

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Qualifications for the Great High Priest

5: 1-4

Qualifications for the great high priest DIG: What qualifications does your messianic rabbi or pastor have? Is it merely education, or is there much more? What qualities do you look for? Are these qualities ever lacking? How do his shortcomings help him deal gently with his congregation when they go astray, since he too is subject to weakness? How does his role compare to Yeshua's in terms of how each is chosen? How each relates to sinners?

REFLECT: Do you put your messianic rabbi or pastor on a pedestal? Do you expect perfection, or can you allow for human imperfections? What expectations do you have on the wife of your spiritual leader? Can she be a regular person in the congregation, or does she have to lead the women's ministries and play the keyboard? What about their children? Can their halo slip now and then, or do they have to perfect?

The heart of the book of **Hebrews**, in **Chapters 5** through **9**, focuses on the high priesthood of **Yeshua Messiah**. **His** superior priesthood, more than anything else, makes the **Christ's** high priesthood better than the Levitical high priesthood. **Jesus** has done what all the high priests together in the Dispensation of Torah did not do and could never have done (see the commentary on **Exodus**, [to see link click Da](#) - **The Dispensation of Torah**).

The priests in the TaNaKh were bridge builders to **YHVH**. They couldn't come directly into the presence of **Ha'Shem**, and therefore, **God** appointed certain men to be ushers, as it were, to bring mankind into **His** presence. The way to **ADONAI** was opened only as the priests offered sacrifices - day in and day out, year after year - presenting the blood of animals to **the LORD**. The priests were **the Holy One's** mediators.

But with the sacrifice of **Jesus Christ** on the cross, need for the Temple and for the Levitical priesthood ended. A high priest like those who succeeded **Aaron** were no longer needed. **Yeshua** was both **High Priest** and **sacrifice**, and provided mankind an eternal opening into the presence of **YHVH**. After **His** crucifixion, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Lw](#) - **Accompanying Signs of Jesus' Death**),

exposing the Most Holy Place to anyone who would come to **God** through **His Son**. In one perfect sacrifice, **the Lamb of God** accomplished what millions upon millions of sacrifices offered by a multitude of priests never accomplished. He permanently opened the way to **ADONAI**, so that mankind, at any time by faith in **Christ**, could enter into **God's** presence.¹²⁷

The **Hebrews**, however, had not been familiar with the idea of **the Messiah** being a **High Priest**. **Jesus** had not come from the Order of **Aaron**; **His** priesthood was from the Order of Melchizedek. While on the earth **Christ** didn't function as a priest in the Temple in Yerushalayim. **He** performed no priestly duties and thus contradicted the whole Jewish conception of the priesthood. The writer feels the need of explaining in more detail about this new **Priest** to whom some were in danger of rejecting.¹²⁸

Not just anyone could serve the Israelite community as an ordinary **priest**, much less as **high priest**. One of the first questions a messianic Jew would ask when told the **Yeshua** held the position of **High Priest** was this: Is **He** qualified? The writer of **Hebrews** answers that question by reminding his readers that a **high priest** needed **four qualifications**.



The High Priest Must Be Human: For every great **high priest** (Hebrew: *Cohen Rosh Gadol*) **taken from among men is appointed to act on the people's behalf with regard to things concerning God (5:1a CJB)**. First, in order for a **Cohen Rosh Gadol** to act on behalf of **men**, **he** must be **taken from among men**. **YHVH** did not choose angels to be priests. Angels do not have the same nature as **men**. They cannot truly understand **men** and they do not have open communication with **men**. Only **a man** could be subject to the temptations of **men**, could experience suffering like **men**, and thereby be able to minister to

men in an understanding and merciful way. This much, of course, was completely clear and acceptable to Jews. Their problem was with the incarnation – the fact that **God** became a **man**.

In the Dispensation of Torah, even after the covenants with Abraham and with Moshe, **Ha'Shem** was unapproachable. At the Fall, **God** drove Adam and Eve out of the garden and **mankind** no longer had access to **the LORD's** presence (**Genesis 3:24**). In the wilderness, the people were told not to come too near Sinai, where **ADONAI** chose to reveal **Himself** to Moshe when giving the covenant of Torah. In the Tabernacle and in the Temple **YHVH** was behind a veil and could only be approached through **the high priest**.

By sending **His Son, Jesus Christ, God** no longer kept **Himself** aloof and separate from **mankind**. **He** entered into the human world and felt everything the mankind will ever feel in order that **He** might be a sympathetic, merciful and faithful **High Priest**. If **God** never became a **man**, **He** never could have been a **high priest**, a mediator, or an intercessor. **He** never could have offered the perfect and absolute sacrifice for the sins of **His** people, which divine justice required. Therefore, **Messiah** taking on human flesh and being born into this world as a **man** was not an option; it was an absolute necessity if we were to be saved.¹²⁹

The High Priest Must Offer Gifts and Sacrifices for Sins: To offer gifts and sacrifices for sins (5:1b CJB). Secondly, **the high priest** must function in a priestly order that offers both **gifts and sacrifices for sins**. The word **sacrifices** refers to blood-offerings, while the word **gifts** refers to the grain-offering used with **sacrifices**. The grain offering was the only bloodless offering given by Moshe in the Torah (see the commentary on **Exodus Ff - The Grain Offering**). It was a voluntary act of worship and devotion, in recognition of **God's** goodness and **His** provisions. The **sin offerings**, however, were for the temporary forgiveness, or covering, of **sins**. **They** could not take away a person's **sin** nature, but were made for the covering of particular sins (see the commentary on **Exodus Fb - The Five Offerings of the Tabernacle: Christ, Our Sacrificial Offering**). Consequently, those **sacrifices** had to be continually repeated . . . day after day, and year after year. Every **priest** needed to function in some type of priestly order: Moses' brother functioned in the Order of **Aaron**, and **Yeshua** functioned in the Order of Melchizedek. Therefore, **Messiah** was a superior **High Priest** (see **Bl - Yeshua the Melchizedek Priest**) to **Aaron**, and ministered within a superior covenant (see **Bn - The Superiority of the New Covenant**).

The High Priest Must Be Compassionate and Sympathetic: He can deal gently (Greek: *metriopatheo*, meaning *to treat with compassion, with mildness or moderation, to be*

tender in the judgment of another's errors) **with the ignorant and with those who go astray, since he too is subject to weakness (5:2 CJB)**. Thirdly, because **the high priest** is taken from among **men**, **he** is able to have *compassion* on **his** fellow-sinners, since **he himself** is a sinner. This is the advantage of **his** humanity. *Metriopatheo*, then, speaks of a state of feeling toward the ignorant and the sinful that is neither too severe nor too tolerant. **The high priest** must be careful lest **he** become irritated at sin and ignorance. But **he** must also be careful not to become weakly indulgent.

Also, because of this weakness, he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for those of the people (5:3 CJB). The Greek word **weakness**, *astheneia*, means *to be lying around*, and implies *moral weakness* that makes **man** capable of sinning. In other words, having a totally deprived nature. **Offering sacrifices** was the main work of **the priest**. But since **he himself** had a totally deprived nature, **he** had to make sacrifices **for himself as well as for the people**. This was one disadvantage with the human **priest** on earth. On the one hand, **he** could be compassionate because **he** realized that **he himself** had the disease of **sin**, but on the other hand, **he** first had to sacrifice for **his own sin**. **He** had to obtain purity. So while **the** earthly Levitical **priest** had a **sin** nature and had to obtain purity, **the** Heavenly **High Priest** had no **sin** and, therefore, always had purity.

The High Priest Must Be Appointed by God: And no one takes this honor upon himself, rather, he is called by God (Exodus 28; Numbers 16:1-40; First Samuel 16:1-3), just as Aaron was (5:4 CJB). And last, a true **priest** could not just be any **man**. **He** had to be appointed by **God** because **he** had to represent man to **God**. When the priesthood was first established, **Aaron** was singled out by **YHVH** in **Exodus 16:33** to be a **priest**. **He** was officially called into the priesthood in **Exodus 28:1** when **God** said: **Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve Me as priests. He** was later reconfirmed in that office (**Numbers 17:8**). **Ha'Shem** rejected anyone who tried to be a priest without **God's** appointment. For example, **Korah** led a rebellion against **Aaron**. **The LORD** killed **him** by having the earth swallow **him** up (**Numbers 16:31-35**). King **Sha'ul's** attempt to take the role of a **priest** and perform **his** own sacrifice, because **he** would not wait for **Samuel** to arrive, led to **God's** rejection of **Sha'ul** as king and to the anointing of **David (First Samuel 13:8-14)**. When King **Uzziah** tried to burn the incense, which **he** had no right to burn because **he** was not a **priest**, **YHVH** struck **him** with leprosy (**2 Chronicles 26:16-23**). Consequently, negatively, no **man takes this honor upon himself**, but positively, **God** must call a **priest**, and the example the writer gives is, **just as Aaron was.**¹³⁰