



# Knowing what the Hebrews knew

Old Testament background for Hebrews 4:14-5:10



## The role of Jewish high priest

There's no neat summary of the role of Jewish high priest in the Old Testament, but here are some key points to give you the main ideas (you could read some of the passages to give you more detail):

- The first high priest was Aaron, Moses' brother (Exodus 28:1-3).
- People would come to the high priest to find out God's will (eg Exodus 28:29-30; Numbers 27:18-21).
- The high priest could perform normal priestly duties (eg offerings, teaching, sacrifices).
- Probably the most important duty of the high priest was the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). *More on this in Hebrews 9-10.*



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## Royal psalms

The British national anthem is "God Save the Queen" (or, when there is a male monarch, "God Save the King"). This song applies to the reigning monarch, whoever that may be. In a similar way, there are a large number of psalms that apply to the king of Israel, whoever that may be at any time (see the "Hoping for a king" section on the *Faith that He brews 2* hand-out).

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the author of Hebrews quotes some of these psalms and applies them to Jesus, who is the ultimate king.



Read Psalm 2. *Verse 7b is quoted in Hebrews 5:5. (Note that this verse was also quoted in Hebrews 1:5.)*

## A mysterious priest

Melchizedek is a man who appears briefly in the story of Abraham. He is described as a "king of Salem and a priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18). The author of Hebrews discusses Melchizedek in much more depth in chapter 7, so you could wait until that chapter to investigate Melchizedek more deeply.

But if you're keen to dig into this now:



Read Genesis 14:1-24 for the story of how Abraham (called Abram at the time) recovered his captured relatives and goods and then had two contrasting meetings: one with Melchizedek and one with the king of Sodom. *Jesus is described as a priest in the order of Melchizedek in Hebrews 5:6 and 5:10.*



Read Psalm 110, which is another royal psalm. In verse 4, the LORD declares the king to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. *Verse 4b is quoted in Hebrews 5:6 as applying to Christ. (Note that verse 1 was quoted in Hebrews 1:13.)*



# Engaging with the message

Questions & answers for Hebrews 4:14-5:10



## Hot spots

- 1) What's alive for you in this passage? (Things that stand out, "aha" moments, questions etc)



## Digging into the passage

- 2) In what ways does the author show Jesus to be a greater high priest than Aaron?
- 3) What are the two instructions given to the Hebrews in 4:14-16?
- 4) According to 5:7-9, what was achieved through Jesus' suffering?



## Connecting life and faith

- 5) What are some of the temptations/testing situations that you face on a regular basis?
- 6) From what you know of Jesus, when might He possibly have encountered the same sort of temptations/tests?
- 7) Practically speaking, what does it mean for you to "come boldly to the throne of our gracious God" (4:16)?
- 8) In what situation(s) do you need God's grace the most (4:16)?