

• An important digression

The letter to the Hebrews begins a lengthy digression in Hebrews 5:11, a digression that lasts all the way to 6:20. It is only **structurally** a digression. I do not mean that it is unimportant! Our author wants to speak of Jesus' work as a heavenly high priest. He has already urged us to live upon Jesus as our high priest<sup>□1</sup>. But he wants to go into the subject in much greater detail. He has explained how Jesus fulfils the **Levitical** priesthood<sup>□2</sup> and so he was able to minister as a high priest at a higher level<sup>□3</sup> as **the kind of priest that Melchizedek was**.

□1 4:14-16  
□2 5:1-7  
□3 5:8-10

• He asks his readers the question – are they ready for “strong meat” he wants to give?

But at this point our writer has a question. Are they ready for what he wants to tell them? Are they able to take in the teaching about Jesus as the kind of priest that Melchizedek was? So the writer digresses to talk about the problem he has. Are they ready for ‘strong meat’<sup>□1</sup>? He proposes to move on in his teaching<sup>□2</sup>. If God permits they will be given grace to follow and live out what he has to say<sup>□3</sup>. But there is a danger that God might swear in his anger against rebellious Christians and if that happens it will be impossible to help them<sup>□4</sup>. Yet our writer is convinced that his friends have not ‘fallen’ to such a pathetic condition<sup>□5</sup>. They show signs of having zeal in God’s kingdom<sup>□6</sup> and there is hope that they will make speedy progress in faith. He wants them to aim at ‘certainty of hope’ – the full obtaining of the promises of God<sup>□7</sup>. **The important thing is for them to understand the nature of God’s oath, and the best way to do that is to consider Abraham.** If they understand the oath to Abraham they will understand the oath to Melchizedek, and they will understand the oath that God offers to give to the Hebrews themselves.

□1 5:11-14  
□2 6:1-2  
□3 6:3  
□4 6:4-8  
□5 6:9  
□6 6:10  
□7 6:11-12

• The important thing is for them to understand the nature of God’s oath, and the best way to do that is to consider Abraham

God gives both promises and oaths. The highest blessing of this life comes when God swears to bless us. When God does that we ‘obtain the promises’. Abraham persisted in faith for many years until he obtained the promises<sup>□1</sup>. God’s oath to Abraham gives us strong encouragement<sup>□2</sup>. It enables us to have hope that we too will inherit the promises. If Jesus is in the courts of heaven because of God’s oath to Abraham, then he is able to be a forerunner for us so that we too might experience God’s oath of blessing. For Jesus is able to minister to us as a high priest so that we might follow Abraham’s example and get to the point where God gives an oath to us<sup>□3</sup>.

□1 6:13-15  
□2 6:16-18  
□3 6:19-20

Eventually our writer returns to the point where he turned aside. Jesus was ‘designated by God a high priest, the kind of priest that Melchizedek was’, says Hebrews 5:10. Jesus became ‘a high priest for ever, the kind of high priest that Melchizedek was’, says Hebrews 6:20. Hebrews 6:20 picks up from Hebrews 5:10.

Let us make a start on the section and consider Hebrews 5:11 in more detail. It is the point where the lengthy digression begins. He tells them of (i) his hope of teaching them<sup>□1</sup>, (ii) where they stand at the moment<sup>□2</sup>, (iii) what he hopes for them<sup>□3</sup>, and (iv) what he wants to do<sup>□4</sup>.

□1 5:11a  
□2 5:11b-12  
□3 5:13-14  
□4 6:1-2

The digression begins

1. What they ought to be

- Have slipped into a dull, depressed condition
- Not really serving God with confidence

2. Where they stand at the moment

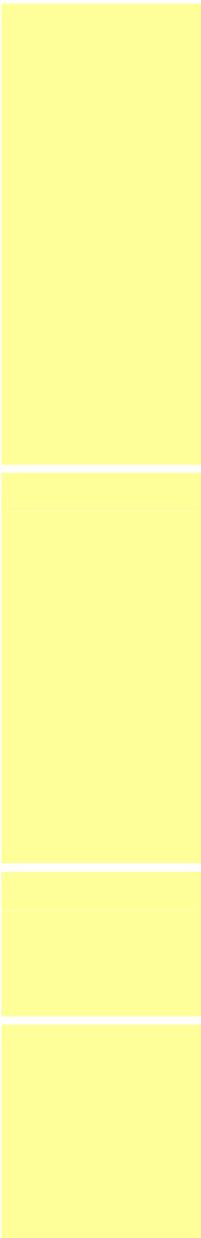
- Still very uncertain about the basics of the Christian gospel
- Still on a baby Christian -diet
- Not yet learned to live out the godly life

**1. What they ought to be.** He says to them: <sup>11</sup>*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.* They are in a depressed condition. Their struggles have been very great. They have suffered a great deal. Because they are fairly young Christians they have slipped into a dull, depressed condition, and are not really serving God with the confidence that they ought to have. Indeed they are in danger of becoming rebellious, although it has not happened yet! They should have made much more progress. Our writer says: <sup>12</sup>*For though after all this time you ought to be teachers...* Although not every Christian has the **gift** of teaching, every Christian ought to be able to teach others at least something of the Christian gospel. Young Christians should be helped by older Christians.

**2. Where they stand at the moment.** He says: *For though after all this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the very first principles of the oracles of God. You have come to be in need of milk not solid food.* It seems these Hebrew Christians were still very uncertain about the basics of the Christian gospel. When people suggested to them that perhaps Jesus was only an angel they were ready to listen. They went on and on discussing things that should have been settled in their minds a long time ago. Is Jesus the Messiah? Is he the fulfilment of the Old Testament? These questions ought to have been settled a long time ago in their lives.

They were still on the milk-stage of their spiritual diet like baby-Christians. The basic facts of the gospel and of spiritual conversion are just milk to help people be 'born again'. But we are intended to grow up!

They had not got to the point where they were living out the life of godliness and faith. <sup>13</sup>*For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is still a child.* Baby Christians have not yet learned to live out the godly life – the 'word of righteousness' – in a practical manner by depending on Jesus our Melchizedek. So what are we? Babies? Or adults?



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