns for *mercy and grace to help in time of need*. Our culture tends to be dismissive towards individuals who are perceived as "needy" but our hearts, minds, and souls are painfully aware that we have needs, and we're not really sure what to do to care for them. Jesus reveals where to discover help and from whom, He is the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). So, rather than looking primarily to human intercessors, mediators, or helpers we can approach God's throne directly through Jesus.

B. The Levitical priesthood is limited (5:1-4)

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. ² He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. ³ Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. ⁴ And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

1. Less than perfect empathy (1-2)

The high priests in the Levitical priesthood were appointed by God to make offerings (e.g. sacrifices) to God and intercede in prayer on behalf of humans. They were *taken from among men* (1), and thus limited. The high priest *can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness* (2). In essence, the priest had compassion for human weakness because that was their reality too; and because they were merely men their compassion or empathy was less than perfect. The breastplate of the high priest had twelve stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus the people were symbolically upon the heart of the high priest whenever he served. Yet in practice the empathy was not perfect.

2. Less than perfect re sin (3-4)

The high priest had to offer sacrifice for his own sin as well as the people's (3). The high priest was limited because his own actions and attitudes could not measure up (3, Leviticus 16). So, although each high priest was appointed by God just like Aaron (4), none of them were perfect. Their work would point to a greater limitless priesthood.

C. Jesus' priesthood is limitless (5:5-11)

⁵ So 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." ⁶ As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek"; ⁷ 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, ⁸ though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰ called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," ¹¹ of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

1. Jesus priesthood is forever (5-6)

Jesus priesthood was also appointed by God the Father (5). As the Son, Jesus shares the nature of God (5, Psalm 2:7). Jesus' priesthood is forever (6, Psalm 110:4). Levitical priests could begin their service at age 25, and at age 50 they retired from some aspects of the ministry, but continued to attend to needs (Numbers 8:24-26).

2. Jesus priesthood is like Melchizedek (6,10-11)

Jesus priesthood is per the order of *Melchizedek*. We are going to learn more about him in chapter 7. He was a priest and king, who lived at the time of Abraham (centuries before Moses). Jewish priests described in the law of Moses were limited to the tribe of Levi (descendants of Aaron and the family of Kohath), and were not kings (Exodus 13:, Numbers 3:25-41, 1Samuel 13). Jesus is of the tribe of Judah, not Levi. Jesus priesthood is like Melchizedek's as there is no limit on tribe, dual role of king and priest, and no term limit.

3. Jesus offers Himself as the perfect sacrifice (7-9)

Jesus' prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, hours before the cross, are described as *prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears* (7, Matthew 26:36-39). Jesus repeatedly prayed that if there was any other way for man to be reconciled to God apart from the cross, then He would prefer not to experience the suffering of the judgment for the sin of all humanity; but added, "Not as I will but, as you will." The Father heard this prayer, and could spare his Son (7-8), but because of God's love for us and justice He allows His Son to go to the cross for us. At the cross, Jesus experienced obedience, as all God and all man, as He endured the difficulty of suffering related to the cross. Jesus was never disobedient, but in heaven there was no testing, and on earth the cross was the ultimate test (8). Through the cross, Jesus *perfected* or completed His work of redeeming mankind to God (9). Through the cross Jesus *became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him* (9). "Jesus does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:27). Salvation is by grace through faith, it is the gift of God, not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Believing is the obedience that saves, and yielding to Jesus proves that salvation. Jesus' gave Himself as a perfect sacrifice, once and for all. The sacrifice is limitless in its effectiveness, but only becomes effective when you believe and receive Him.

Note: Jesus is our great High priest! The Law of Moses reveals that humanity cannot approach God for mercy and grace without God's appointed High Priest. So, come boldly to Christ for mercy and grace.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. Why might people desire empathy from an intercessor?

Q2. List five or more needs that come to mind when you contemplate, "help in time of need"?

Q3. In Christ, we are invited to come to God's throne boldly that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Why might people neglect this amazing invitation?

Q4. How has your Neighborhood Group experience helped you to grow as a person of prayer?

"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Here is a link to a helpful free book on prayer: <https://calvarynexus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Prayer-Bruce-Zachary.pdf>.

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

- 1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?**
- 2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?**

Disciples who make disciples:

- 1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?**
- 2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:
[Offer to pray with \(or for\) a neighbor where you live, work, study, play or worship.](#)**

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. Preparation and participation: Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better. As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples. Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.