

## Lesson Five

(2:17-18)

### OUR HIGH PRIEST

<sup>17</sup>Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup>For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

The Hebrew epistle is unique in its presentation of Jesus as high priest. Generally the emphasis is upon Jesus' divinity/humanity, or his being savior, or lordship. While all of these concepts are also in Hebrews, the major thrust of the book is on the fact of Jesus being our high priest. The concept is approached from various angles in the book, and will be discussed at the appropriate places. Suffice it to say here that the sacrifice Jesus made for sin, and his continued intercession at God's right hand on behalf of "saved sinners" is the crux of the New Covenant, that which makes it better than the Old Covenant, or any other religious system.

2:17 — **he had to be made like** — many times the New Testament writers present the idea that Jesus though being deity became also

## TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

human. The opening verses of John's gospel provide endless food for thought, that Jesus was deity but became flesh, dwelling among men. I John 1:1-4 insists that Jesus was not a phantom, but was actual flesh. Jesus made the same point even after his resurrection, that he was flesh, Luke 24:39-41. The familiar accounts of the incarnation and the beautiful text in Philippians 2:1-11 sort of capsulize the tenor of the New Covenant scriptures. Note that Paul especially used the word likeness in Philippians 2:7 and Romans 8:3.

**his brethren** — As commented in lesson 3, Jesus did attempt in every way to relate to humanity. His earthly life surely was not lived in a vacuum, but rather he could readily understand life. His birth in humble surroundings was, in contrast to his heavenly home, awful. Yet many have been brought into the world in pitiful places, sometimes with no one to care, even the parents. It might have been true that the innkeeper was indifferent, but Jesus had parents who cared. The gifts that the wise men brought doubtless helped in the expenses of a hurried trip to Egypt, but the gospel accounts indicate that Jesus grew up in a home where "ends didn't always meet." God knows how it is down here — he grew up, lived and died here — that he might be like his (potential) brethren.

**merciful . . . faithful** — These two terms are most important to our understanding of Jesus. Each term is full of meaning as we contemplate Jesus and our own self.

Mercy is that quality, of God or of anyone, that can't be demanded. Wages can be demanded (the laborer is worthy of his hire) but mercy isn't a wage. It isn't owed though it may be given and received. God didn't have to love us, or do anything for us — but he did. Moreover, he, in his Son, became like us so that we might know that he does understand our problems, most especially those problems that occur over and over again.

Faithful is a different characteristic — it is often not associated with mercy, but both have a definite bearing on our need as sinners. The Greek term translated "faithful" is the same word translated as "belief." The context will generally help us to decide which of our English words best fits the idea at hand. However, we must remember that both concepts are inherent in the Greek term. From the position of the high priest, who must confront the same people over and over again, often with the same sins, who must also represent them to God and God to them, both these characteristics are needful. Mercy is needed, but so is faithfulness.

**in the service of God** — As noted above, the one who is high priest must mediate for people to God, but must also represent God to the worshippers. Neither facet must be overshadowed by the other. Eli's two sons were unduly like humans and were tragic examples of many other priests who forgot whose they were and whom they served.

**expiation** — Some versions used “propitiation” here while others, avoiding the theological problems with expiation/propitiation use “sin-offering.” The Greek term, *λασμος*, can be seen in Luke 18:13; Romans 3:25 and I John 2:2; 4:10. In the Old Testament, the LXX used it for the place of the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, as in Exodus 25:19. The idea is that of mercy, not deserved, but needed. All were under the wrath of God, Romans 1:18ff.; 5:9 — none could pay the ransom. Jesus came and accomplished “what the law . . . could not do,” making reconciliation for the sins of all people.

V. 18 — **suffered** — Jesus’ suffering is underscored many places in our Bible, beginning with types and shadows, prophetic utterances (Psalms 22; Isaiah 53), and elaborated upon by the New Testament writers (I Peter 2:21-24; Philippians 3:10). Suffering generally equals the events surrounding his death, since he seemingly didn’t suffer except at that time.

**tempted** — The Greek term, *πειρασμος*, carries the twin ideas of test/tempt. Context will determine which of the two English words best conveys what is in the context. As is born out elsewhere (Matthew 4:1ff.; Hebrews 5:7-9; etc.) he was subjected to “life.” Hence, he can identify with us, and we with him, all the while realizing that he did not succumb to any. He then knows the exact strength of temptation. We can not affirm that “he doesn’t know my/our problems” for he does know them. He experienced them all, withstood them all, then became guilty of them all, II Corinthians 5:21, even to suffering their penalty. Let us then rejoice in such a high priest!

**he is able** — “Tis the grandest theme . . . !” And so it is — we serve the God who is both able and willing, whose son not only loved us but gave himself up for us. What need we more?

**those who are tempted** — The Greek text has it “Jesus is able the ones being tempted to help.” Temptation/testing is constant, in various ways and manners, in all sizes and colors, in all times and places. How eternally valid it is to sing “I need Jesus, I need him every hour.”

## QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5:

31. Did you take time to read the various texts in Hebrews suggested in the lesson outline on page vi?
32. Comparably, which other New Testament letter develops Jesus as our high priest?
33. Did Jesus ever intercede for anyone while here upon earth? (Notice Luke 22:31-32; 23:34; John 11:41-42; 17:9, 20.)

## TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

34. Do you think that Jesus was "human" like you are?
35. Could a high priest be too merciful? not faithful?
36. What two relationships does a high priest sustain in the service of God?
37. What was the primary service of Jesus as high priest in the service of God, according to v. 17?
38. How much do you think Jesus is able to help you?