

# **PART 2: THE PRIEST (Hebrews 4:14--7:28)**

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **The Epistle to the Hebrews**

#### **THE PREPARATION OF THE PRIEST (Hebrews 4:14---5:10)**

by G. H. Lang

#### **Chapter 4**

14. Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.
15. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.
16. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help *us* in time of need.

#### **Chapter 5**

1. For every high priest, being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins;
2. who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity;
3. and by reason thereof is bound, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.
4. And no man taketh the honour unto himself, but when he is called of God, even as was Aaron.
5. So Christ also glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but he that spake unto him, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee:
6. as he saith also in another place, Thou art (a) priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.
7. Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear;
8. though he was (a) Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered;
9. and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation;
10. named of God (a) high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

In the opening description of the dignities and offices of the Son of God it was mentioned that He "made purification of sins" (1:3). The means by which He did this were indicated in 2:14, 15: He became man, taking part in flesh and blood, in order that He might die, an event impossible to Him in His original condition in the form of God.

But only by death could He provide a righteous and lawful deliverance for creatures in bondage to death under the just law of the holy God.

A further result of becoming man was that He obtained experimental acquaintance with the essential elements in the case of those He came to rescue, and in particular with the power of their Enemy the devil, as he tempts them to rebellion, and their own weakness against him. By these various and severe trials He became able to sympathize with and to succour those who will accept His service unto salvation. Through sufferings He was "perfected"; not, that is, as to His moral nature and character, for these were inherently perfect; He was always completely devoted to the will of God; but perfected as the Author of salvation for sinful man (2:10).

The keen tests which the devil was permitted to apply to Him served to show that He was without sin, and so without liability to the law of God, and therefore able, as one rich in righteousness, to accept and discharge the liabilities to the Divine law of sinners wholly bankrupt morally, with no righteousness to present to God.

Criminals under sentence of death have no access to their Sovereign. Any hope of reprieve must arise by the activities on their behalf of some person acceptable to the Sovereign and having access to him. In England, the Home Secretary can so act, and when he does so he becomes virtually a priest, a mediator between the King and the criminal. This gracious office Christ, risen from the dead, and gone to the audience chamber of God, now holds in heaven, this saving service He now renders to those who draw near to God through Him. He has "become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (2:17).

It is upon this High Priest that we are exhorted to fix our attention: "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus" (3:1); and, having turned aside to enforce the need of this by the solemn considerations that follow in chs. 3 and 4, the Writer now returns to the main theme and enlarges upon the priestly labors of the Son of God.

2. *The Fact and use of the Priest* (4:14-16). The following features are presented for our attention.

i. The Priest *exists*. We have Him. The present participle "having" indicates that He exists and acts as priest continuously, without intermission. At all times He is available.

ii. He is no *insignificant* person. Jeroboam was ready to appoint as priest any nobody that came along (1 Kings 13:33); but God's Priest is "great" in person and standing and power.

iii. He is *high* priest, not a subordinate. He has access to the throne, He has authority over all God's affairs, He dispenses all God's bounties, He can introduce unto God all whom He will (Matt. 11:27; John 6:37-40).

iv. He has passed *through* the heavens, as the high priest in Israel passed through the courts and the veils into the audience chamber of the Most High. None can debar Him access; He is already there and there permanently.

v. He is *Jesus*, the man of human nature, experience, sympathy. The man Who never drove away even one who sought Him, but right warmly welcomed all; He is Bunyan's Man at the Gate into the King's highway, Who when the trembling pilgrim asked if he could pass in, replied "With all my heart!" Rome encourages her devotees to appeal to "Mary" because of her womanly tenderness, in contrast to an alleged sternness of Jesus. The answer to this gross misrepresentation is simply the name JESUS.

vi. *He is the Son of God*, personally acceptable to the Father, the Son He loves pre-eminently; able to understand God and His rights and able to meet them fully; even as He understands man and his needs and is able to meet them fully. He is the perfect Mediator, able perfectly to understand both parties, God and man.

vii. He is *without sin*. In Him there was nothing carnal to respond to temptation. He felt it, indeed, the more keenly that His susceptibilities were not dulled by sinful indulgence; but in Him there was no response to its overtures, but perfect revulsion and complete rejection. He *suffered* under temptation, suffered exquisitely, agonizingly (Luke 22:44); but He did not succumb.

**3. Our Response.** Because of this full provision to meet our need we are required.

i. To *hold fast* our confession. The heathen confesses Siva, Krishna, Vishnu, or some other demon to be his god and he seeks the help of the priest of his god in his approach or prayer. The Moslem confesses Allah to be his god and that Mohammet is the prophet of god. Israel of old confessed Jehovah to be their God and Aaron to be their priest to secure for them the blessing of God. The Christian is one who confesses the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ as his God and draws near unto Him through Christ.

Against this confession Satan hurls his heaviest attacks. To maintain it courageously is at once the conflict of this age, the method by which the Spirit of truth illuminates and delivers others, the basis of reward in the day of Christ.

The power for this confession is that the heart be in the present enjoyment of the mighty facts expressed in the name *Jesus the Son of God*. If He is to me what this name means then I shall talk about Him; one cannot help doing so. As Spurgeon said: We are fools for Christ's sake, and therefore we must be allowed to preach Christ crucified, for *every fool talks about what is uppermost in his mind*.

ii. We must *draw near* unto God. Jonah fled from Him, with painful results. The publican (Luke 18) sought His mercy, but could get no nearer than the front gate of His holy house, where the victim on the altar procured for him pardon. He was justified there and then; but he went down to his own house, he dared not go forward into God's house, for the way into the holy place had not yet been made manifest (9:8).

But since Calvary the veil is rent, the new, the living way has been dedicated for our use (10:20), God is personally accessible; the Mediator is there to bring us to God in peace, and we are therefore to *draw near*, not merely to "come (as A.V.) but to "draw near," as Moses to the burning bush (Acts 7:31), and Philip to the chariot of the eunuch (Acts 8:29) (where the same word is used), and we are to do so with boldness. Then we shall learn that we have access to the throne whence issue decisions against which lies no appeal, and shall experience that at this holy throne we are sure of grace, of undeserved Divine favour, the favour deserved only by the Son but shared by Him with the Sons.

"So near, so very near to God, nearer I cannot be,  
For in the person of the Son, I am as near as He."

It is needful to hold this as a doctrine, to hold it tenaciously, but this is not *enough*. One may hold the doctrine, yet break down as a confessor. The soul must be in the joy of it all: "realization is everything in the things of God" (A. N. Groves). And he who, by confidence in the Priest, with the energy of His Spirit of sonship, does thus enter into the presence of God in heart consciousness, and does this habitually, will find that he gains there what can be gained nowhere else, even mercy to forgive his failings, and grace, that is, succour and strength, to meet every need of his pilgrim life as a confessor of God and His Son.

**4. The High Priest (vers. 1-10).** Such boldness toward God is the very opposite of presumption, seeing that it is God Himself who has made the approach possible by

appointing the adequate Mediator. We ought to draw near with assurance “for,” on account of, the High Priest. To seek God tremblingly is to show that the soul has no proper appreciation of Christ or reliance upon Him.

There were certain features applicable to “every high priest” of old.

i. He was “taken *from among* men.” He is no stranger to the parties he has to represent in court. He is one of their race and nature.

ii. “He was appointed *for* men”; the office exists for their benefit.

iii. His special sphere was the “*things pertaining to God.*” It was his office to adjust man’s relations with God. He meets the claims of God against the guilty; He instructs the godly how to please God and infuses into them His strength to do this.

iv. With this in view *He presented to God* two kinds of offering, namely, “gifts” and “sacrifices for sins.” Gifts have priority, for angels and men offered to God gifts of love and gratitude before sin entered; and unfallen angels and redeemed men will continue to do so for ever after the Son shall have reconciled heaven and earth to God, having removed in reality the sin that He put away judicially by the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. This priority was recognized by that discerning scribe who said that “to love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and love his neighbor as himself, is much more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33). To re-establish this normal condition is the work and object of the High Priest, to which end holy angels and reconciled men are privileged to cooperate with Him and each other.

v. *Personal infirmity.* The Priest knows by experience the weakness attaching to human nature. It is as a chain hampering movement and restricting freedom (Acts 28:20); yea, as a millstone slung around the neck and threatening one with destruction (Mk. 9:42; Luke 17:2); or (as in the only other place (12:1) where the word [*peirkeimai*] comes) it is a crowd encompassing one, which may impede progress. All this the High Priest knows by experience, and so . . .

vi. He “can *deal gently,*” or, more accurately, can “moderate his feelings” (*metriopatheo*) toward those who fail. Human nature forms swift and severe opinions about failing fellow-mortals, and is ready to pass harsh judgment. But the truly qualified priest remembers his own weakness. As he watches the criminal going to the gallows, he says: “But for the grace of God, there goes John Bradford.”

vii. But it is with “*the ignorant and the erring*” that the High Priest deals gently. And the assumption here is that they are not *willingly* ignorant, much less willfully rejecting knowledge had or available. From the word rendered “ignorant” comes *agnostic*, the self-chosen title of certain modern deniers of God, for whom the light of revelation is available but they reject it. It is not such that are here presented as the objects of pity and sympathy, but such as are genuinely ignorant as to God and His law.

Moreover, in the word rendered “erring” (*planao*) there is prominent the notion of one being led astray by some malevolent deceiver or influence. The sinner is blinded by the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), who hoodwinks and beguiles Eve’s children as he did Eve (2 Cor. 11:3). And as on this account God dealt gently with Eve and opened for her a door to freedom, so does God’s Priest treat other deceived and ignorant souls.

But, on the other hand, for such as are willfully ignorant in spite of opportunities of knowledge, and who willingly, from love of sin, follow the Deceiver, there is no mercy, at least not until they repent and seek mercy. For in chapter 3:10, the same words are associated as regards perverse Israel, of whom God said (Ps. 95:10); “They do always *err* in their heart: but they did *not know* My ways.” But this was because they had deliberately and repeatedly hardened their hearts against God, though they saw His works of power, in grace and in wrath, for forty years. The Writer will later make clear that the High Priest cannot help such, but that in them is fulfilled of just necessity the prayer, “Be not merciful to any *wicked* transgressors” (Ps. 59:5).

But where there is some sincere desire to know and to do what pleases God, yet there is failure, even grievous failure, through ignorance and weakness, then the High Priest is compassionate and ever glad to save, for

“He knows what sore temptations mean,  
For He has felt the same.”

viii. All the foregoing particulars are easily seen to apply to Christ as high priest, but how can this be said of the connected statement that the high priest is under obligation (*opheilei*), “as for the people, so also for himself to offer for sins” (ver. 3)? There would appear to be only one sense, and this a modified sense, in which it can be so applied, and here enters one of the deepest elements of His sacrifice of Himself, even that, in a real sense, it was for Himself. Personally He was always without sin, as much on the cross as before and after it. But “Jehovah made to light on Him the iniquity of us all” “It was exacted and He was made answerable” (Isa. 53:7; Lowth, Newberry). Lev. 4:24 says of the goat offered as a sin offering that “it *is sin*,” and the goat slain on the Day of Atonement was to be “*made sin*” (Lev. 16:9). Equally of Christ it is said (2

Cor. 5:21), that “Him who knew no sin God *made sin* on our behalf.” Having thus, in divine grace, accepted the legal responsibility of sins not His own, there was no way by which He could release Himself from the liability save by discharging it, and in this sense the sinless Priest and Lamb of God offered His sacrifice “as for the people, so also for Himself.” By His atoning death He delivered Himself as well as His people from death, the penalty of sin. On this account it will be said later (9:12) that it was “through [the merit of] His own blood that He entered into the holy place.” His blood was “as a key opening the holiest to Him” (Alford, *in loco*). By assuming our guilt He debarred Himself from entering the presence of God; by discharging our guilt He regained His right of access, and acquired it for us also.

ix. No such priest can be self-appointed or man-appointed but must receive his charge from God, as did Aaron (ver. 4; Exod. 28:1; 1 Chron. 23:13). The sin of self-appointment was met by God with summary death, as in the case of Korah and his company (Num. 16). The sin of appointment by man caused the destruction of Jeroboam, the appointer, and his house (1 Kings 13:33, 34).

The writer proposes to show later that Christ has superseded Aaron (ch. 71). He therefore establishes his argument by showing that the Son of God did not arrogate to Himself this honorable office. The fact illustrates that even in His resurrection life the Son receives all from the Father. Not only in the humble conditions of His life on earth, but in His glorious status in heaven, He does nothing “of Himself” by His own separate initiative or action. It is the Father who appoints and who announces the appointment. This last had been done in advance by the Spirit of prophecy, as in the second psalm, ver. 7. God had then said:

Thou art my Son,  
This day have I begotten thee;

and later had declared (Ps. 110:4):

Thou art priest for ever  
After the order of Melchizedek.

x. Paul described his career of conflict and hardship as the life which I now live *in the flesh*” (Gal. 2:20). It was through the body that the stern struggle was carried on and its intensity felt. Similarly in ver. 7 the severe battle waged by the Son of God is described as “the days of *His flesh*.” The acute strain was a consequence, accompaniment, and proof of His humanity, its reality and sensitiveness. That humanity

was no mere but unreal semblance, as the Docetics and Gnostics taught, thereby earning the description of deceivers and antichrist (2 John 7, 8).

So intensely real and acute were Christ's human feelings and conscious weakness that He was necessarily a man of prayer, and "offered tip prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save Him." Prayers (*deesis*) point to the particular petitions; supplications (*hiketeria*) seem rather to hint at the lowlier rank of the petitioner, who does not prefer a request as of title but as a *suppliant*. The Son having become man felt and owned His dependence upon God. He felt also and intensely the urgency, the desperateness of His position; it constrained Him to "strong crying and tears." Gethsemane was no light affair, but a terrible ordeal causing sweat like blood to drip from His veins upon the ground. Yet were "the sufferings of His body the body of His sufferings, and the sufferings of His soul were the soul of His sufferings" (Spurgeon).

From *what* did He so earnestly cry to be saved? Not from the act of dying; that He had recently faced, and had challenged I-Himself whether He should ask to be saved from being as a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies. Nay, He had replied: "for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:24, 27). We take the words "able to save Him *out of death*" to mean deliverance from the death state and realm into which He was descending willingly, but which to the Prince of life was an awful experience. See *Note* at end of this chapter.

Moreover, had He remained there, were He still there, He would have suffered on the cross in vain; no sinner could have been justified and redeemed, nor could He Himself have known the answer to His prayer, "Now Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). His resurrection was indispensable and it was an answer to prayer.

How vital is piety to prayer: it was on account of His godly fear that His prayer was heard.

xi. It was through these prolonged and painful experiences that He, though Son to God His Father, learned what obedience to the Father's will costs in a world ruled by that Father's enemy and by sin. He did not learn to obey; that He knew from the first by the instincts of His sinless heart: but He learned the nature and the benefit of obedience, for thereby He became perfectly, experimentally fitted to be the "cause of eternal salvation" to those who in their turn learn to obey Him as He obeyed the Father. Good is Chrysostom's personal application of this: "If He, being Son, gained obedience from His sufferings, much rather we" (Westcott *in loco*).

**Note .** At first sight the usage of *ek thanatou* seems to vary.

(1) In 2 Cor. 1:10, “who delivered us *ot4 of (ek)* so great a death,” the sense is that Paul was kept from dying. (2) It is the same in Jas. 5:20. “He who turneth back a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul [life] *from (ek)* death,” that is, from dying prematurely under the summary judgment of God. Camp. 1 John 5:16; 1 Cor. 5:3-6 with 2 Cor. 2:5-10; 1 Cor. 11:27-32; Acts 5:1-11. (3) But in 1 John 3:14, “passed *out of (ek)* death into life,” the man is viewed as having been *in* spiritual death and having been raised *out of* it; which (4) is a repeating of Christ’s words given in John 5:24 that the believer “has passed *out of (ek)* death into life.”

But it is possible that in cases (1) and (2) above *ek* is used because the deaths in question were regarded as so seemingly inevitable that the persons were already “as good as dead,” and the deliverance was reckoned to have brought them *out of* the death state where they were *deemed* to be, though not yet *actually* in it.

The usage of the Septuagint is similar. (1) In Job 5:20 *ek* means kept from dying or being killed: “In famine he shall deliver thee *from (ek)* death, and in war he shall free thee *out of (ek)* the hand [power] of the sword.” (2) Ps. 29 (30):3 has this sense; “Lord, thou hast brought up (*anegages*) my soul *out of (ek)* Hades, thou hast saved me (*esosas*) *from (apo)* those going down into the pit.” The preceding verse shows that this was a matter of bodily healing, not of actual death and resurrection: “I cried to thee and thou didst heal me.” Yet here also death may have seemed so certain that the writer thinks of himself as having been in Hades as to his heart’s contemplation, and so of having been brought up *out of* it. (3) But Ps. 33 (34):19 has the meaning of being brought out of circumstances in which one actually is: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but *out of (ek)* them all the Lord will save them.” (4) Ps. 116:8 reads: “He has delivered my soul *out of (ek)* death, my eyes *from (apo)* tears, and my feet *from (apo)* sliding.” The two latter clauses require the sense of the writer having experienced tears and sliding, which suggests a metaphorical sense of the first clause; he was to himself as already dead, according to ver. 3: “The pangs of death compassed me, the dangers of Hades found me.” (5) Esther 4:8. Mordecai charged Esther to “speak to the king concerning us, to rescue us *out of death*” (*ek thanatou*). They had not actually been killed, but were legally dead, being under sentence of death, and so deliverance would be, as it were, *out of death*. (6) The natural force of *ek* is seen in 1 Macc. 2:59: “Ananias, Azaria, Misael having trusted [in God] were saved *out of (ek)* the flame.” These had been literally in the fire. But (7) in the next verse, “Daniel for his innocence was rescued *from (ek)* the mouth of lions.”

Jude 5 speaks of Israel having been “saved *out of (ek)* the land of Egypt,” in which they had actually been, and in John 12:27, the Lord regards Himself as having already reached a certain hour for a definite purpose, and therefore He would not ask the Father to save Him “*out of (ek)* this hour.” This sets aside any thought that He would ask to be saved from dying, and so requires that Heb. 5:7 be taken, as above, as a prayer for resurrection.

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