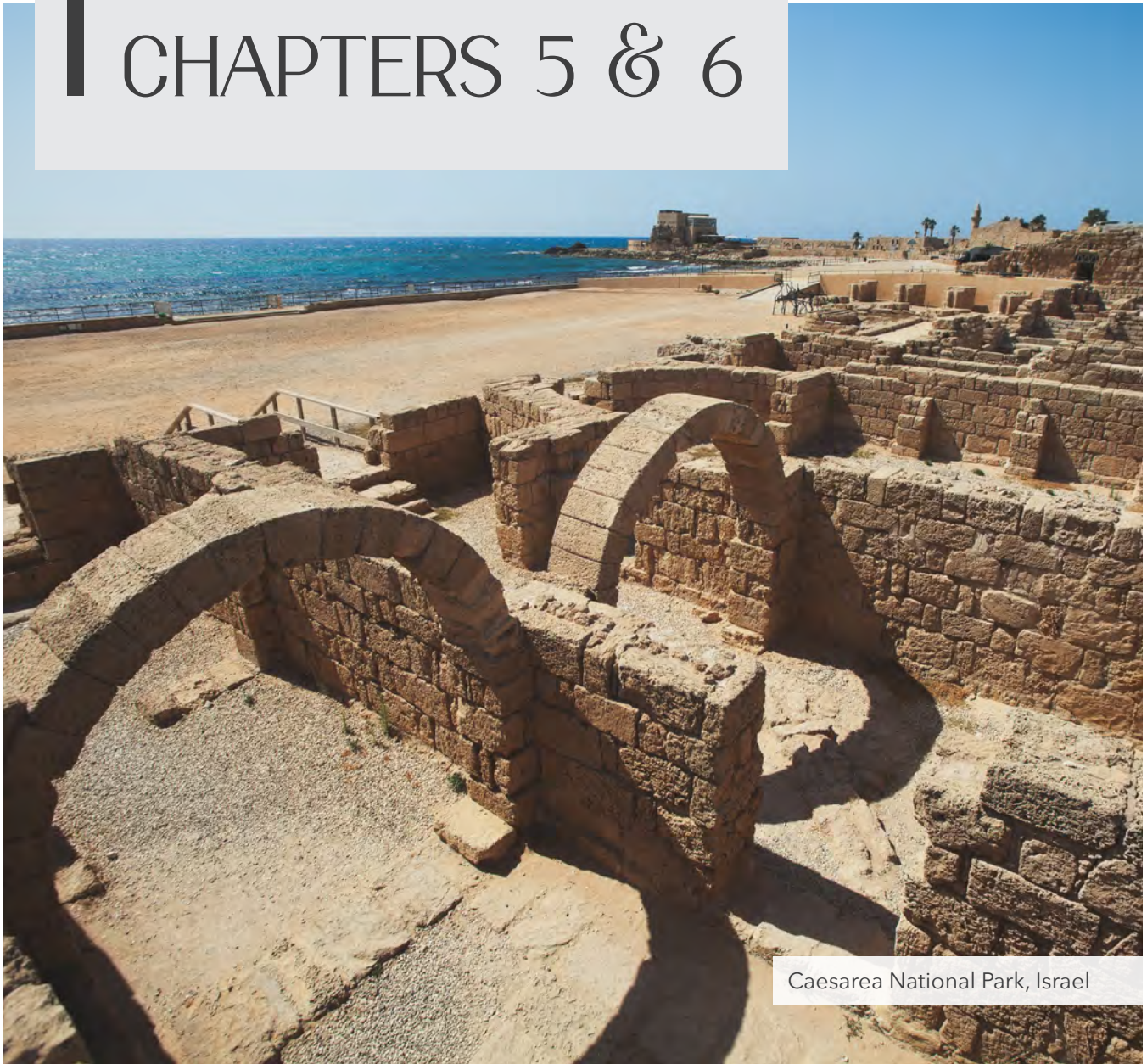


WEEK 4

HEBREWS

CHAPTERS 5 & 6



Caesarea National Park, Israel

JESUS IS THE GREATER PRIEST

This week, we are looking at the book of Hebrews, chapters five, six, and seven. These chapters focus on the truth that **Jesus is our high priest, meaning that there is no other priest or prophet greater than the One we have in Jesus.** This week, we will examine the role of the priest, how Jesus perfectly fulfills this role in our lives, how we should respond to it, and how a mysterious man from the Old Testament reveals to us in greater depth the supremacy of Jesus as our high priest.

DAY 1 – MONDAY

HEBREWS 5:1-6, EXODUS 28:1-5

THE ROLE OF THE PRIEST

Unless you grew up in the Catholic faith, you might not be very familiar with the role of a priest. This role, however, predates Catholicism. God established it early in creation, with its formal institution recorded in Exodus 28:1-5, when He told Moses to “set apart” Aaron and his sons as priests over Israel in the wilderness. They were given distinctive garments to mark their position, but it was ultimately their spiritual service that was meant to set them apart.

The role of the priests was, as Hebrews 5:1-6 clarifies, to represent the people of God. They were chosen to bring forth gifts (or offerings) to God, and to offer sacrifices for the people’s sins. Essentially, the role of the biblical priests was to be a mediator between the people and God. They were tasked with keeping the sacred space of worship to God and carrying out the sacrificial rituals that brought about forgiveness and access to God’s presence.

The author of Hebrews, though, gives us a glimpse into the shortcomings of this previous system and role: “... *he (the priest) is subject to the same weaknesses.*” (v. 3) The priests were human, meaning sinful too. They failed to live the holy standard expected of a priest. They had to offer sacrifices for themselves, their sinfulness, too. God’s people needed a higher priest. This is Jesus.

Jesus was called by the Father to be a priest to all mankind, but not just any priest. He is the high priest, the greater priest. Unlike any other, Christ lived a perfect life, free of sin, and offered the greatest sacrifice, Himself, for the forgiveness of the world. As verse six reminds us, He is our priest for all eternity (more to come on who Melchizedek was later in the week), meaning that there is no end to His mediation on our behalf to the Father. **Christ is the greater priest because He is the direct connection to God, completely unbroken by sin and eternally secure.**

REFLECTION

The role of the priest can be hard to understand, but consider this: we need a mediator. When we do wrong or are challenged legally, we are brought before a judge. We can’t try our case on our own; we don’t know the laws as well as our attorney, our advocate, and mediator, before the judge. Jesus is our mediator, our high priest, who not only advocates our case, but knows the judge so intimately that there is no question that our case will be dismissed, we will be declared not guilty, and eternally free.

Reflect on this good news and how good it is to have Christ as our greater priest. End this reflection time by praying and praising Him for His mediation in our lives.

DAY 2 – TUESDAY

HEBREWS 4:14-16, 5:7-10, MATTHEW 27:46, PSALM 2:7,
MATTHEW 3:13-17, PSALM 110:4

JESUS: THE HIGH PRIEST

Verse 10 refers again to this mysterious figure of the Old Testament, Melchizedek. We will study why he is referenced so frequently in Hebrews at the end of the week, but the rest of this passage explains more about what it means that Jesus is our high priest. The author is pointing out how Jesus perfectly lived and executed the role of high priest. He specifically points to the fact that Jesus cried out to God with prayers and pleadings. He sought to remove the unbearable weight of sin and death from the world by taking on that great, torturous pain exclusively.

Just like we discussed yesterday, the old order of the priests was an incomplete system for atonement and forgiveness, because the very priests who offered the sacrifices for the people were sinful. None is perfect, and so none is completely worthy, or holy, enough to present a sacrifice that would bring eternal forgiveness. Jesus is the perfect priest who offered the ultimate sacrifice, Himself. The author makes it clear that Jesus did not elect Himself to this role, but that God Himself called Him from heaven to it. **The Lord established Christ as our high priest, and it is because of this divine call, it is because of this perfect priestly sacrifice, that we have all now been called and accepted as congregants of this high priest and set free from our sins for all time.**

Practically, this means we are invited to come before God boldly, not timidly or with shame, but with confidence. This is not confidence in ourselves, but in Him. His sinless life means He can represent us perfectly before the Father, and His humanity means He understands us perfectly. The throne of God, which might otherwise seem intimidating, is here called a throne of grace. In Christ, it is not a place of condemnation but a place of help. Whatever burden you carry, you can bring it directly to Him and find not only mercy for what's past but grace for what's ahead.

REFLECTION

Hebrews 4:14-16 reminds us then that we can boldly, confidently, approach the Lord. God is now our Father who welcomes us to His embrace with nothing holding us back from Him. How often do we really do this, though? How often do we feel this boldness and confidence that the author refers to?

Today, reflect on Christ as our high priest again. Reflect on what that really means, and how our posture towards Him should shift. Take a moment to humbly embrace the entitlement of your salvation that Christ paid for with His life. Approach the throne of Christ and speak to the Lord with confidence, love, and assurance like never before.

DAY 3 – WEDNESDAY

HEBREWS 5:11-6:12

BECOME SPIRITUALLY MATURE

Yesterday's reflection might have felt a little broad. Still, I hope you embraced the challenge and that it had an impact, as yesterday's reflection is precisely what the author of Hebrews challenges the readers with in the remainder of chapter five and the beginning of chapter six. The author uses some harsh language referring to the readers as "babies", immature, and ignorant about how to do what is right. The reason for this, though, is understandable. The author is giving us all the harsh locker room halftime charge that we need.

The author is calling the readers to move off the sidelines of their faith and to get into the game. "Stop asking about the things you already know!" the author essentially says, "And begin playing a role in the royal priesthood that Christ has now brought you into!" What role are we called to play? Teach others! Spread this gospel truth with words and actions. **Let your life be a living sacrifice (example) to the world of the heavenly confidence you now possess because you KNOW you have been paid for and are set free.**

The author in chapter six warns about those who have not walked in this way of mature confidence of faith. They experienced a "taste" (6:5) of this work of Christ, but never fully embraced it. They sat on the sidelines. The author is our coach here, encouraging us, saying, "You're not like that! You're truly free because you accepted it, now go and live it out!" (paraphrased 6:9-12). Are you ready to walk in the way of the confident, mature, secure believer of Jesus? Then get off the sidelines, take your place in the game, and lead your team, your people, to victory with Jesus.

REFLECTION

There is a quote that is often misattributed to St. Francis of Assisi, which says, "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." This is an incredible quote, though we don't know who said it, but the message is more important than the messenger. Our lives should be transformed by our high priest. It should change everything about us. Love should now outweigh every other attribute about us. Our default place should be the throne room of Christ, meaning we should be so fully aware and enamored by God's presence at all times that we become like Him.

Does this describe you? Most likely not, but it could. Reflect today on what the author encouraged about getting off the sidelines of your faith. Why do you think you are still on the sidelines? Finally, ask the Lord to help you embrace Him with a confidence like never before, that you may reflect His light to the world and live in the warmth of His throne room.

DAY 4 – THURSDAY

HEBREWS 6:13-20, GENESIS 22:16-18

JESUS: OUR ANCHOR AND CONFIDENCE

This week, as we've looked at Christ as our greater priest, we've mentioned our default position needing to be one of confidence. Why is that? Hebrews 6:13-20 gives us the clearest understanding of why we should be people of confidence. The author begins by explaining the power of an oath. "...when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it." (v. 16). The oath is binding. It is a covenant; it means something. The author explains the oath and covenant He made in the past before Abraham and how He proved faithful in this oath. He has done it again by swearing an oath to us. The Lord has sworn an oath to us that through faith we have received salvation. We can be confident in this oath because His promises are always kept, His oaths are never broken, and His word is the most secure promise we will ever receive. This promise is so protected that the author describes it by saying, "*God also **bound** himself with an oath...*" (v. 17). He has bound Himself; there's no binding contract stronger than the One put in place by God Himself.

This is why we should be anchored to Him. He is our ultimate security. **There is nothing that can take us away from His love, from the work of Christ on the cross, from our salvation. We are so free that we should walk confidently.** I think of it this way: when my son is scared or unsure, he clings tighter to me. He anchors himself to me because he views me as his strong protector. I bring him confidence. We should be doing the same with the Lord. He offers us security, protection, assurance, and ultimately confidence. If we lack this confidence, it's a good sign that we lack faith or understanding in how strong His work and promise are.

REFLECTION

Today, go back and reflect on just one verse, Hebrews 6:17. He has bound Himself with an oath to us. He has bound Himself to you. Have you bound yourself to Him? Write down verse seventeen and ask yourself what it would mean for you to walk daily bound to Him, in confidence and assurance of your salvation.

A DEEP DIVE

WHO WAS MELCHIZEDEK?

JESUS: OUR ANCHOR AND CONFIDENCE

(HEBREWS 7:1-14, GENESIS 14:18-20, JOHN 2:1-11, LUKE 22:14-20)

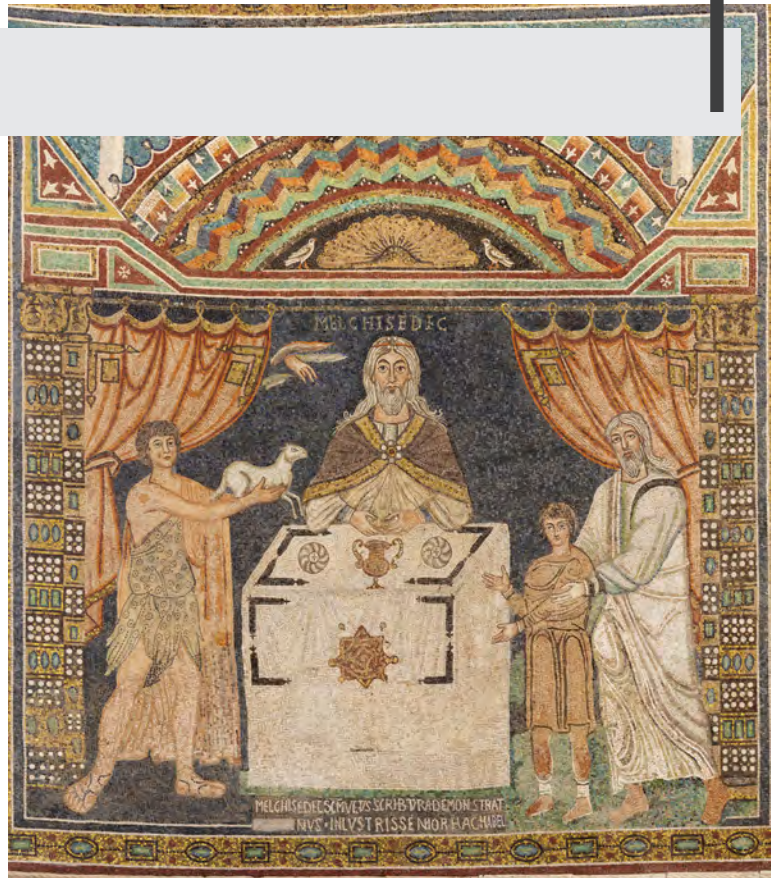
This week's reading has had a lot to say about a specific person of the Old Testament, Melchizedek. If you are unfamiliar with this person, don't feel bad. He's one of the more obscure and mysterious people of the Old Testament. We learn about Melchizedek in the book of Genesis, chapter fourteen, but we only get two very short verses about him. If you don't know the significance of this encounter, then you miss the significance of the author's point that Jesus is like Melchizedek in Hebrews 7.

Melchizedek, we are told in Genesis 14:18, was the king of Salem (Salem is the half of Jeru-salem and is actually ancient Jerusalem before the Israelites came and inhabited it). Salem comes from the Hebrew root word for shalom, which means peace. So, when the author of Hebrews in 7:2 points out that Melchizedek's name means "king of justice" and Salem is peace, then the significance becomes really clear: **Melchizedek is the king of justice and peace.** This is important to understand because names carry great significance in the Bible. Melchizedek lives up to this name in the way that he interacts with Abram.

Abram has just returned from fighting a great war against four kings. He is returning victorious, and as he enters the region of Salem, Melchizedek brings forth wine and bread. Wine and bread are offerings of hospitality, honor, peace, celebration, and prosperity, but more specifically, this is a symbolic priestly offering. The wine and bread represent a spiritual blessing. Think also of the water that Jesus turned to wine to usher in the beginning of His ministry (John 2:1-11) and of course, His last supper, the first communion, with the disciples (Luke 22:14-20). One could argue that Melchizedek is bringing about the first symbolic communion by bringing Abram bread and wine. Melchizedek then, as a priest does, gives a blessing to Abram.

The significance doesn't end here, though. Abram then, recognizing the significance of this priest king and his offering, gives to Melchizedek one-tenth of his wealth (his plunder from war). This is the first tithe. In the Old Testament, the priests would receive a sacrificial tithe from the Israelite, Hebrew people. The tithe was part of an offering to God, and so Abram giving a tithe to Melchizedek here further supports that Melchizedek is a priest.

Finally, Melchizedek is significant because it is the first time the word or role of priest is mentioned. This matters because the Hebrews reading this would know that the role of priest was established officially by God through Aaron and his sons in Exodus 28:1. Aaron was chosen for this because he was a descendant of Levi (one of the twelve sons of Jacob). From this moment of establishing Aaron and his sons as priests, moving forward, only those from the line of Levi could be priests. But Jesus was not a descendant of Levi, which is why the author of Hebrews so strongly focuses on Melchizedek, the true first established priest, who brought peace and justice. Jesus is like Melchizedek. This is who Melchizedek was; this is why he is so significant to the Hebrew author who is trying to explain to the Hebrew audience that Jesus is truly our high priest.



*The mosaic panel of Abraham, Abel and Melchizedek in church
Basilica of Sant Apollinare*

DAY 5 – FRIDAY

HEBREWS 7:15-28, PSALM 110:4, HEBREWS 5:5-10

JESUS IS GREATER THAN MELCHIZEDEK

"The heart of Hebrews' theology is the presentation of Jesus as our great High Priest, superior to Aaron and Melchizedek, whose once-for-all sacrifice secures eternal redemption."

- Craig Blomberg

The first half of Hebrews seven goes over who Melchizedek was. The second half of this chapter now looks at how Jesus is the perfected priest and is like Melchizedek. Remember, the whole point the author is seeking to make here is that Jesus is still our high priest even though He was not a descendant of the Levites (who were previously the only people appointed by God to be priests). The author wants the Hebrews to understand that Jesus overthrew this system because He was the completion and fulfillment of God's plan.

Remember back to day one of our study this week. We saw that the previous system of the priesthood was lacking. It wasn't perfect, because the priests offering the sacrifices for God were not perfect themselves. In the second half of chapter seven of Hebrews, the author is pointing to this truth again, *"...the old requirements about the priesthood was set aside because it was weak and useless..."* (v. 18).

The author makes it clear that this new priest, this new system of atonement for sins, is better! *"...now we have confidence in a better hope..."* (v. 19). This new system draws us nearer to God. **Jesus is the ultimate priest because it is only through Him that we find hope and are able to draw near to God**, not only on the other side of this life in eternity, but even now on this side of heaven, in our day-to-day lives. His reign as priest is even more secure than Aaron's or the Levites because God made an oath to Jesus (Psalm 110:4) that He would be a priest forever. The previous priests never received such an oath. **Jesus is the only one who has the oath of God's blessing to be the priest of all mankind.**

"He (Jesus) is the kind of high priest we need..." (v. 26) *"...He (Jesus) is able once and forever, to save those who come to God through Him..."* (v. 25)

REFLECTION

This week covered a lot of historically weighty truths. Take a moment and re-read Hebrews chapter seven. Reflect on how all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful our God is that He was working His plan of a royal high priest, His son, to come and offer eternal salvation to us all from the very beginning. Now write down Hebrews 7:26 and 25. Conclude your time by praying to this high priest. Praise Him and pour out sacrifices of gratitude for His salvation and goodness.

DAY 6 – SATURDAY

REFLECTION DAY

REFLECTION NOTES AND QUESTIONS:

As we wrap up this week's study, reread Hebrews Chapters 5-7

This week, we looked at how Jesus is our high priest. There were many priests before Him, but even though He wasn't from the traditional lineage of the priests, He is greater. He perfects a broken system of human, sinful priests, and insufficient sacrifices. **Jesus is our eternal priest who brings about salvation.**

Reflect/journal your thoughts on the following prompts:

- Write down what you learned about the Lord this week.
- What is something you looked at this week that you want to receive from God in greater measure? Why?
- How can you begin to apply this truth about God to your walk with Him?

DAY 7 – SUNDAY

REST DAY

Join us for worship today and prepare your heart to engage with next week's study of God and His word. Use your time today to rest, pray, and reflect on this week's readings.