



INTRODUCTION

Hebrews 4:14-16

We have difficulty relating to the concept of a high priest, but to the Jews, it was an important office. Moses' brother Aaron was the first high priest. He was the mediator between the people and God. He and his fellow priests offered the sacrifices on behalf of the people. They had to follow a detailed procedure spelled out by God. Any variance or innovation meant instant death, as Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu discovered when they offered "strange fire" on the altar (Lev. 10:1-3).

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest alone would go into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for all the sins of the nation. If he entered there improperly or at any other time, he would die (Leviticus 16). He would sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat in the very presence of God. When he came out alive, the people heaved a sigh of relief, because it meant that God had accepted the sacrifice for their sins for another year.

Jesus is not just another high priest in the line of Aaron. Rather, He is our great high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (5:6). Rather than entering the Holy of Holies in the temple, He has passed through the heavens (in His ascension) into the very presence of God. The Jews thought of the sky as the first heaven. The stars are the second heaven. The presence of God is the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2). Whether the author has this in mind, or is just using "heavens" in the plural because the Hebrew word is always plural, we cannot say for certain.

But his point is that Jesus, our great high priest, is unlike any merely human high priest. He has entered the very presence of God. The Father has said to Him, "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Ps. 110:1). No earthly priest would dare to sit in the Holy of Holies! They always stood. But Jesus sits at the right hand of God's throne because once for all He made atonement for our sins (Heb. 10:12). So Jesus is a great high priest, in a class by Himself, because of His office as a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (which the author will explain more in the following chapters).¹

Watch It  Bible Principles

Watch Bible Principles #8; Heb. 4:14-16 www.villagebible.church/bibleprinciples

¹ Sermon by Steven Cole found at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-14-throne-grace-hebrews-414-16>

Open it

1. Who is someone of authority in your life you feel the freedom to approach candidly? What gives you that confidence?

Read it

Hebrews 4:14-16

Explore it

2. What office or role does this passage say Jesus fulfills? How is his fulfillment of this role set apart from the Levitical system?
3. Because of Jesus, what does the author of Hebrews urge his readers to do?
4. Why is Jesus able to sympathize with our weaknesses?
5. Because of our Great High Priest, how are we to approach our God?
6. What do we receive when we approach the throne of grace?

Apply it

The Great High Priest

Old Testament priests could only offer sacrifices that would delay God's judgment against sin. Their sacrifices could only buy time. Jesus' sacrifice, however, accomplished complete atonement for sin once and for all. This was only possible because he was without sin, totally unlike every other high priest and totally unlike every other human being.²

7. How is Jesus' priesthood greater than that of the Levitical high priests?

8. In what ways does Jesus' great sacrifice and great intercession in the presence of God, give you strength to hold fast your confession of faith?

Sticking With It

The grand and great point of this for the author's Jewish hearers is the overarching superiority of Jesus, their great High Priest. Their preacher-writer-friend knew that amidst the rising troubles, some of them would no doubt look back through rose-colored glasses to the Levitical system, over-imagining the comfort of having priestly mediation, and some would be in danger of being sucked back into the system.³

9. What is our confession that the author is referring to in this passage?

² Mohler, R. Albert. Exalting Jesus in Hebrews (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 67-68). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

³ Hughes, R. Kent. Hebrews (2 volumes in 1 / ESV Edition) (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 2182-2185). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

10. The Jewish people were tempted to turn back to something tangible that they could see and touch in a sense. While we don't have the experience of a high priest in our own context, what things might we be tempted to turn back to?

11. How might our troubles and temptations today cause us to abandon our confession of faith? What must we do to ensure that we hold fast to our confession?

Temptation without Sin

As C. S. Lewis explained: A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is... You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means— the only complete realist.⁴

12. Explain the difference between temptation and sin. Scripture is clear that Jesus was without sin, yet faced temptation. How can we be tempted and still not fall into sin?

⁴ Hughes, R. Kent. Hebrews (2 volumes in 1 / ESV Edition) (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 2226-2228). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

13. In what ways does Jesus' sinlessness inspire and motivate you in your own battle against sin?

Approach with Confidence

The term that the ESV renders "confidence" here has a long documented history in classical Greek and denotes "free and open speech of citizens with one another." Significantly, it was never used for prayer in pagan classical literature. Rather, it was the Jews who first began to use it in the Greek Old Testament to describe prayer. It means "bold frankness" — an open outpouring of the heart.

There is no suggestion of disrespect here, but simply that we are to come to God without hesitation or tentativeness. What a contrast with the trepidation of the high priest when he entered the Holy of Holies! This is one of the grand revelations of this letter: "Come frankly and confidently to God, brothers and sisters!"⁵

14. We are urged in this passage to draw before the throne of God with confidence, or "an open outpouring of the heart." Yet scripture tells us we should also fear the Lord and submit to Him. How would you describe reverent confidence before the Lord?

15. How might our enemy try to attack our confidence before the throne of grace? What things might the devil use to make us feel we don't have confidence before God?

⁵ Hughes, R. Kent. Hebrews (2 volumes in 1 / ESV Edition) (Preaching the Word) (Kindle Locations 2246-2252). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

The Throne of Grace

P. T. Forsyth used to insist that prayerlessness is the root of all sin. When we do not give time each day to earnest and believing prayer, we are saying that we can cope with life without divine aid. It is human arrogance at its worst. Jesus knew that he had to pray and did so, gladly, necessarily and effectively. To be prayerless is to be guilty of the worst form of practical atheism. We are saying that we believe in God but we can do without him.⁶

16. What two things are we told we will receive at the throne of grace? How do these two things give us hope in approaching God despite our circumstances?

17. The original readers of Hebrews were facing trials on account of their faith and temptations to turn away from it. Why is prayer such an important weapon in our fight amidst trials and temptations? How does God offer us help through prayer?

⁶ Brown, Raymond. The Message of Hebrews (The Bible Speaks Today Series) . InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.
This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Jeremy Anderson (Indian Creek Campus)—www.villagebible.church/smallgroup