

The Qualifications Of A High Priest

Christ is our high priest. This truth first is introduced in Hebrew 2:17 and referred to again in chapter three. Now in chapter four and five the functions and qualification of a priest are set forth. *"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with our infirmities, but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"* (Heb. 4:15). *"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: who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring ..."* (Heb. 5:1f). Summed up, these verses teach us that a high priest stood between men and God, that He offered (for man) gifts and sacrifices in things pertaining to God; that He must bear gently with the ignorant and unsteadfast. We are repeatedly assured in various places that Christ is our mediator and Advocate (1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Jn. 2:1). We are told that Christ gave Himself for us, that He is the propitiation for our sins and for those of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). We are reminded many times of the tender care our Savior has for us, that we are to cast all our cares upon Him, because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). He knows and fulfills our needs. Because of His adequacy in filling all the needs of man, He is perfectly suited to function as our high priest.

But the Hebrew writer was addressing a Jewish audience and while Jesus might perfectly function as a high priest, it was necessary that He meet God's qualifications to be a high priest. The writer was keenly conscious of this and elsewhere showed that the priesthood of Christ was in heaven; that He could not serve as a priest on earth because Moses spake nothing about one for Judah serving as priests. The writer says, *"The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of law"* (Heb. 7:15).

Our writer shows that, despite the fact that Christ was of a different tribe than that from whence priests were to be taken, that did not disqualify Him serving as a priest. To be a high priest, one must have a divine call -- Aaron did and so did Jesus. *"So Christ also glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but he that spoke unto him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee; as he said also in another place 'thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek'"* (Heb. 5:5f). Discerning Jewish scholars must have pondered the significance of the passage from Psalms: *"Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."* Many questions must have flooded their minds. What was the significance of a priest different from that of Aaron? Who was this to whom God swore these words? In addition, Zechariah must have likewise baffled them when he spoke of the man called the Branch (a clear reference to the Messiah whom all acknowledged was to come from David and from Judah). Of that one, Zechariah declared that the

man called the Branch would be a priest upon His throne (Zech. 6:12f). Surely this was at odds with the accepted tribe, Levi! Who was this man to whom God swore, "*Thou art a priest forever*"? This man was the man the Psalmist spoke: "*The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet*" (Ps. 110:4). No Jewish scholar could dispute that God had spoken of a high priest other than from the tribe of Levi, and the Hebrew writer affirmed that just as God called Aaron to be a priest, so He called His Son to be our high priest today. Jesus is eminently qualified both by His call and from the functions He fills, to be an adequate high priest for us!

Jim McDonald