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among Lutheran theologians to the present day. In that they differ from their Reformed and Roman Catholic counterparts, who traditionally have had no such reservations about its canonical status.131

**The Liturgical Nature and Purpose of Hebrews**

So much work has been done from many different angles over the last thirty years on the analysis and interpretation of Hebrews that it is hard to survey and assess all the material that has been published. Yet there is one thing that has begun to emerge which, I reckon, requires fresh consideration in a new commentary. That is the liturgical context and purpose of this homily.

While there has been an ongoing debate on whether Hebrews either mentions or alludes to the Lord’s Supper,132 little attention has been given to its broader liturgical context and purpose. Witherington sums up this issue well, albeit from an anthropocentric perspective:133

> Since this homily is meant to be heard in the context of worship, we should evaluate it in that light. In worship we praise God for what he has done and is, and we draw near to him, as the letter exhorts us to do, but in worship we also hear and learn what we must go forth and do. Hebrews then is a vehicle for worship that leads to the right sort of service.134

It is, however, hard to follow Witherington’s advice because we are so severely hampered by disagreement on the nature, content, and purpose of worship, both for that congregation and in our modern ecumenical context.

While the sermon describes only the worship of the angels in the sense of their prostration before the exalted Lord Jesus in 1:6, it lays great weight on the “service” (λατρεία or λατρεύω) of the congregation (9:9, 14; 12:28) in contrast with the “service” of God’s people in the old covenant (8:5; 9:1, 6; 10:2; 13:10). In fact, the sermon sets out to encourage the congregation to “serve” the living God in a well-pleasing way with a clean conscience (9:14; 12:28). In their service they, by faith, are able to “come near” (προσέρχομαι or ἐγγίζω) to God, in order to present their offerings to him and receive gifts from him (4:16; 7:19, 25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:22). Their service to God is both the liturgical purpose and the liturgical context of the sermon.

The liturgical purpose of the sermon corresponds with the theological purpose of the service. It revolves around the presence of Christ Jesus as the hearers’ great High Priest and their possession of him (4:14; 8:1; 10:21). He is available and accessible to them in their service. Through him they have access to God’s presence in heaven (10:19–22). Because they “have” him as their High

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131 See the helpful summary in Koester, Hebrews, 37–40.

132 See excursus 12, “Allusions to the Lord’s Supper in Hebrews,” following the commentary on 6:4–12.

133 What Witherington omits is that “we draw near to” God *in order to receive his grace in Jesus Christ, which alone enables us to do* “what we must go forth and do.”

Priest (4:14; 8:1), they “have” the other eschatological gifts that come from God: strong encouragement to enter God’s presence (6:18) and free-speaking access to God (10:19), the hope of God’s blessing (6:19) and a great reward (10:35), a cloud of witnesses all around them (12:1), God’s grace (12:28), and an altar that provides them with heavenly food (13:10).

Jesus, their great High Priest, serves the congregation as its mediator (8:6; 9:15; 12:24). He is faithful in serving God and gracious in ministering to them (2:17). As their liturgical minister he, like the priests in the old covenant, brings them to God and God to them (8:2, 6). On the one hand, he now appears on their behalf with his blood before God in heaven (9:11–12, 24). There he presents the congregants with himself to God (2:13). There he stands in for them and intercedes for them (7:25). Through him they come near to God and present their offerings to him (7:25; 13:15). On the other hand, he also now speaks God’s Word to them on earth (1:2; 12:25). He proclaims God’s name to them as he sings God’s praises (2:12). He pardons their sins (2:17); he purifies them (9:14) and makes them holy (2:11; 13:12). Through his speaking blood he offers them the better things that come from God (12:24), the better things that belong to their salvation (6:9). As they listen to him, they receive grace and mercy from God (4:16). Through him God equips them with every good thing for them to do what pleases him (13:20–21).

What then is the liturgical context of this liturgical homily? Was it a charismatic service in which the gifts of the Spirit were distributed and exercised? Yes, but that occurred as they heard the message of salvation (2:1–4) and shared a holy meal (6:4–5)! Was it a service of prayer and praise? Yes, but that was done in connection with hearing God’s Word (4:12–16) and eating the holy food that came from the Lord’s altar (13:8–15)! Was it a service of the Word with readings from the Septuagint and teaching that was much like what happened in the Greek-speaking synagogues of the Jewish diaspora? Yes, but that was associated with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as a communal meal! While we do not know exactly what was done, when it was done, or how it was done, the service most likely had the following components:

- Leaders who spoke God’s Word to the congregation (13:7, 17)
- The confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ, God’s Son, and Lord (3:1; 4:14; 10:23)
- The presentation of psalms and hymns of praise together with the angels as a thank offering to God through Jesus (2:11–12; 12:22; 13:15)
- Readings from the OT by which God spoke to the congregation through the prophets and by his Son (1:1–2)
- The leaders’ exposition and application of the readings in a word of encouragement to the congregation (13:22)
- The presentation of offerings (13:16)
- Petitions for help from God (4:16; cf. 7:25)
- Intercessions for others (4:16; 13:18)
- Reception of Christ’s body and blood in a sacrificial meal (13:9–12)
• The performance of a benediction (13:20–21b)
• The performance of doxology to Jesus (13:21c)
• A liturgical greeting for the bestowal of God’s grace (13:25)

Thus Vanhoye accurately sketches out the liturgical context of Hebrews:

The Priestly Sermon (Heb 1,1–13,21) has been composed to be read aloud before a Christian assembly, doubtless like the one which St. Luke describes in Acts 20,7–8 or St. Paul in 1 Cor 14,26. The Christians have come together to hear the Word of God, to sing, to pray, and also, quite likely, to celebrate the Eucharist (cf. Acts 20,7; 1 Cor 11,20).135

In this commentary I too assume that the homily was delivered in the context of a service that began with the reading of the OT and culminated in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. If that is so, then its liturgical setting is in fact much more significant for its interpretation than the social, cultural, and political context of the congregation.

The liturgical setting of this sermon colors how it is heard and understood both in its original context and in its present context. So, for example, if the congregation heard the words of Christ in the Lord’s Supper “this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you,”136 this would, no doubt, have influenced how they understood the mention of “the new covenant” in 8:8; 9:15; 12:24; “the blood of the [new] covenant” in 10:29; “by/with the blood” in 10:19 and 13:20; and other references to the “blood” of Jesus, including “his own blood” in 9:12; “the blood of Christ” in 9:14; “the blood for sprinkling” of the “new covenant” in 12:24; and “through his own blood” in 13:12. Likewise, the mention of attention to what had been heard in 2:1 and tasting the heavenly gift in 6:4 would also have been considered by the congregation in the light of the sermon’s liturgical context. Thus Arthur Just rightly notes that the issue for debate is not just whether Hebrews refers, explicitly or implicitly, to the Lord’s Supper in a few isolated verses, but whether this homily was addressed to a congregation that regularly celebrated the Lord’s Supper. He argues that this was most likely the case. He therefore concludes:

As a homily, Hebrews … is intended to be preached as a performative word in the context of a worshipping assembly where Christ is present bodily as he comes to the hearers in their ears through the proclaimed word and in their mouths through the Lord’s Supper.137

The context of the sermon determines how it is heard by the congregation.

The issue of liturgical context is closely connected with the liturgical purpose of the sermon. If the hearing of this sermon prepared the congregation for the reception of the Lord’s Supper, and if the risen Lord Jesus was regarded as the priestly host of that celebration, that colors how the congregation considered

135 Vanhoye, Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 45.
136 See the wording in Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25.
their involvement with Jesus in the Divine Service and their approach to God through him. So too the exhortations in this sermon to hold on to their confession, to serve the living God, and to present their offering of praise to God through him!

The teaching on God’s provision of access to himself through Jesus shows us the liturgical purpose of the sermon. The author of Hebrews clearly regards that as communal undertaking, something that is done publicly and corporately. Mackie therefore rightly critiques those who, like Scholer in Proleptic Priests, hold that this is a subjective spiritual experience rather than a communal activity and is only a provisional anticipation of our eventual participation in the eschatological heavenly cultus. He argues that “the author’s entry exhortations must reflect the actual experience of unhindered, substantial, and life-changing access to God and his Son.”

Well how can that be? Hebrews, says Mackie, is an eschatological exhortation for those upon whom the end of the ages has come through the sacrificial self-offering and manifestation of Jesus as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (9:26). There he provides them with access to God by interceding for them (7:25), cleansing them (9:14), consecrating them (2:11; 10:10, 29; 13:12), and perfecting them as members of God’s household, which is the new sacral sphere (10:14). Through Jesus they enjoy the heavenly gift of the Spirit and the powers of the age to come for their earthly existence (6:4–5). So the teaching of Hebrews about the provision of access to God through Jesus as the great High Priest culminates in exhortation to come near to God and his throne of grace (4:16; 10:19–22; 12:22–24; cf. 7:25).

Two answers have been given on how the congregation has access to God in the heavenly realm. The first is that this refers to a mystical, visionary experience. It is argued that the author is a mystagogue who leads the congregation into a mystical encounter with the exalted Lord Jesus. His sermon stems from his own visionary mediation on certain key passages from the OT. In it he engages the congregation imaginatively with the exalted Lord Jesus. His sermon stems from his own visionary mediation on certain key passages from the OT. In it he engages the congregation imaginatively with the same texts to produce a similar mystical experience. Yet despite its commendable attention to the importance of

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138 See Isaacs, Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for a careful examination of this theme in Hebrews.

139 See his stress on the inner spiritual service of God in prayer (Scholer, Proleptic Priests, 11, 108, 142, 149). In a similar vein, Lane maintains that access to the heavenly realm is available in prayer (Hebrews, 1:115) and in an act of faith and commitment (Hebrews, 2:100), while for Peterson (Hebrews and Perfection, 160–61) and O’Brien (Hebrews, 184–85, 249), it is given by a new personal relationship with God.

140 Mackie, Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 201–11.

141 Mackie, Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 208.

142 Mackie, Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews, 232.

143 See Mackie, “Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” and Barnard, The Mysticism of Hebrews. Both of these scholars hold that Hebrews was profoundly influenced by Jewish apocalyptic mysticism.
vision in Hebrews, this interpretation rests on uncertain foundations. The main problem with it is that visionary experiences, such as Paul’s revelation in 2 Cor 12:1–10, are not public and communal but intensely private and personal. In contrast with that, Hebrews presupposes that the congregation shares a common vision of Jesus as their exalted Priest and King (2:9; 3:1; 12:2).

The second and much more traditional interpretation is that communal access to God is given liturgically in the Divine Service.144 There the whole congregation participates in Christ and his priestly activity (3:14). So access to God comes from the common participation of the congregation in the liturgical ministry of Jesus as their High Priest. As they hear the voice of God the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the members of the congregation become enlightened, so that, like Moses (11:27), they all see what is otherwise unseen and hidden from human sight (6:4; 10:32). As they hear God’s Word, they, by faith, see Jesus as God’s Son and themselves as his holy brothers (2:9–13; 3:1; 12:1–2). Thus the sermon in Hebrews teaches a kind of sacramental, liturgical “mysticism.” It discloses the presence of Christ, the divinely anointed Priest and King, with his brothers in the Divine Service.

If that is so, then how does this happen in the congregation? It occurs by way of a liturgical theophany for the congregation in heavenly Jerusalem (12:22–25). As they participate in the Divine Service and listen to Jesus, the assembled congregation experiences the new theophany of God, his gracious manifestation to his people, just as the Israelites had once experienced his theophany at Mount Sinai.145 In the Divine Service God’s glory is revealed to them through Jesus (1:1–4), just as it was manifested to the congregation of Israel at the tabernacle in the daily services (Lev 9:6, 23–24).146 There and then, those who confess Jesus as Lord have access to the heavenly realm and the heavenly gifts by faith in God’s Word. His Word shows them what they cannot otherwise see. Yet faith does not merely hope for what will be given on the Last Day, but already now receives what it hopes for, what is otherwise unseen and will be visibly manifested only in the final theophany at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (9:28).

Yet these heavenly gifts are already now given and disclosed verbally through God’s Word in the Divine Service as an unusual kind of theophany. There the earthly congregation straddles two worlds. As they participate in Christ, he involves them in his priestly ministry. He engages in a service which is both earthly and heavenly, a service in which he officiates as High Priest and is himself the radiance of God’s glory (1:3), a service in which God the Father; Jesus, his divine Son; and the Holy Spirit speak to the congregation. By speaking

144 See Westcott, Hebrews, 415; Dahl, “A New and Living Way,” 408–11; Michel, Hebräer, 461; Hegermann, Hebräer, 258; Ellingworth, Hebrews, 678; Pfitzner, Hebrews, 187.
146 See Kleinig, Leviticus, 217–22.
they disclose God’s glorious presence and gracious activity to the enlightened minds of his holy people.

In sum: the sermon in Hebrews is an example of liturgical preaching and teaching. In it and by it, the teacher aims to lead his congregation into deeper and fuller participation in the Divine Service, both on earth and in heaven.

My Approach in the Commentary

While this commentary does assume some knowledge of NT Greek and some familiarity with Hebrew, it is not addressed primarily to an academic reader. It aims to equip pastors to teach this book to their members and preach from it in the Divine Service. It is therefore deliberately catechetical and homiletical, liturgical and pastoral in its approach.

In this commentary I shall engage in a close grammatical reading of the Greek text in Hebrews in order to help the reader do so too. That is what the extensive textual notes are designed to accomplish. The grammatical syntax of the Greek text will be carefully analyzed, paying due attention to the order of words in each simple and compound sentence, as well as the arrangement of sentences in larger syntactical units. Special consideration will be given to the connective particles and conjunctions that link sentences and paragraphs in order to follow the train of the argument.147

Since the purpose of each spoken or written unit of speech determines its structure, its actual arrangement discloses its purpose. I shall therefore analyze and describe the structure of each unit and its place in its context. This kind of structural analysis goes well beyond the outline of each unit’s contents. It not only examines the logical sequence of the unit’s argument but also detects the practical purpose of that unit. It helps the reader to make sense of the recurrent movement in Hebrews from exposition to exhortation and back again.148

In my interpretation of Hebrews I shall not make any assumptions about what lies behind its text in terms of general religious influences on the author, such as from Gnosticism or the Neo-Platonism of Philo or Qumran or Jewish apocalyptic mysticism, or in terms of the historical situation of the congregation, such as their supposed reaction to the destruction of the temple in AD 70 (which may antedate the book) or the delay of Christ’s return. I shall assume that the congregation has not only heard the story of Jesus from his human birth to his exaltation but also shares a common confession of faith in him. I shall also presuppose that both the author and the congregation have been profoundly influenced by the Septuagint and its use in the Jewish Hellenistic synagogues. Consequently, the sense of an obscure word or phrase will be considered first and foremost in the light of the theological vocabulary of the Septuagint, rather than its use in other contemporary Greek texts.

147 See “The Rhetorical Techniques of Hebrews” and “The Structure of Hebrews” above.

148 See “The Rhetorical Character of Hebrews” and “Discourse Analysis” above.
Since Hebrews is a written sermon that is meant to be read aloud and heard by the congregation, it will be examined as a sophisticated speech by a person trained rhetorically in the art of speech in order to identify the rhetorical devices that are used in the sermon and explain what they seek to accomplish. I shall not only examine the logical argument of the discourse, its logos, but shall also consider its persuasive appeal—its appeal to authority, the ethos of the speaker; its appeal to the emotions of its hearers, its pathos; and its appeal to their imagination, its ekphrasis.149

Since the sermon constantly compares the situation of the congregation in the new covenant with the people of Israel in the old covenant, it makes huge demands on the imaginative competence of its audience, with the assumption of a high level of biblical literacy. This applies most of all to its references to the ritual legislation in the Pentateuch and its enactment at the tabernacle. The author assumes that what was done then does not just correspond in some ways with what is done in the new covenant but is actually fulfilled and surpassed by Jesus Christ, the new High Priest. Much of that ritual imagery is so obscure to modern Christians that it has little or no impact on them unless they too are steeped in the OT. So I shall explain the ritual allusions and show how the author argues by ritual precedent and analogy to promote insight into the congregation’s involvement in the heavenly liturgy. So, for example, the entry of the high priest into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sin offerings on the Day of Atonement sets a ritual precedent for the entry of Jesus with his own blood into the heavenly sanctuary at his exaltation and the congregation’s entry into it through his blood in the Divine Service. Likewise, the sprinkling of the priests at their ordination with the blood of animals sets a ritual precedent for the sprinkling of Christians in their hearts in order to purify and consecrate them for their service to the living God.

At the end of each unit I shall consider, all too briefly and inadequately, how Hebrews has been received and applied by the church in the Divine Service. For practical reasons the focus there will be on its reception by the church catholic in its ecumenical Creeds, the Lutheran church in its confessions and its liturgical tradition, and modern English-speaking liturgical churches in their use of the three-year lectionary.150 The readings of the lectionary indicate how this sermon, which was once spoken to a particular unnamed congregation and canonized for liturgical use in all churches, now teaches God’s people to attend closely to what they have heard and still hear from God. Each unit concludes with a portion of a hymn because current hymnody clearly shows how the message of Hebrews is received and confessed personally and corporately by the people of God.

149 For the italicized Greek terms, see “The Rhetorical Character of Hebrews” above.
150 This new ecumenical lectionary has brought this somewhat-neglected book to the attention of the church liturgically in the English-speaking world.
Hebrews 5:1–10

The Source of Eternal Salvation

Translation

5 1For every high priest taken from men is appointed on behalf of people in relation to the things for God, so that he may offer gifts and sacrifices on account of sins, 2being able to moderate his feelings for those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also beset with weakness. 3And because of it he too is obliged to make an offering for himself on account of sins, just as for the people. 4Moreover, no one takes the honor [of being high priest] for himself, but, like Aaron, one called by God [receives that honor].

5So the Christ also did not glorify himself in becoming High Priest, but the One who spoke to him:

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you,”

6also likewise says elsewhere:

“You are a Priest for eternity
in the order of Melchizedek,”

7who in the days of his flesh, having offered petitions and supplications, with a loud cry and with tears to him who was able to save him out of death and having been heard as a result of his right reverence, 8though being the Son, learned obedience from what he suffered, 9and, having been made perfect, became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10having been designated by God as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Textual Notes

5:1 ἀρχιερεύς—This noun, “high priest,” recurs in 5:5, 10. See the sixth textual note on 2:17 and figure 3, “Jesus as High Priest in Contrast to Israel’s High Priests,” in the commentary on 2:5–18.

λαμβανόμενος (“taken” or “selected”)—The passive voice of the participle of λαμβάνω indicates that this is done by God. See the fifth textual note on 2:3, as well as the use of this verb in the LXX for God “taking” the Levites from among the Israelites to be his own and to serve him (LXX Num 3:12, 41; 8:6, 16).

ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων (“on behalf of people”—For the force of the preposition ὑπὲρ with the genitive, see the ninth textual note on 2:9. The first instance in 5:1 of the plural of ἄνθρωπος was translated as “men,” since each high priest was selected only from the (male) sons of Aaron. This second instance, however, is translated as “people” since the priests ministered on behalf of all of God’s people to offer sacrifice for the sins of all.

καθίσταται (“he is appointed”)—See καθίστημι also in 7:28; 8:3. The passive voice of the verb here indicates that this is done by God through human agents, such as Moses, whom God commissioned to “appoint” Aaron and his sons (Num 3:10). The
The Source of Eternal Salvation

author commonly employs the customary present tense\(^1\) for recurrent liturgical practice.\(^2\) The present tense may also indicate that the author wrote before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (AD 70).

τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν (“in relation to the things for God”)—See the seventh textual note on 2:17. For this sense of πρός, see also the first textual note on 1:7.

προσφέρω (“he may offer”)—The verb προσφέρω, literally, “bring forward,” is a technical liturgical term for the presentation of an offering to God, as by Abel (11:4), Abraham (11:17), and the high priest on behalf of the people.\(^3\) It also describes how Jesus offer prayers (5:7), himself (9:14, 25), and his body to God (10:12 in the light of 10:10). The “offering” that he presents is denoted by the cognate noun προσφορά (10:10, 14; see also 10:5, 8, 18). In the LXX the verb does not refer either to the slaughter of an animal or the burning up of the offerings on the altar, but to the rite of presentation of all offerings to God. In the case of animals, this happened before they were slaughtered and offered up to God by their incineration on the altar. In a surprising ritual reversal Jesus is said in Heb 9:28 to have been “offered” by God to take away the sins of many people. In the LXX this verb translates the important technical ritual term בוריק (“to bring near,” which describes the presentation of an offering to God: a burnt offering (Lev 1:13, 14, 15), a grain offering (Lev 2:1, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14), a peace offering (Lev 3:6, 9), and a sin offering (Lev 4:23, 32). In the OT it never refers to “offering” prayers addressed to God, but προσφέρω is so used by the author of Hebrews in 5:7.

δῶρα … θυσίας (“gifts … sacrifices”)—These terms (δῶρον and θυσία) are combined also in 8:3 and 9:9 (cf. 11:4). While this combination could contrast cereal offerings (δῶρα) with animal sacrifices (θυσίας), both terms most likely include all kinds of offerings.\(^4\) The LXX often renders the noun δῶρον, the technical ritual Hebrew term for any kind of offering, with the first term here, δῶρον, “gift.”\(^5\) Like the LXX, Hebrews uses δῶρα, “gifts,” by itself to cover all classes of offerings to God. The LXX does not use θυσία, “sacrifice,” the second term here, for the rite by which something is offered to God, but to refer to what is offered to him by being partially or wholly burned so as to produce a column of smoke from the altar for burnt offering. The LXX uses θυσία, “sacrifice,” in connection with a “burnt offering” (νῦμο),\(^6\) a “grain offering” (μητρική),\(^7\) and the animal for a “peace offering” (μητρική),\(^8\) but not in connection with

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3. Heb 5:1, 3; 8:3, 4; 9:7, 9; 10:1, 2, 8, 11.
5. See LXX Lev 1:2, 3, 10, 14; 2:1, 4, 5, 7, 12, 13; 3:1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 12; 4:23, 32; 5:11.
6. See LXX Lev 1:9, 13, 17, where θυσία translates νῦμον, “an offering by fire,” which refers to an μητρική, “burnt offering.”
8. See LXX Lev 3:1, 3, 6, 9, where θυσία translates μητρική, “a sacrifice,” which refers to a μητρική, “peace offering.” See also LXX Lev 7:12, 13, 15, where θυσία, translating μητρική, “a sacrifice,” is used in connection with a thank offering.
a sin offering or a guilt offering. In Hebrews θυσία describes the offerings presented to God by Abel (11:4) and the Levitical priests (5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:9; 10:1, 11), by Jesus (9:23, 26; 10:12) and the congregation through him (13:15, 16).

tε καὶ—Literally “both and,” this combination is used to connect two similar things. See the second textual note on 2:4. It recurs in 5:7.

ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν (“on account of sins”)—See the twelfth textual note on 1:3 and, for ὑπέρ, the ninth textual note on 2:9. Jesus himself is “without sin” (4:15).

5:2 μετριοπαθεῖν—This is the present infinitive of the compound verb μετριοπαθέω, which combines notion of measure (μετρι-) by volume or extent, with that of feeling and suffering (-παθ-, from πάσχω; see the second textual note on 5:8). In secular Greek literature it describes the golden mean, the balance between emotional indifference (apathy) and emotional excess by yielding to a passion, such as anger at abuse or grief from bereavement. Here in Hebrews it describes the measured sympathy of a High Priest that involves him in feeling and suffering for and with those who have gone astray from God, without condemning or excusing them. It recalls the earlier mention of Christ sympathizing (συμπαθέω; see the second textual note on 4:15) and anticipates the subsequent reference to him learning from his suffering in 5:8. “Deal gently” (5:2 RSV, NRSV, ESV) does not do justice to the verb’s emotional connotations. “Bear patiently” (NEB) comes closer to its sense, as does “have compassion” (NKJV). Lane rightly argues that it “means to restrain or moderate one’s feelings, and so to deal gently and considerately with another.”

δυνάμενος (“being able”)—A participle of δύναμιν recurs in 5:7. See the discussion of this verb in the tenth textual note on 1:3.

tοῖς ἁγνοοῦσιν καὶ πλανομένοις—The single article τοῖς governs both plural participles. The first group, τοῖς ἁγνοοῦσιν, “those who are ignorant,” is clearly a subset of the second group, τοῖς … πλανομένοις, “those … who are going astray,” because only some who are ignorant go astray and among the strayers are also those who sin knowingly. As is evident from the use of the noun ἁγνοῦματα for “sins of ignorance” in 9:7, the author’s use of the participle of ἁγνοῦμαι here recalls the distinction in the Pentateuch between those sins that were done “unintentionally” (ἀκουσίως in LXX Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:15; Num 15:24, 27, 28, 29) out of “ignorance” (ἄγνοια in LXX Lev 5:18; 22:14), which could be remedied by a sin offering (Lev 4:1–35; Num 15:22–29) or by a guilt offering (Lev 5:14–19), and those sins that were done deliberately (ἐχοσίως, Heb 10:26) against God “with a high hand,” which could not be remedied by atonement with

9 The ritual slaughter did not determine whether an offering was called a θυσία, “sacrifice.” In keeping with the derivation of the noun θυσία from the verb θύω, which means to turn something into smoke by burning it, the essential feature of all these sacrifices was the presentation of some part or the whole for incineration on an altar to produce a sweet aroma.

10 Koester, Hebrews, 286.

11 Lane, Hebrews, 1:116.

12 See Wallace, Greek Grammar, 280, for the combination of two plural substantives in which the first is a subset of the second, although Wallace (284, n. 74) regards this as an ambiguous case.
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the blood from any offering (Num 15:30–36). In the LXX the second verb, πλανάω, can be used for an animal “wandering astray” (Ex 23:4; Deut 22:1) or people straying so as to worship false gods (Deut 4:19; 11:28; 13:6 [ET 13:5]; 30:17), but also a repentant believer who confesses that he strayed (Ps 118:176 [MT/ET 119:176]; cf. Job 6:24).

ἐπεί (“since”) — See the first textual note on 2:14.

αὐτός (“himself”) — Here this pronoun emphasizes identity; see the sixth textual note on 1:5.

οὐσθένειον (“weakness”) — For this noun, see the third textual note on 4:15.

καί — At the start of this verse (“and”) and the next verse (“moreover”) this conjunction signals that an additional point is being made.

δι’ αὐτῆν — The feminine pronoun αὐτῆν refers back to the feminine noun άσθένεια, “weakness,” in the previous verse. A few manuscripts make this quite explicit by reading διὰ ταύτην, “on account of this.”

ὀφείλει (“he is obliged” or “required”) — For ὀφείλω, see the second textual note on 2:17. This may refer to the sacrifice for the high priest that was required under God’s Law (Lev 8:14–17; 9:8–11; 16:6, 11, 24) or, more likely, what was appropriate for him to do as a fellow sinner among God’s people.

καθὼς περί τοῦ λαοῦ, οὔτος καὶ περί αὐτοῦ — The Greek word order is, literally, “just as for the people, so also for himself.” Here καθὼς serves as an adverb of comparison, “just as.” It recurs with a different sense in 5:6; see the first textual note there. The adverb οὔτος combines with καί to form the second part of the comparison, “so also.” See the combination οὔτος καί again in 5:5. For οὔτος, see the fourth textual note on 4:4.

See the discussion of περί in the fourth textual note on 2:5. The prepositional phrase περί τοῦ λαοῦ, “for the people,” uses περί in the same sense as for the presentation of sin offerings on the Day of Atonement “for the benefit of” the priests and God’s people by making atonement and providing purification for them (LXX Lev 16:11, 17, 30, 33, 34; see also περί τοῦ λαοῦ in LXX Lev 16:15, 24, as well as LXX Num 17:12 [ET Num 16:47]; 21:7). Here the prepositional phrase περί αὐτοῦ, “for himself,” refers to the sin offerings of the high priest in Ex 29:10–14; Lev 8:14–17; 9:8–11; 16:6, 11–14; see περί αὐτοῦ in LXX Lev 16:6, 11, 17, 24.

προσφέρειν περί ἁμαρτιῶν (“to make an offering … on account of sins”) — Since περί ἁμαρτίας can denote a “sin offering” (see the twelfth textual note on 1:3), this

13 For a discussion of the role of the sin offerings and guilt offerings in atoning for unintentional sins against God, see Kleinig, Leuiticus, 97–124. Interpreters offer three different positions on the question of whether sins done “with a high hand” could be atoned for: (1) Deliberate sins by God’s people who quite knowingly despised God’s Word and broke his commandments were not atoned for by any sacrifices or offerings. The only hope for these high-handed sinners was to plead for God’s mercy apart from ritual atonement, as was the case with David in Psalm 51 and Manasseh in 2 Chr 33:11–13. (2) Such sins were atoned for on the Day of Atonement for those who observed that day since sacrifices were offered for “all” the sins of Israel (Lev 16:34; cf. Lev 16:21). (3) The sins that were confessed were atoned for by the regular sin offering since they thereby ceased to be high-handed but were regarded as unintentional sins (see the emphasis on confession in Lev 5:5). As is shown by Gane in Cult and Character, 198–213, the first option is the most tenable.
could also be translated as “to offer sin offerings.” This was required of the priests at their ordination, at the inauguration of the Divine Service, and on the Day of Atonement. It recalls the stock idiom for making atonement “on account of sin” (περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας, LXX Lev 4:35; 5:6c, 10, 13; see also “on account of all the sins,” περὶ πασῶν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, LXX Lev 16:16; cf. Lev 5:13).

5:4 οὐχ ἔστω τις λαμβάνει—Literally, “not for himself someone takes,” this is rendered as “no one takes … for himself.” The reflexive pronoun ἐστώ is placed before the indefinite pronoun τις to emphasize self-promotion versus divine appointment. This clause stands in sharp contrast with καλούμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, “one called by God” (5:4). As Ellingworth notes, the author’s use of λαμβάνει may contrast the active meaning “take” with the passive meaning “receive” in an implied contrast between usurping the office and receiving it from God.

τὴν τιμήν—See τιμή, “honor,” also in the fourth textual note on 2:7. Here the term denotes the office of high priest with the status, responsibilities, and entitlements that come with it.

καλούμενος … Ἄαρών—The participle καλούμενος, “one called,” could also be rendered as “when called.” For καλέω, see the seventh textual note on 2:11. The only other references to “Aaron” are in 7:11 and 9:4. In Lev 9:1 Moses “called” (LXX: καλέω) Aaron and his sons to serve as priests who performed the Divine Service at the tabernacle, after Moses ordained them (Lev 8:1–9:24), just as God had instructed Moses in Ex 28:1–30:33.

5:5 οὕτως (“so”)—For this adverb, which was also in 5:3, see the fourth textual note on 4:4.

ὁ Χριστός (“the Christ”)—See the first textual note on 3:6.

οὐχ ἔστων ἐδοξάσεν—Here the verb δοξάζω, “glorify,” is not used for honoring a person by recognizing his status and worth, but (with the reflexive pronoun ἐστών, “himself”) for usurping a divinely instituted office with its high status in an act of self-promotion. The author most likely alludes to the attempt by Korah and his associates in Numbers 16 to claim the priesthood that belonged by divine call to Aaron and his sons.

γενηθῆναι ἀρχιερέα (“in becoming High Priest”)—If this is taken as a result clause, it could be rendered as “that he might become/be made High Priest.” The aorist passive infinitive γενηθῆναι adverbially qualifies the main verb, ἐδοξάσεν (“he did not glorify himself”), further explaining what is meant by it. See the textual note on γενόμενος in 1:4.

ὁ λαλήσας—For λαλέω denoting God “speaking,” see the second textual note on 1:1.

πρὸς αὐτόν (“to him”)—See the first textual note on 1:7.

υἱός μου (“my Son”)—See υἱός in the fourth textual note on 1:2. While the author continues to use this royal title conventionally from here on for Jesus, the “Son,” as

15 See Wallace, Greek Grammar, 598–99, on the use of a complementary infinitive with a finite main verb.
God’s royal heir (6:6; 10:29, as in 1:2), he also, rather unconventionally, uses it to name Jesus as his royal Priest (5:8; 7:3, 28).

5:6 καθώς (“likewise”)—This word usually serves as a comparative adverb,16 but here it functions to emphasize similarity without any notion of comparison, just as in 3:7 (see the second textual note there), where it is part of an introductory formula for the fulfillment of a subsequently quoted passage from the OT. See also 4:3, 7, where it operates as a correlative rather than a comparative adverb.

ἐν ἑτέρῳ—Literally, “in another,” this refers to a passage from elsewhere in the Scriptures, as in Acts 13:35; Barnabas 15:2; I Clement 8:4; 29:3; 46:3.

λέγει—For this formula for God’s speech, see the fourth textual note on 1:6.

σύ (“you”)—ἐστιν adds the verb εἶ, “you are,” to mirror εἶ σύ in the previous verse (5:5) and assimilate the quotation to LXX Ps 2:7.

ἱερεύς—This is the first of fourteen instances of this noun (“priest”) in Hebrews. It refers to Jesus (5:6; 7:11, 15, 17, 21; 8:4; 10:21), Melchizedek (7:1, 3), or other OT priests (7:14, 20, 23; 9:6; 10:11). See also ἀρχιερεύς, “high priest,” in the sixth textual note on 2:17.

eἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (“for eternity”)—See the last textual note on 1:2. Here the noun αἰῶν is to be understood both temporally as the “eternal age” and spatially as the “eternal world.” This phrase occurs also in 1:8; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 24, 28 (see also ὁς τοῦ αἰῶνας in 13:8, 21).

κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ (“in the order of Melchizedek”)—See also 5:10; 6:20; 7:11, 17. The noun τάξις, “order,” is of military origin and was used liturgically in the synagogue and the early church.17

5:7 ὁς (“who”)—For this relative pronoun, see the first textual note on 1:3. Its antecedent is ὁ Χριστός, “the Christ,” in 5:5.

τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (“of his flesh”)—See the third textual note on 2:14.

dεήσεις τε καὶ ἱκετηρίας—While δεήσις is a common term for a “petition” in the LXX Psalms, the noun ἱκετηρία, “supplication,” is not used in any of them. This term came from a person who “comes” (ἠκός) to a foreign land as a refugee with an olive branch to seek protection from its gods and gain asylum there. The LXX uses the noun ἱκετηρία only in Job 40:27 (ET 41:3) and 2 Macc 9:18, while the verb ἱκετεύω, “supplicate,” is found in LXX Job 19:17; Ps 36:7 (MT/ET 37:7); 2 Macc 11:6; 3 Macc 5:51; 6:14; 4 Macc 4:9; 16:13; Wisdom 13:18; 19:3. Heb 5:7 uses the noun ἱκετηρία for a fervent entreaty, the insistent and persistent prayer of supplication of a person whose very existence is threatened.

ἐκ θανάτου (“out of death”)—For θάνατος, see the fifth textual note on 2:9. Here death is understood as the realm of death rather than dying. By his petitions for deliverance from death, Christ identifies himself with the righteous person in the Psalms who cries out to God for deliverance from death and takes up his cause before God.18

16 E.g., Jn 6:58; Gal 3:6; 1 Tim 1:3; 1 Jn 3:12.
μετὰ κραυγῆς ἰσχυρᾶς καὶ δακρύων—The noun κραυγή is used in the LXX for the “cry” of the afflicted to God for justice, help, and deliverance.19 The LXX commonly employs the verb from which it is derived, κράζω, “to call out, cry,” in the psalms of lament for this kind of prayer.20 In the psalms “tears” (the plural of δάκρυον) of anguish, grief, and pain are also connected with the ardent prayers of the righteous.21 The model for such anguished prayer for deliverance from certain death is Hezekiah in 2 Ki 20:1–6. The rabbis later distinguished between three kinds of prayer with increased intensity: an entreaty with a soft voice, a loud cry with a strong voice, and tears with intense emotion, which were the highest form of prayer.22

eἰσακουσθείς (“having been heard”)—The passive voice of the aorist participle of εἰσακούω indicates that this is done by God. The verb εἰσακούω is the stock term in the Psalter for God’s response, his answer, to the “petitions,”23 “cries of distress,”24 and “tears”25 of the righteous.

ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας (“as a result of his right reverence”)—See the noun εὐλάβεια also in 12:28 and the use of the verb εὐλαβέομαι to describe Noah’s piety in 11:7. See also the cognate adjective εὐλαβής, “reverent,” in Lk 2:25; Acts 2:5; 8:2; 22:12. In the LXX these terms usually refer to the reverential fear of God, but in extrabiblical Greek they often denote caution and outright fear.26 While it is possible to construe the noun here as a reference to Christ’s fear of death, the emphasis on Christ’s prayer and obedience shows that it describes his reverence for God (cf. its translation by reverentia in the Vulgate of Heb 5:7; 12:28). Gray’s analysis of εὐλάβεια and its use by Hebrews concludes that it combines reverence with godliness.27

5:8 καίπερ ὁν υἱός (“though being the Son”)—See the textual notes on ὁν in 1:3 and υἱός in 1:2. The lack of a definite article before “Son” stresses his unique status as God’s Son.28 Here, as in 7:5; 12:17; as well as Phil 3:4 and 2 Pet 1:12, the conjunction καίπερ, “though,” is followed by a participle. This conjunction identifies ὁν as a concessive participle.29 The present participle indicates that, like God, “the One” who always “is” (ὁ ὁν, LXX Ex 3:14), Jesus has always been and still is God’s Son. Even though he was and always will be God’s Son, he became High Priest at his exaltation.

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19 LXX Pss 5:2 (ET 5:1); 9:13 (ET 9:12); 17:7 (MT 18:7; ET 18:6); 101:2 (MT 102:2; ET 102:1); 143:14 (MT/ET 144:14); Jonah 2:3 (ET 2:2).
20 LXX Pss 3:5 (ET 3:4); 4:4 (ET 4:3); 21:3, 6, 25 (MT 22:3, 6, 25; ET 22:2, 5, 24); 30:23 (MT 31:23; ET 31:22); 31:3 (MT/ET 32:3); 85:3, 7 (MT/ET 86:3, 7).
21 LXX Pss 6:7 (ET 6:6); 38:13 (MT 39:13; ET 39:12); 41:4 (MT 42:4; ET 42:3); 55:9 (MT 56:9; ET 56:8); 79:6 (MT 80:6; ET 80:5); 114:8 (MT/ET 116:8).
22 Moffat, Hebrews, 65.
23 LXX Pss 2:25 (MT 22:25; ET 22:24); 27:2, 6 (MT/ET 28:2, 6); 39:2 (MT 40:2; ET 40:1); 65:19 (MT/ET 66:19); 114:1 (MT/ET 116:1).
28 See Wallace, Greek Grammar, 245.
29 See Wallace, Greek Grammar, 634–35.
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ἐμάθεν ἀφ᾽ ὧν ἐπαθεῖ—These two aorist verbs are of μανθάνω, “learn” (only here in Hebrews) and of πάσχω, “suffer,” which is also in 2:18; 9:26; 13:12; see the textual note on the noun πάθημα, “suffering,” in 2:9. Note the widespread wordplay in popular speech on the “gain” of learning through the “pain” of suffering.30

τὴν ὑπακοήν (“obedience”)—See Rom 5:19. The article attached to this noun shows that this is not just any kind of obedience but the perfect obedience to God that was appropriate to the Son’s vocation.31 Note the interplay between this noun and the verbs ὑπακούω, “obey,” in 5:9 and εἰσακούω, “hear,” in 5:7.

5:9 τελειωθείς—This aorist passive participle of τελείω, “having been made perfect,” could also be rendered as “having been brought to completion.” The passive voice indicates that this action is done by God. See the last textual note on 2:10 and excur- sus 4, “Perfection as Priestly Ordination in Hebrews,” following the commentary on 2:5–18.

ἐγένετο (“he became”)—See the textual note on γενόμενος in 1:4.

τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν (“who obey”)—This is synonymous with οἱ πιστεύσαντες, “those who believe,” in 4:3. See ὑπακούω, used of Abraham, in 11:8.

αὐτῷ (“him”)—Instead of God, Jesus is here regarded as the object of obedience and the source of salvation because he obeyed God in suffering death on behalf of all sinners.

αἰτίος—This adjective functioning like a substantive is used for a person or group that is the “cause” of someone’s death (LXX 1 Sam 22:22), potential destruction (Bel 42), an act of sacrilege (2 Macc 4:47; 13:4), or the downfall of tyranny (4 Macc 1:11). Here, however, as in Josephus, who speaks about Antipater as the man “responsible for the deliverance” (τῆς σωτηρίας αἴτιον),32 it has a positive sense. It is closely related to the noun αἰτία, which is used in 2:11 for the “cause” of something, the reason for it. Jesus, the originator of eternal salvation, also delivers it to those who obey him.33

σωτηρίας αἰωνίου (“of eternal salvation”)—See the textual note on σωτηρία, “salvation,” in 1:14 and the discussion of the adjective αἰωνίος, “eternal,” in the textual note on αἰών, “age,” in 1:2. This echoes the reference in 5:7 to God’s power to “save” Jesus from death. The author most likely recalls God’s promise of eternal salvation to his people in Is 45:17.

30 Ellingworth, Hebrews, 291. The popular American phrase “no pain, no gain” is used as a motto to encourage strenuous exercise. It expresses an idea that can be traced as far back as the Mishnah (ca. second century AD), where Rabbi Ben He-He said: “According to the suffering so is the reward” (Mishnah, Aboth, 5:23 [Danby, The Mishnah, 458]), meaning that without the pain in doing what God commands, there is no spiritual gain. One of the earliest English attestations of the phrase is in the poet Robert Herrick’s Hesperides (1650 edition), in a two-line poem titled “No Pains, No Gains”:

If little labour, little are our gains;
Man’s fate is according to his pains.

31 See Wallace, Greek Grammar, 226–27.


33 Grässer, Hebräer, 1:310–11.
5:10 προσαγορευθείς (“having been designated”)—This aorist passive participle is of the verb προσαγορέω, which describes what is done in an ἀγορά, the “marketplace” of a city, its public square. While it often refers to greeting a person by name, here it depicts God’s public, legal conferral of this office on Jesus in a speech act that designates him as a High Priest, the official proclamation of his status as the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.34

ἀρχιερεύς—See the textual note on ἀρχιερεύς, “high priest,” in 2:17.

Commentary
Context, Syntax, Style, and Structure

By beginning this passage with “for,” the author explains how the congregation can approach the throne of grace freely and boldly, and why. They may do so because Jesus, their merciful High Priest, has been appointed by God himself as “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (5:9). With that new focus comes a shift in genre from instruction and exhortation in 3:1–4:16 to exposition in 5:1–10. This passage also forecasts the extended discussion on the priesthood of Jesus in 7:1–10:18. The summary of the high priest’s authority and function here in 5:1–3 does not just introduce this unit but also foreshadows 7:26–28 with its summary of the priesthood of Jesus.35 The connection between these summaries is marked by the repetition of certain key words and phrases:

- “appoint” (καθίστημι) in 5:1 and 7:28
- “men” (ἄνθρωποι) in 5:1 and 7:28
- “offer sacrifices on account of sins” (προσφέρω θυσίας ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν) in 5:1 and “offer up sacrifices on account of sins” (ἀναφέρω θυσίας ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν) in 7:27
- “people” (λαός) in 5:3 and 7:27
- “weakness” (ἀσθένεια) in 5:2 and 7:28

The passage consists of two paragraphs that compare and contrast the appointment of an Israelite high priest with God’s appointment of Jesus as High Priest. The first paragraph, 5:1–4, is framed by the repetition of “God” (θεός) and the verb “take” (λαμβάνω) in 5:1 and 5:4. It has three main clauses, with the verbs “he is appointed” (καθίσταται, 5:1), “he is obliged” (ὀφείλει, 5:3), and “he does not take” (οὐχ…λαμβάνει, 5:4). The first main clause is qualified by two participial clauses (with the participles λαμβανόμενος, “taken,” in 5:1 and δυνάμενος, “being able,” in 5:2), a purpose clause (beginning with ἵνα, “so that,” 5:1), and a causal clause (introduced by ἐπεί, “since,” 5:2). The third main verb (οὐχ…λαμβάνει, “he does not take,” 5:4) is qualified by an incomplete comparative clause, “but like Aaron, one called by God,” which the hearers are meant to complete for themselves by supplying “receives that honor.”

34 Grässer, Hebräer, 1:312.
35 See Pfitzner, Hebrews, 89–90.
The second paragraph consists of a complex sentence that runs from 5:5 through 5:10. It contrasts what has been said about the Israelite priests in 5:1–4 with the priesthood of Jesus. It is framed by the repetition of the noun “high priest” (ἀρχιερέως) in 5:5 and 5:10 and the verb “become” (γίνομαι) in 5:5 and 5:9. It has two main verbs, “he did not glorify” (οὐχ ἐδόξασεν, 5:5) and “he says” (λέγει, 5:6), which contrast what Jesus did not do for himself with what God did for him by appointing him as High Priest.

The statement about the glorification of the Christ (5:5–6) is followed in 5:7–10 by a complex set of subordinate relative clauses that are introduced in 5:7 by the relative pronoun “who” (ὁς), which tells how Christ prepared himself as a man in his human life for his priestly ministry on behalf of people. This grammatical subunit consists of two correlative main clauses with the main verbs “he learned” (ἔμαθεν, 5:8) and “he became” (ἐγένετο, 5:9). The first of these correlative main clauses is introduced by two linked clauses governed by the participles “having offered” (προσενέγκας, 5:7) and “having been heard” (εἰσακουσθείς, 5:7), as well as by a concessive participial clause beginning with “though being” (καίπερ ὄν, 5:8). The second main verb is flanked by two clauses with aorist passive participles, “having been made perfect” (τελειωθείς, 5:9) and “having been designated” (προσαγορευθείς, 5:10).

In this piece of exposition the teacher appeals to the authority of the Scriptures by his quotations from Ps 2:7 (in Heb 5:5) and Ps 110:4 (in Heb 5:6) to establish the credibility of his argument. Even more than that, he gets the congregation to listen to what God says to his Son in these oracles in order to strengthen their faith in Jesus as their High Priest and their obedience to him as the source of their salvation. He also appeals to their imagination by presenting Jesus as a student, like each of them, who learned prayerful obedience in the school of suffering, thereby commending him to them as worthy of obedience.

Taken as a whole, this unit is an intricate composition with a carefully constructed argument that makes great demands on its hearers and even greater demands on a modern audience that prefers simple sentences with little or no subordination and no use of the passive voice. It is much more easily followed with the ear that hears it read in Greek than the eye that overlooks the rhythms and patterns of spoken speech.

Outline of the Structure

I. The appointment of high priests in the order of Aaron (5:1–4)
   A. God’s appointment of a human high priest from the people to offer gifts and sacrifices for the sins of the people (5:1)
   B. The high priest’s ability to moderate what he feels about those who have gone astray (5:2a)
   C. His need to deal with his guilt from his own sinful weakness (5:2b)
   D. His weakness as the reason for his own sin offerings (5:3)
   E. God’s call of a high priest rather than a man’s choice of it for himself (5:4)
II. God’s appointment of the Christ as the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:5–10)
   A. God’s glorification of the Christ by making him the High Priest (5:5–6)
      1. Christ’s refusal to promote himself as High Priest (5:5)
      2. God’s designation of him as the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek by his Word (5:6)
   B. The education of God’s Son for the office of the high priesthood (5:7–10)
      1. His education by learning obedience as a man in his suffering through offering prayers for deliverance from death and having them heard (5:7–8)
      2. His education in order to become the source of eternal salvation through God’s designation of him as the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (5:9–10)

Analysis

5:1 Before the author considers the authority and work of Jesus as High Priest, he focuses on the authority and work of the high priest in the old covenant. Since that is a matter of ritual legislation, it is sketched out by the use of the present tense in 5:1–4.

Every Israelite high priest “is appointed” to his office by God through his human agents. He is “taken from men” by God to deal with “the things for God,” the things that have to do with the Divine Service. God authorized and empowered the high priest to represent his fellow Israelites in that office. Thus he acted vicariously “on behalf of people” by offering “gifts and sacrifices on account of sins”; he represented the people before God.36

God did not just appoint a man into the office of high priest but also determined what he was meant to do in that office. God appointed him “to offer gifts and sacrifices on account of sins.” The clause “to offer gifts and sacrifices” covers the whole ritual performance of the Divine Service that began with the presentation of the gifts and sacrifices to God and culminated in their incineration on the altar for burnt offering.37 By his mention of gifts and sacrifices, the teacher does not refer to two different classes of offerings, but to all

36 See excursus 10, “Sacrifice in the Old Testament and in Hebrews,” following this pericope.
37 The daily morning and evening sacrifices were enacted in four stages: the splashing of blood from a male lamb against the altar for burnt offering as an act of atonement and purification, the burning of incense in the Holy Place as an act of intercession, the burning of meat and flour on the altar for burnt offering as an act of sanctification with the performance of the Aaronic Benediction (Num 6:24–26) for God’s provision of his blessings to his people, and the holy meal for the priests on duty. For a comprehensive analysis of this order, see Macina, “A Theological Ritual Analysis of the Practical Order, Ritual Function, and Theological Purpose of the Daily Divine Service according to the Priestly Tradition of the Pentateuch.” See also the brief summary by Kleinig in “The Lord’s Supper as a Sacrificial Banquet,” 12, and the table in Kleinig, Leviticus, 39.
The Source of Eternal Salvation

the public offerings\textsuperscript{38} that were presented each day for God’s people (7:27) and each year on the Day of Atonement (10:1–3). They were offered “on account of sins” (5:1). That, indeed, was not their exclusive function; it was the purpose of the daily rite of atonement in which the blood from the sacrificed male lambs was splashed against the altar for burnt offering (Ex 29:38–41; Lev 17:11; cf. Lev 1:11). That, however, was the main purpose of the service for the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:16, 34).\textsuperscript{39}

5:2–3 Israel’s high priest was in one respect well suited to make offerings for sins, because he himself was “beset with weakness,” the weakness of sin and its debilitating effect on sinners (7:27–28). His own sin put him in the same place as all other people, since he was tempted just as they were.\textsuperscript{40} Because he himself had sinned, he was in no position to condemn “those who are ignorant and going astray” from God. He could deal with each of them as a lost person, like all other people who had lost their way on earth. Yet as God’s representative he was also “able to moderate his feelings for them.” He was, as it were, emotionally attuned both to God and to them. By his balanced, emotional affinity with them, he was able to feel for them and suffer with them, without either distancing himself coldly from their plight in order to dismiss them or identifying with them so closely that he excused their sin so as to belittle his own guilt too.

Since he needed to balance what he felt for them and to share their pain without further burdening them, he had to deal with his own guilt, so that he could minister for them with a good conscience. He was therefore “obliged to make an offering for himself on account of sins, just as for the people” (5:3). While this was first done at his ordination (Ex 29:10–14; Lev 8:14–17), it was also repeated each year on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:6, 11–14). Thus he could only make offerings for the sins of the people as long as he also offered sacrifices for his own sin.

5:4 Since the high priest was a weak sinner rather than a strong spiritual hero, he could not under any circumstance claim this high position before God and the people as an “honor” for himself that he rightly deserved because of his spiritual superiority. But he received the honor only as a weak man who, like Aaron, had been “called by God.” That divine call authorized him to do what he could otherwise not do: offer sacrifices to God on behalf of sin in that divinely instituted office rather than by his own authority, virtue, and power.

\textsuperscript{38} The regular public offerings for the whole nation need to be distinguished from the occasional personal offerings that were brought by families at the three pilgrim festivals and presented between the public morning and evening burnt offerings (see Kleinig, \textit{The Lord’s Song}, 101–8, and excursus 10, “Sacrifice in the Old Testament and in Hebrews,” following the commentary on 5:1–10).

\textsuperscript{39} See the discussion of this by Kleinig, \textit{Leviticus}, 327–50.

\textsuperscript{40} The language here recalls 4:15, but with a difference: Jesus, the great High Priest, is able “to sympathize with our weaknesses” since he “has been tempted in every way like us” yet remained “without sin.”
5:5–6 The teacher now begins to show how Jesus was similar to the high priests at the temple. Like them Jesus did not claim the office of high priest for himself in his own right. Rather, God himself glorified him by placing him in that office. This happened at his exaltation (Ps 110:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1–2; 10:12). Yet despite that similarity, he also differed from all previous high priests in five respects. First, unlike all other priests he was without sin (4:15). Second, unlike them he was not a son of Aaron, but the Son of God. Third, unlike them he was not appointed by another man, but by God himself as the Christ, God’s anointed Priest. Fourth, he did not become High Priest by the enactment of God’s Law in the rite of ordination, but is High Priest by God’s decree. Just as God had spoken the words from Ps 2:7 that acknowledged him as his Son, so God now speaks the words from Ps 110:4 that make him High Priest. By God’s performatory decree, God’s oath that installed him, Jesus became High Priest and now serves as our High Priest. Fifth, God’s spoken decree that had been announced prophetically in Ps 110:4 and fulfilled at his exaltation does not make him a temporal priest, like Aaron and his successors, but “a Priest for eternity in the order of Melchizedek,” a priest in the new eternal age that has already begun. What that means is left unexplained at this point. It is taken up again and dealt with much more comprehensively in Hebrews 7.

The contrast between what God once “spoke” (5:5) and what he now “says” (5:6) may be meant to show that the appointment of Jesus as High Priest was a process which began with God’s acknowledgment of Jesus as his Son and was completed at Jesus’ enthronement with God. Since he was acknowledged as God’s Son at his conception (Lk 1:35; cf. Mt 1:20–23), the preparation for his vocation as High Priest covered the whole of his earthly life. And since he was acknowledged as God’s Son at his Baptism (Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22; Jn 1:34), the whole of his earthly ministry prepared him for his priesthood. The teacher’s subsequent reference to what Jesus did “in the days of his flesh” (Heb 5:7) indicates that he envisages the whole of Jesus’ life as his training for that eternal vocation.

The teacher’s use of the divine oracles from Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:4 is most surprising. They are not just taken as prophetic announcements that have now been fulfilled, but, like the scriptural oracles in Heb 1:5 and 1:8–13, as words spoken directly by God to his Son, part of God’s eternal conversation with him. They allow the congregation that hears this sermon to listen in on that conversation and hear God addressing his Son with words that make him an eternal Priest and acknowledge him as such. God’s decree in Ps 110:4 is an eternal word that transcends time and space. Hence it comes as no surprise that it is quoted again in Heb 7:17 and 7:21, for chapter 7 is an exposition and application of that decree.

5:7–8 The relative pronoun “who” signals a shift from God’s appointment of his Son as the High Priest to the Son’s preparation for that office. These two verses concentrate on the training of the Son for his priesthood, for, even though he was God’s eternal Son already before his incarnation, he had to experience the full extent of human weakness in order to become a truly sympathetic High
Priest (see also 4:15). So, like the Israelite priests, Jesus experienced human weakness and suffering to prepare him to present offerings to God on behalf of the people.

The picture here is of the Son as a student, an apprentice, and of God as his Teacher, his wise Mentor. The period of his apprenticeship, his human training for the priesthood, was “the days of his flesh,” his human life on earth from his conception to his death. His preparation for his vocation as High Priest involved a life of obedience to God. In that he resembled the good students in Proverbs, who gain wisdom by listening to their teachers and obeying them in the school of life. He was educated in practical piety that was marked by “right reverence” for God (5:7).

That lesson in obedient piety had two sides to it, a passive side and an active side. The passive side was his “obedience” in suffering. He suffered all kinds of abuse, culminating in his trial and crucifixion. He endured the penalty of sin for sinners and the effects of their sins on their victims. Even more than that, he suffered under the threat of “death” that lay so heavy on all humanity. Here, as in the OT and particularly the Psalms,41 “death” is not envisaged just as an event that occurs at the end of human life but as a dark power that blights the whole of human life, a tyrant that terrifies and enslaves humanity (2:15), an enemy that is closely allied with the devil and his life-threatening cronies (2:14). The human experience of suffering from the threat of death all too often leads to disobedience and rebellion against God. The suffering of Jesus, however, trained him in true obedience to God. Thus the teacher rightly claims that Jesus was “tempted in every way” as we are but “without sin” (4:15). He tasted death on behalf of all humanity (2:9).

His passive obedience in suffering death was matched by his active obedience in prayer. Since only God was “able to save him out of death” (5:7),42 he, as a man, learned to pray for his deliverance from death and for all those who would be delivered from it through him (7:25).43 His whole life was a life of

41 Thus the righteous are beset by the pangs and terrors of death (Pss 55:4 [MT 55:5]; 116:3) that entrap them and drag them down into death’s domain (Pss 18:4–5 [MT 18:5–6]; 88:3–7, 15 [MT 88:4–8, 16]; Prov 14:27).


43 There is some debate about what Jesus prayed for. First, Strobel holds that Jesus prayed to avoid death (“Die Psalmengrundlage der Gethsemane-Parallele,” 45). Second, Peterson recalls the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane and proposes that Jesus prayed for God’s will to be done (Hebrews and Perfection, 88–92). Third, in a similar vein Swetnam proposes that Jesus asked to die as the sacrifice for sin (Jesus and Isaac; “The Crux at Hebrews 5,7–8,” 356). But none of these three proposals does justice to the mention of God saving him “out of death” (5:7). Fourth, and most likely, it is argued that Jesus prayed for his bodily resurrection (e.g., Jeremias, “Hbr 5,7–10,” 107; Attridge, Hebrews, 150–51; Gray, Godly Fear, 192, 199; O’Brien, Hebrews, 199). By his mention of Jesus as “the source of eternal salvation” (5:9),
prayer, something that was mostly hidden even from the eyes and ears of his disciples, but was manifest to them privately in the Garden of Gethsemane and publicly to the world as he hung on the cross. In noting that Jesus “offered” (προσφέρω) prayers (5:7), the teacher deliberately uses the same technical ritual term for the “offering” of sacrifices to God that he had used in 5:1 and 5:3. By claiming that Jesus “offered petitions and supplications” to God throughout the whole of his human life, the teacher, rather surprisingly, describes his praying as a sacrificial act by which he offered himself to God. He envisages Christ’s whole earthly ministry as prayerful, priestly service. The terms that are used for his praying, “petitions and supplications, with a loud cry and with tears,” cover all kinds of human need, from the necessities of life to refuge from enemies, from help in trouble to relief from deep distress. They also cover all kinds of praying, from spoken petitions to full-bodied supplication, from vehement cries to heartbroken tears. By the use of language from the psalms of lament, the teacher implies that Jesus learned obedience in prayer by making the Psalter his prayer book. As the perfect student of God’s Word and the perfect man of prayer, he was exemplary in his piety. He learned right reverence for God in the school of suffering. God therefore “heard” his prayer (5:7) and accepted it by raising him from the dead (13:20).

the author implies that he also prayed for the salvation of others by his resurrection (Rissi, “Die Menschlichkeit Jesu nach Hebr. 5, 7–8,” 40; Ellingworth, Hebrews, 287–88; Clivaz, “Hebrews 5.7, Jesus’ Prayer on the Mount of Olives and Jewish Christianity,” 198–209).

See Mt 14:23 || Mk 6:46; Lk 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1. See also Kleinig, Grace upon Grace, 157–59.

For the view that in 5:7–8 the author refers to the agony in Gethsemane, see Bruce, Hebrews, 126–30; Peterson, Hebrews and Perfection, 86–93; Kistemaker, Hebrews, 136; and George Guthrie, Hebrews, 189–91; against that view, see Attridge, Hebrews, 148–49; Lane, Hebrews, 1:120; and deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude, 189–90.

By his mention of “a loud cry” (5:7), the author may allude in part to the final cry of Jesus on the cross, which is mentioned in Mt 27:50 and cited in Jn 19:30 as “it is completed.”

Since the sinless Christ (“without sin,” 4:15) had no need to offer sacrifices for his own sins, some commentators discount this understanding of Christ’s prayers as his offering to God (Riggenbach, Hebräer, 129–31; Bruce, Hebrews, 126–27, n. 43; Loader, Sohn und Hoherpriester, 105; Laub, Bekenntnis und Auslegung, 118; Peterson, Hebrews and Perfection, 84; Attridge, Hebrews, 149). They overlook the author’s claim that Jesus “offered himself” on behalf of sinners (9:14; see also 9:25; 10:12). By doing this he took away their sin (9:28; cf. 10:4, 11) and presented his body as an “offering” for their sanctification (10:10, 14).

See Maurer, “‘Erhört wegen der Gottesfurcht,’” 283–84.

While Strobel (“Die Psalmengrundlage der Gethsemane-Parallele”) and Schröger (Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes als Schriftausleger, 121–27) argue that the author’s description of Jesus in 5:7–9 is influenced by Psalm 116, it seems more likely that he draws on other psalms of lament as well to depict Jesus as the embodiment of true God-pleasing piety. See also Attridge, “The Psalms in Hebrews,” 208–12.

For the identification of Jesus with the faithful man of prayer in the Psalms, see Luther’s first lecture on Psalm 1 (AE 10:11) and Bonhoeffer, Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible, 17–21.

See Friedrich, “Das Lied vom Hohenpriester im Zusammenhang von Hebr. 4, 14–5, 10,” 104–5; Maurer, “‘Erhört wegen der Gottesfurcht,’” 277–84; Lane, Hebrews, 1:119.
By offering prayers to God in his suffering and being “heard” by God (5:7), Jesus “learned obedience from what he suffered” (5:8). This does not refer just to his passion and death on the cross (2:9); it includes all the evil that he suffered in his life on earth (12:3). In that, he was a model student, the perfect Son, for listening obedience to a father’s wisdom is the mark of a God-fearing student. His suffering was part of his training, his education as a student of God, a candidate for the high priesthood, just as correction was an aspect of a father’s training of his sons, so that they would become his responsible heirs and rightly manage his property and business (12:4–11; see παιδεία, “instruction,” in 12:5, 7, 8, 11). His lesson in passive obedience and the practice of active obedience prepared him well for his priestly office, which now revolves around his intercession for the salvation of all people (7:25).

5:9–10 While the previous verses (5:7–8) tell of Jesus’ earthly preparation for his heavenly priesthood, 5:9–10 speak of its purpose. His training, which made him “perfect” for his work as High Priest (5:9), was part of his ordination as High Priest. He was perfected by his prayers for deliverance and God’s answer to those prayers. By raising Jesus from the dead and enthroning him as High Priest, God brought Jesus to the goal of his earthly journey. The Son, who was sent from God as his envoy, comes back to God as the High Priest of humanity. The completion of his journey reverses the situation in 5:7–8. The obedience that he had learned on earth he now requires of his disciples; the deliverance from death that he had besought from God he now grants to those who follow him; the perfection that he had gained by his obedience he now offers to those who obey him.

By his deliverance from the realm of death, he “became the source of eternal salvation” for all his disciples (5:9). That “salvation” is “eternal” because he brings them through death to eternal life in the new age, God’s eternal world. The “eternal salvation” which God had promised to the Israelites in Is 45:17 is available not just to them but to “all who obey” Jesus. It is an eternal state that comes from “eternal redemption” through his blood (9:12), “the blood of the eternal covenant” (13:20), and results in their reception of an “eternal inheritance” (9:15). Those who obey Jesus can now approach the throne of grace confidently with freedom of speech and the full assurance of faith (4:16; 10:21–22).

That Jesus is “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (5:9) is a startling claim, since normally the accent in the Scriptures is on obedience to God and his Word. As High Priest Jesus now speaks the Word of eternal salvation to his disciples (cf. 2:3; 12:25); they come near to God through him as their High Priest (7:25). What’s more, God himself put his stamp of approval on

53 See excursus 4, “Perfection as Priestly Ordination in Hebrews,” following the commentary on 2:5–18.
54 See Grässer, Hebräer, 1:309.
Jesus’ priestly work of mediation. Jesus has been “designated by God as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek” (5:10). By the formal bestowal of that title God confers on him that office which authorizes him to speak eternal salvation to those who obey him, the salvation that he has won for them by his active and passive obedience.\(^55\)

**Reception and Application**

While Heb 5:7–9 is part of the Epistle Reading for Good Friday for each series in the three-year lectionary,\(^56\) Heb 5:1–10 is set as the Epistle Reading for Lent 5 in year B.\(^57\) It is associated with Mk 10:32–45, where Jesus tells his disciples about his impending passion in which he would give his life as a ransom for many. The accent in that account is not on what he would do but on what he would suffer in order to save sinners from eternal death.

Taken by itself, 5:1–10 teaches the congregation that their eternal salvation depends entirely on Christ’s perfect obedience rather than on their own all-too-inadequate obedience. That topic is explored at some length in the Formula of Concord in its discussion of Christ’s righteousness (FC Ep III 3–6; FC SD III 3, 9–15, 22, 30, 54–57). Unlike any other person, the obedience of Jesus was “perfect” (FC SD III 4, 22, 30, 55, 58). This was so because of the “entire obedience” (FC SD III 15; see also FC SD III 55, 56, 58) of his “entire person” as both God and man (FC SD III 55, 57; see also FC Ep III 3) during his whole earthly life, from his most holy birth to his death (FC SD III 58). Each of these is significant. His perfect and entire obedience was both active and passive, active in keeping God’s Law completely and passive in enduring suffering and death without sin (FC SD III 14–15). His perfect obedience makes him the perfect mediator between God and man. His entire person, with both his divine and human natures, is involved in our salvation, his divinity in making perfect satisfaction for the sins of the world and his humanity in mediating between God and us. By his whole life of perfect obedience, he undoes the ravages of original sin on our whole lifetime (FC SD III 22, 58). His obedience in representing us before God and in representing God to us is vicarious; it is done on our behalf and in our stead (FC SD III 30, 58). His perfect obedience as both God and man is reckoned to us as our righteousness before God when we trust in him.\(^58\) So through him and his perfect obedience, we receive pardon and

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\(^{55}\) See the commentary on 5:7–8.

\(^{56}\) See *LSB*, pp. xiv, xvi, xviii. The first part of the reading is 4:14–16.

\(^{57}\) See *LSB*, p. xvi.

\(^{58}\) Note the summary in FC SD III 58:

For this reason neither the divine nor the human nature of Christ by itself is reckoned to us as righteousness, but only the obedience of the person who is God and man at the same time. Faith thus looks at the person of Christ, how this person was placed under the law for us, bore our sin, and in his path to the Father rendered to his Father entire, perfect obedience from his holy birth to his death in the stead of us poor sinners.
reconciliation, adoption as God’s children and eternal salvation; through him we share in God’s righteousness and holiness.

More simply, Jesus is the perfect model for Christian piety, the piety of those who obey him.\textsuperscript{59} It is the piety of passive and active obedience by which we listen to God’s voice and respond to him in prayer. It is the piety of receptive obedience by which we rely on God for everything and receive eternal salvation from him in Jesus. What Jesus models he also gives as the pioneer and perfecter of faith (12:2).

\begin{quote}
O perfect life of love!
All, all, is finished now,
All that He left His throne above
To do for us below.

No work is left undone
Of all the Father willed;
His toil, His sorrows, one by one,
The Scriptures have fulfilled.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{60} From “O Perfect Life of Love” by Henry W. Baker (\textit{LSB} 452:1–2).
Excursus 10

Sacrifice in the Old Testament
and in Hebrews

There are few topics in which confusion reigns as much as in the understanding of sacrifice in the OT and in Hebrews. Confusion prevails at all levels of discussion, whether it be semantic, practical, conceptual, or theological. Three common misunderstandings distort the interpretation of what is meant by sacrifice in Hebrews. They are the use of “sacrifice” as a generic term to cover a wide range of offerings to God, the equation of sacrifice with the death of the victim, and the reduction of the varied functions of the offerings in the Bible to making atonement for sin.

First, it may come as a surprise to many modern readers of the Bible that there is no generic term for “sacrifice” in the OT. Instead, we are confronted with a confusing array of offerings, such as the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering. Though they are all interrelated by their presentation in the Divine Service, each of these was different in nature and purpose. What’s more, they could be presented either as national communal offerings or as personal family offerings. While the burnt offering was the main national offering, the peace offering was the chief family offering. Despite their differences, they were all brought to the altar, where they were partially or wholly “burnt up” on it to produce a sweet-smelling cloud of smoke.¹ By its contact with the Lord’s altar, each offering was sanctified (Ex 29:37b).

The closest that we get to a general term for what was presented to God is the Hebrew noun הָעֹלָה, “an offering.”² This noun is derived from the verb הָעֹלָה, “come near,” which is commonly used in the sacrificial legislation in the Hiphil, meaning “to bring [an offering] near” to God.³ Thus the noun הָעֹלָה describes an “offering” as something that is “brought near” to God at the altar in the tabernacle or temple, whether it be a domesticated animal, flour, bread, olive oil, incense, or wine. The LXX does not, as we might expect, translate this generic term for an offering by προσφόρα, “an offering,” but by δῶρον, “a gift.” The most general technical term for an offering in the LXX is the noun θυσία, “a

¹ The technical Hebrew term for this is the Hiphil of הָעֹלָה, literally, “to make a sacrifice smoke,” that is, to burn it so as to offer it up in smoke (see Lev 2:16; 3:5, 11, 16; 4:10, 19, 26, 31; 6:15 [MT/LXX 6:8]; 7:5, 31; 8:16, 20, 28; 9:10, 20). This incineration produced “a pleasing aroma” (הָעֹלָה הָאֵ.async), which signaled God’s acceptance of them and their offerings. See Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9; 3:5, 16, and Kleinig, Leviticus, 41–43, 57–58, 66.
² See, e.g., Lev 1:2a–b, 3, 10, 14a–b; 2:1a–b, 4, 5, 7, 12, 13a–b; 3:1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 12.
³ See, e.g., Ex 29:10; Lev 1:2, 3, 5, 10, 13–15; 2:1, 4, 8, 11–14; 3:1, 3.
sacrifice,” a term that describes a peace offering, a burnt offering, and a grain offering, but, oddly, not a sin offering or a guilt offering.

In Hebrews the noun θυσία, “a sacrifice,” is a general term for any kind of offering in both covenants, whether it is presented to God by the Levitical priests (5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:9; 10:1, 11) or by Jesus (9:23, 26; 10:12) and the congregation through him (13:15, 16). In contrast with the many sacrifices in the LXX, Hebrews speaks of a single “sacrifice” presented by Jesus (10:12), as well as the “sacrifice” of praise (13:15) and the various “sacrifices” of well-doing that the congregation offers to God through him (13:16).

Second, in the OT the slaughter and death of an animal as the victim had by itself little or no ritual and theological significance. An animal was not sacrificed merely by killing it. Thus the animal was not slaughtered on the altar but elsewhere in the courtyard of the tabernacle or temple. Its ritual slaughter was a preparatory act, for by it all the blood was drained from the animal before it was splashed against the altar and poured out on it. The rite of atonement was not accomplished simply by the death of the animal but with the application of its blood on the most holy altar (Lev 17:11; cf. Heb 9:21), whether it be by the blood being “splashed on” its four sides (προσχέω, LXX Lev 1:5, 11; 3:2, 13) or “poured out” at its base (ἐκχέω, LXX Lev 4:7, 12, 18, 25, 30, 34). By that enactment the priests and the people were released from sin and cleansed from its impurity. After that had been done, they could approach God safely, without incurring his wrath by the desecration of his holiness. The rite of atonement was performed not just with the blood from the burnt offering (Lev 1:5, 11; 9:12; 16:24) but also with the blood from all the other animals that were offered to God (Lev 3:2, 8, 13; 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34). The blood of the victim atoned for sin by its application on the altar for burnt offering (Lev 17:11). All animal sacrifices were therefore offered for the sins of the priests and the people (Heb 5:1, 3; 10:11).

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4 In LXX Lev 3:1, 3, 6, 9, θυσία translates ἡμίρηδος, “a sacrifice,” which refers to a ἱερήμα, “peace offering.”
5 In LXX Lev 1:9, 13, 17, θυσία translates ἐκχέω, “an offering by fire,” which refers to an ἱερήμα, “burnt offering.”
6 The Hebrew noun נַחַלָּה, “a grain offering,” is translated by the Greek noun θυσία, “a sacrifice,” in LXX Lev 2:1, 3–11, 13–15. Since only animals were slaughtered (and not grain offerings), the ritual slaughter did not determine whether an offering was called a “sacrifice” in the LXX. In keeping with the derivation of θυσία, “a sacrifice,” from the verb θύω, which is predominantly used in Classical Greek (see LSJM) and the LXX (see Muraoka) for sacrificing animals and burning up at least part of them into smoke, the essential feature of all these sacrifices was the presentation of some part or the whole for incineration on the altar to produce a sweet aroma.
8 Two offerings were also prescribed as extraordinary sacrifices for sin, the sin offering (Lev 4:1–5:13) to atone for a guilty conscience from transgressions against the Second Table of the Decalogue (Ex 20:12–17; Deut 5:16–21) and the so-called guilt offering (Lev 5:14–6:7 [MT/LXX 5:14–26]) to atone for acts of desecration.
There is a major shift in emphasis from this in Hebrews, for in the NT the death of Jesus is much more significant than the death of any animal in the OT. Jesus does God’s will by presenting his body as a vicarious offering to atone for sin (10:5–14) and to free sinners from slavery to the fear of death by his death on their behalf (2:14–15). He tastes death on behalf of everyone (2:9) to redeem them from sin (9:15). But his self-sacrifice (9:26) is much broader than just his death. It also includes the whole of his bodily life on earth (10:10, 14), his willing passive and active obedience to God with his prayers for deliverance from death (5:7–8), his presentation of himself with his blood before God in the heavenly sanctuary at his exaltation (9:12, 24–25), and the sprinkling of the congregation with his blood to cleanse their hearts from sin (9:14; 10:22; 12:24). His work “to atone” for sin (ἱλάσκεσθαι, 2:17) includes his ongoing heavenly ministry. In keeping with the sacrificial significance of his death and its ongoing relevance, the main emphasis in Hebrews is on cleansing, remission, and sanctification through his sacrificed blood (9:14, 22; 10:18, 29; 13:12).

Third, the presentation of the daily communal burnt offering each morning and evening provided the ritual framework for all the other offerings. It consisted of four basic enactments: the splashing of blood from a slaughtered male lamb against the altar in the rite of atonement, the entry of the high priest or his deputy into the Holy Place to burn incense as an act of intercession by the high priest on behalf of the people, the burning up of the meat and flour of the burnt offering with the performance of the Aaronic Benediction (Num 6:24–26) by the high priest in front of the altar, and the eating of the leftover flour as most holy bread by the priests on duty. The basic purpose of that complex enactment was for God to meet with his people in order to purify, accept, sanctify, and bless them.

So when we speak of sacrifices in Hebrews we need to distinguish between these four enactments, each of which has its own complementary purpose as part of the whole Divine Service. It is of course true that Hebrews does emphasize the application of blood for the forgiveness of sins in the rite of atonement, but it does not reduce the sacrifice of Christ to that single purpose. The other three aspects of the full sacrificial enactment are also mentioned. As High Priest Jesus appears before God in heaven on behalf of the congregation (9:24) and intercedes for them there (7:25). As High Priest he also offered himself with his prayers (5:7) and his human body as an offering to God (9:14, 25, 28; 10:12).
and *offered up* himself for the sins of the people (7:27).\(^\text{13}\) The result of his self-sacrifice is a sacrificial Meal for the congregation rather than for the Levitical priests (13:10). He provides his Holy Supper, in which the communicants feast on his body and blood, given and shed for them for the forgiveness of sins.\(^\text{14}\)

Yet despite these OT precedents and parallels, the sacrifice of Christ transcends the order of sacrifice in the OT and differs from it. It falls into four main phases: the presentation of his body as an offering to God by his obedient life and sacrificial death, his entry as High Priest with his blood into the heavenly sanctuary, his ongoing intercession on behalf of God’s people, and his sprinkling of the congregation with his blood for purification from sin and his sanctification of them through his blood. While the first two phases of his self-offering were done once for all and then never repeated, the last two continue in the Divine Service. There the congregation draws near to God through Jesus and his high-priestly intercession for them (7:25). There he cleanses and sanctifies them with his blood, so that they can enter God’s presence through his flesh and with his blood (10:19–21).

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\(^{13}\) The verb translated as “offer (up)” in 7:27 (also 9:28) is ἀναφέρω, the usual LXX translation for the Hiphil verb ḫaphiq, which is the technical ritual term for sending an offering up in smoke to God on the altar for burnt offering. For this Hiphil of ḫaphiq, see the footnote on it at the beginning of this excursus.

\(^{14}\) See further the commentary on 13:9–15, as well as excursus 12, “Allusions to the Lord’s Supper in Hebrews,” following the commentary on 6:4–12.