

**HEBREWS 18**  
**(Hebrews 4:14-16)**

**OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST**  
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*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

Hebrews 4:14-16

**INTRODUCTION**

We have seen in our study of Hebrews that Jesus is better than anything Judaism could offer. Jesus was actually the great reality of which those things of Judaism were only the types.

- \* In Hebrews 1:1 that Jesus is better than the prophets.
- \* In Hebrews 1:4, he is better than the angels.
- \* In Hebrews 3:1 Jesus is superior to Moses.
- \* In Hebrews 4:8, his rest is better than Joshua's rest.

And now we come to Hebrews 4:14 where the discussion turns to the priesthood of Jesus. And we find that Jesus is a better priest than Aaron and all of the other priests of Israel.

Now Aaron and his sons were called into the priesthood in Exodus 28:1.

*And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.*

Exodus 28:1

And our immediate context confirms that Aaron was ordained by God (5:1) and called of God (5:4) to be a priest.

So, Aaron was a legitimate priest in Israel because God ordained him and called him to be a priest. And this is always the crucial test. Has God called him or not? Now Aaron himself had a shocking failure shortly after he was ordained as a priest. (See Exodus 32:1-10)

And Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, also were called into the priesthood. But look what happened to them.

*And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.*

Leviticus 10:1-3

Now the Scriptures don't say much about this incident. But clearly Nadab and Abihu performed a religious service that was not commanded by the Lord. And as such it is not accepted. This reminds me of Cain's offering. It was not what the Lord commanded and so Cain was cursed.

Note: Men are always trying to offer something to God other than what he requires. God says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." And men say, here Lord, take my good works instead, take my church attendance, take this ritual or that ceremony. Let me recite this formal prayer instead Lord." And God is angry because he says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."

So you see very early on that these human priests had their faults. They occupied an office, but they were very imperfect occupiers.

Now Aaron was a descendent of Levi and so, ultimately the tribe of Levi was set aside to serve in the tabernacle and some of the tribe of Levi would serve as priests in the tabernacle.

Now the priests performed all the rituals that God required to be performed. Particularly, they performed the rituals of the sacrifices. And they slaughtered the lambs and the goats and the other animals which were to be sacrificed. And they sprinkled the blood on the altar and on the people and the tabernacle was a bloody place. And these priests

performed many of these duties in a section of the tabernacle called the Holy Place. They kept the lamp stand supplied with oil so that the lamp never went out. They kept showbread on the table. And they kept incense burning. In short they studied the book of Leviticus and they performed everything that God told them to do.

But there was an inner room in the tabernacle. It was called the Holy of Holies. And no one could go in this room. It was set aside as that special and most holy place where God would reside. God's very presence would be in this room. The people of Israel could not enter this holy chamber. And the priests could not enter this chamber. And if they dared set foot in this room they would die.

But there was one man and one man only who could enter this room without being killed and that was the High Priest. And even the high priest could enter only once a year on the Day of Atonement. And this High Priest would enter into this chamber and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. He would sprinkle blood for himself and for the people.

Now all of this was to be done by the High Priest on behalf of the people.

And the question would be, "Why did the people need a priest?" Why did Israel have priests and why do we need a priest?

And the simple answer is that God is holy and we are unholy. And because of our sin and our rebellion, we are not qualified to come into the presence of a holy God.

**Example: My wife is an imminently perfect housekeeper. Dirt is not allowed to come into our house. And if it comes in, it is unceremoniously swept out. And it is swept out continually throughout the day. It is not welcome and it is not tolerated.**

Our God is imminently holy and he will not tolerate dirt in his house. Sin is not acceptable. And around God's house is an impenetrable screen and no sin can come in and no sinful creature can come into God's presence. And God loves it that way because he loves good, clean holiness. For, what fellowship does light have with darkness? What fellowship does holiness have with uncleanness? And what fellowship does

our holy God have with worms such as us?

And so, there is a great gulf fixed between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. And that's why there must be a mediator. God does have somewhat against us and that's why we need a priest. Perhaps our priest can somehow turn away the wrath of God and cause Him to accept us.

Now I am afraid that many people today feel that they do not need a priest. Especially in our country, we think of ourselves as "can do" people. We can do anything if we put our mind to it. We can solve any problem. We can achieve any goal. And many people think they can placate God on their own. They say, "We can please God. We can do this and that and he will let us into his house." And God will never let them in because they are unholy.

But, Israel knew that they needed a priest. God trained them well, and God gave them priests to perform religious services so that the people would not be immediately killed because of their sins. They knew that they could not approach God without a priest. There was not an Israelite who would dare go into the Holy of Holies. It was unthinkable. Only the High Priest could go in once a year.

And I want you to know that you cannot approach God without a priest. By Adam's sin and by your own sins you are an unholy creature. And without a priest you cannot go in. God will sweep you out like the filthy dirt on my wife's kitchen floor. And he will bundle you up and burn you in the lake of fire if you try to come to him without a priest.

But I want you to know that you have a priest! And you have a priest who is greater than Aaron and greater than any Old Testament priest.

*Seeing then that we have a great high priest. (v.14)*

Now notice also that Jesus is not just a priest and he is not just a high priest. He is a great high priest.

Aaron was a High Priest, but Jesus was a great high priest.

And in this verse you will find that Jesus is a great high priest,

I. Because of who he is.

A. He is a man. (v.14)

When the Scriptures use the name Jesus, they typically are referencing the humanity of Christ. This was his human name given him by Joseph and Mary by God's instructions. And so, we have a great high priest and his name is Jesus.

Jesus was the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 which would bruise the head of Satan.

Jesus is the seed of Abraham through whom the promises are fulfilled. (Galatians 3:16)

Jesus is the seed of David and as such he will inherit David's throne and David's kingdom.

But, if he were just a man, then he would be no different from Aaron or the other priests. But Jesus is more than a mere man,

B. He is the Son of God. (v.14)

Hebrews chapter one made it clear that this man Jesus is actually the creator of the world and he is the heir of all things.

(2) *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*

(3) *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

Hebrews 1:2,3

So, Jesus is the perfect priest to serve as a mediator between God and man because Jesus is a man and Jesus is God. No other priest in all of history was both God and man.

So, Jesus is a great high priest first because of who he is and secondly,

II. Because of where he is.

*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens. (v.14)*

Now Israel thought of God as dwelling in the Holy of Holies. When children were in the outer courts of the tabernacle, I suppose they would ask their parents what is in that inner chamber. And the parents would tell their children, "That is where God lives."

And it was true in a typical way. This was the most holy place for Israel. It was the place where the most holy God of Israel resided. It is where Israel must go to approach God. And as to that nation Israel, it could be said that God resided there.

But can it be that God really lives in a cubical 10x10x10 cubits? The Scriptures make it plain that God lives in heaven. In fact, even the heavens cannot contain him.

*Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory.*

Isaiah 63:15

And Jesus referred to the Father as being in heaven.

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

Matthew 6:9

So, it is rather shallow and unbiblical thinking to believe that God could reside and be contained in a small room. It is clear that any residence he had in the tabernacle was a typical residence. It was a typical place to typify the place where men can meet with God.

Now God did communicate with the High Priest once per year from within that cubicle. But it merely typified God's presence in the heavenlies.

Solomon later built a temple for a place where God could reside. And listen to what Solomon said.

*But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee: how much less this house which I have built?*

I Chronicles 6:18

And this teaches us that even the heavens cannot contain God. A cubical cannot contain him. The temple could not contain him. The heavens cannot contain him.

But this is all that we can conceive. Where does God live? It must be the biggest place that we can imagine. And so we say he lives in the heavens – that universe that expands into infinity.

And look at verse 14. We have a priest who has passed into the heavens. That is, he has passed to that place where God really is. Jesus is not a priest which is sent to that typical place. Jesus has not gone to a cubicle in the tabernacle. But he has gone into the very presence of God – that real place wherein is God.

Now the High Priest in Israel would pass out of sight when he entered the Holy of Holies once per year. He would enter and go behind the veil. And he could not be seen. Just so, Jesus passed out of sight when he ascended into the heavens and entered the presence of God.

*For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:*

Hebrews 9:24

This verse teaches that the earthly tabernacle and more particularly, that Holy of Holies which was made by hands, was a mere figure of the true. It was a place that represented that true place. And the high priest that entered in was a mere figure of that great high priest who would enter into the very presence of God.

So, Jesus is a great high priest because of who he is and where he

is. And he is a great high priest,

III. Because of what he is.

What is he? He is a sympathizing high priest.

Now it might have been supposed that because Jesus was the Son of God, because he was divine, because he was impeccable (that is, he could not sin), because he didn't have a sin nature, because he was embodied with all the divine attributes even after he became human, because he had the fullness of the Holy Spirit, that he could not relate to us.

This would be the objection. Christ can't really be a perfect high priest because he can't relate to us. How can the Son of God, God himself, even know what it is like to be us? How can he feel for us? How can he have compassion on us?

And if Paul were voicing that objection he would state it like this from verse 15. "Christ is a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Jesus can't be a high priest because he cannot be touched, because he is God, he is beyond feeling. He cannot feel our infirmities."

Not so, says Paul.

*For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

Christ was not kept at an arm's length from the infirmities of humanity, but he was made to partake of them. Jesus suffered everything that was common to man's fallen nature, yet he never sinned. But he suffered the effects of sin. He suffered hunger and thirst. He suffered weariness. He suffered emotional pains like sorrow and rejection and loneliness. Jesus suffered physical pain when he was scourged and when he was crucified. Paul puts it this way: "He was in all points tempted like as we are." That is, he was tried with all sorts of pains and agonies and sufferings.

Jesus was a man. And while he walked on the earth as a man he had great compassion on human beings.

1. When he saw the multitudes and they were hungry it says he had compassion on them.
2. When he passed the sick and the lame he had compassion.
3. On many occasions he went to the seedier side of town where there were demon possessed people and he had compassion for these people and he cast the demons out.
4. Lepers would come to him who were covered with leprosy from head to toe. And no one else would touch these people. They were unclean both physically and ceremonially. But Jesus touched them and made them whole because he had great compassion on them.
5. And Jesus had great sorrow and compassion even for those who were unbelievers. When he came into the city for the last time he looked out over Jerusalem and wept with great compassion and he said,

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not?*

Matthew 23:37

6. When he was hanging from the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

And now that he has died and has risen and has passed into the heavens, he is

*Not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. (v.15)*

He is not that kind of a high priest. Some of the other high priests may have been heartless and unfeeling in their fallen natures. Caiaphas was not that caring or compassionate when Jesus was brought to him.

But this high priest, this great high priest, that is Jesus, can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

*Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.*

Hebrews 2:17,18

Do you have troubles? Do you have weaknesses and trials? Then you have a great high priest who can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. He feels for you because he also was a man who suffered all things.

Most importantly, do you have sins? Then, you have a great high priest who has passed into the heavens and who makes reconciliation for your sins. He reconciles you to God continually by his own blood and by his constant mediation on your behalf.

### Our duty in light of having a great high priest

1. Let us hold fast our profession.

Don't leave Christ because he is a great high priest.

2:1 Don't let them slip.

3:14 Hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.

4:14 Let us hold fast.

The picture here is that when you have faith you have spiritual hands. Now hands and fingers are made for gripping. And Paul is saying in Hebrews, "Take your spiritual hands and grip onto Christ. Lay hold of Him. And don't let go." In your trials and tribulations, hang onto Christ. In your sicknesses, hang onto Him. And when you sin against Him, hang onto Him. Don't flee from Him and don't give up your hold on Him. He is a great high priest and he is there in the heavens with God for the very purpose of reconciling you to God.

2. Let us come.

Now the people of Israel could not come into the presence of God. There was a veil separating them from their Holy God. Only the high priest

could come once a year.

But because we have a great high priest, one better than Aaron, that veil has been rent in two and torn down. And the way into the presence of God has opened up.

And so, Paul says “Come. Come one, come all into the very presence of the Holy God through your great high priest.”

Now don't try to come without that priest. Don't try to come through another door, because you will be swept out. But come through Jesus. His sacrifice makes you clean and holy before God. Come, come into the presence of God.

But look how you are to come. Come boldly! Israel dared not even come close to the Holy of Holies while Aaron was their priest. Even Aaron tiptoed into the presence of God with fear and trepidation.

**Example: There is some Jewish tradition which suggests that they would tie a rope around the ankle of the high priest so that if he was struck dead in the Holy of Holies they could pull him out. That is how timidly they approached God.**

But with Jesus as our high priest, it says, “Come boldly.”

Bring your petitions boldly to God for you have a covering for your sins. It is the blood of your great high priest. And you can come boldly into the presence of holiness for he has forgiven your sins.

But it also tells you where you may come in verse 16. It is not to the holy of holies, it is not to the temple, it is not to a city or a certain mountain as the woman at Samaria thought, but it is to the very throne of God that we may come.

*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne. (v.16)*

What, we can come to the very throne of God? This is the place where he resides. This is the place from which he rules the universe. This is the place from where he will judge the nations. Judgment will be rendered here. God's anger will flare up here against the unrighteous. But it

is this very place where he tells us, “Come. Come boldly. Come boldly to the throne. And this only because we have a great high priest.

For others this throne is a throne of wrath. His eyes will be as flames of fire toward them. And he will cast the wicked away into everlasting punishment.

But to us who have a priest, no, to us who have a high priest, no, to us who have a great high priest, this is not a throne of wrath, but a throne of grace.

*Come boldly unto the throne of grace. (v.16)*

Because we come through that true priest and only through him, a throne of terror is turned into a throne of mercy.

*Come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace. (v.16)*

Jesus did not come into the world to save the righteous but to call sinners to repentance. And he calls them to a throne of grace. There is not a more beautiful word for sinners in all the world than grace. And he calls us to his throne of grace.

There is a fountain flowing from the throne of God and it is a fountain of grace. And whosoever will, may drink freely from that fountain.

But I want you to notice lastly, that there is a time when God’s grace is particularly available to you.

*That you may obtain mercy, and find grace in time of need. (v.16)*

Grace is available in time of need.

I have often heard people say, I just don’t know how I could do such and such a thing. If I were faced with persecution because of my faith, I just don’t think I could do it.

Lord, I don't think I have what it takes to be a Christian. And he says, "I give grace in time of need."

Others who are facing some deadly disease may say, I just don't think I can go through this.

But when does God give the grace? He gives it in time of need.

And when that need comes, and it surely will,

*Let us come boldly to the throne . . . the throne of grace . . . that we may obtain mercy . . . and find grace . . . in time of need.*