

***CHRIST,
SUPERIOR
TO AARON
Hebrews 4:14—5:14***

By

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See also Hebrews 4:14-5:14 Exegesis & Exposition

Introduction

- Building upon Christ's superiority to the prophets, the angels, Moses and Joshua, the writer of Hebrews shows that Jesus is our unexcelled high priest
- The background leading to a discussion of Christ's superior priesthood might be summarized as a development of increasing significance:
 - The prophets delivered God's Word to the Israelites

Introduction

- God gave the prophets his message through the agency of angels (1:14; 2:2)
- Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt
- Joshua led God's people into the promised land of Canaan
 - This was possible because the Israelites had a high priest serving as a mediator
- Christ is compared to Aaron, who did not take the honor of high priesthood for himself, but who was called to that position by God

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

4:14—“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession”

- Notice the previous description: “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (3:1)
- Not just high priest but “great High Priest”
 - “Great” means “splendid, magnificent, extraordinary, wonderful, powerful”

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- Jesus' greatness as high priest is due to his access to God in passing through the heavens, not through a physical veil
 - Ascended into the actual presence of God
 - Christ's passing through the heavens alludes to the high priest going through the courts of the temple into the Holy of Holies

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- The term “heavens” is used in a broad, general sense
 - Trying to calculate the number of “heavens” through which Jesus passed (whether three or seven of them) is not the writer’s point
 - The frequency in the NT and the LXX of the plural “heavens” reflects the Hebrew word that is used in the OT, which is always plural

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- Jesus' transcendence is what is stressed
 - He “has become higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26)
- Christ's passing through the heavens is inseparably linked to his ascension
 - Jesus literally “passed through the heavens” when he ascended
 - He “ascended far above all the heavens” (Eph. 4:10)

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- David prophesied Christ's ascension:
Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the king of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory (Ps. 24:7-10)

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- As the Lord “passed through the heavens,” the messengers of God said to the entranced disciples, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11)
 - (The disciples had seen Jesus do many things, but they had never seen him fly)

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- As a result of having such a great high priest, we are to “hold fast our confession”
 - The Greek word translated “hold fast” means “to hold to, adhere to”
 - After strongly urging Christians to cling tenaciously to Christ (3:6, 14), the writer again urges greater dedication to Jesus

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- The translators have supplied the word “our” (in “our confession”)
 - In the Greek text, the definite article (“the”) immediately precedes “confession,” so that we are to “hold fast the confession”
 - Similarly, Paul told Timothy he “confessed the good confession” (1 Tim. 6:12)
- “Jesus the Son of God” with “the confession” would remind them what they had confessed and the life-long commitment they had made

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

4:15—“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”

- The word “sympathize” means “to suffer with’ another person, thus to sympathize with him to the extent of entering into his experience and feeling his heartache yourself” (Wuest)
- “Weakness” is “the frailty to which all human flesh is heir” (Bauer)

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- “Weakness” is not “sin,” otherwise Jesus would not have been “without sin” since “weakness” is something inherent in all human flesh
- “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God” (2 Cor. 13:4)
- Jesus became as vulnerable as we are, and as a result, he experienced “our weaknesses”

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- The “weaknesses” with which we struggle and with which Christ sympathizes is not our yielding to sin but our struggling with temptation
- Jesus can identify fully with our weaknesses and struggles because he was tempted just as we are, in every way, “yet without sin”
 - Jesus lived without sinning, which does not mean “without the ability to sin” but “without having in fact sinned”

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (2:18)
- Since Jesus was tempted and overcame every temptation, he is willing and able to help us overcome all our temptations

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

4:16—“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”

- Since Jesus is our sinless high priest and has compassion for us, we should approach God’s gracious throne with confidence
- The “throne of grace” is God’s throne, where Jesus, as high priest, sits at God’s right hand

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- “The throne of grace” is an allusion to the mercy seat in the earthly sanctuary
 - “It was before the earthly mercy-seat that the work of propitiation was completed in token on the day of atonement and the grace of God extended to His people; the presence of the Christians’ high priest on the heavenly throne of grace bespeaks a work of propitiation completed not in token but in fact, and the constant availability of divine aid in all their need” (Bruce)

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- When we go to the heavenly Father through Christ, God is approachable
 - Notice an interesting contrast of the approachability of God versus approaching an earthly king (Neh. 2:1-4)
 - God will provide us mercy and grace every time we ask
 - 1 Jn. 5:14-15

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- The writer of Hebrews prescribes prayer as a preventative measure so that we do not sin
 - While the context clearly seems to indicate a preventative measure against sin, the possibility remains that the writer may be making a general statement that would also include the extension of God's forgiveness after sin has been committed, especially since the high priest functioned to plead with God for the people's forgiveness

Our Superior, Sympathetic and Sinless High Priest

4:14-16

- We should go to God in prayer asking for help during times of temptation
 - John similarly stresses that the purpose of his writing is so that we will not sin; however, if we do, “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1)

The Qualifications of the High Priest

5:1-4

5:1—“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins”

- Every high priest was taken from among men, not from among angels who would not be able to identify fully with humans
- To be high priest, required: becoming flesh to live among us (Jn. 1:14), “coming in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7) and “taken from among men”

The Qualifications of the High Priest 5:1-4

- “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17)
- The sacrifices offered by the high priest were to make atonement for sin
 - The goal of every offering and every bloody sacrifice he made was focused on reinstating and securing for the people a condition of acceptance with God

The Qualifications of the High Priest

5:1-4

- Jesus completed the mission that every previous high priest had given himself to the task of accomplishing; “for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:27)

5:2-3—“He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins”

The Qualifications of the High Priest

5:1-4

- The Greek word translated “compassion” is defined as “to be gentle” (Perschbacher)
 - It is not easy to translate—it is halfway between apathy and anger
 - God’s faithful high priest was not indifferent to sin, nor was he harsh
 - He could take the position only because he shared in the same trial of temptation as the sinners for whom he offered sacrifices

The Qualifications of the High Priest

5:1-4

- The high priest was fully human, was tempted and even committed sin himself
 - “For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness” (Heb. 7:28)
 - Again, “weakness” is not synonymous with “sin”
 - It refers to the fact that the high priest was not invincible but was also susceptible to sin
- He offered sacrifices “first for his own sins and then for the people’s” (Heb. 7:27)

The Qualifications of the High Priest

5:1-4

- Even Aaron had to make atonement for himself and for the people (Lev. 9:7)
- Therefore, the high priest was able to be compassionate toward God's people

5:4—“And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was”

- No human could appoint himself to offer sacrifices
- One of the requirements to be a high priest was that he must be “called by God”

The Qualifications of the High Priest

5:1-4

- The high priests were appointed by God, “just as Aaron was” (Ex. 28:1)
- Rienecker says, “The author may have had in mind the leading sacerdotal families of Jerusalem in his day, who were not descendants of Aaron, but had sought for themselves the high priestly office and been elevated to it by Herod the Great. Such men, though approved by the state, were not approved by God” (*A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 678)

The Qualifications of the High Priest 5:1-4

- The Scriptures record God’s punishment that fell on those who took upon themselves the honor of performing the duties of the high priest (or of the priests), such as in the following cases:
 - Korah (Numbers 16)
 - Saul (1 Sam. 13:8ff)
 - Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16ff)
- God will maintain his justice in “dethroning” those who exalt themselves (2 Thess. 2:3-12; 1 Pet. 5:5)

The Qualifications of the High Priest

5:1-4

- God now calls through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14)
 - God calls every soul who is obedient to the gospel “to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1 Pet. 5:10)
 - Paul says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28)
 - Those who do not obey the gospel will “be punished with everlasting destruction . . .” (2 Thess. 1:8-9)
 - Therefore, we learn the importance of being called by God, both then and now

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest

5:5-11

5:5—“So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’”

- Jesus says, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God” (Jn. 8:54)
- Not even Jesus was able to become a self-appointed high priest
 - God appointed him; Jesus was called God’s Son by sovereign, divine right

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Christ meets all the qualifications necessary to becoming high priest
 - He is qualified on the basis of his identification with humanity (vv. 1-3) and his divine appointment (v. 4)
 - Paul quotes the psalmist, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You” (Ps. 2:7), stating that Jesus was “begotten” through the resurrection (Acts 13:33)

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

5:6—“As He also says in another place: ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’”

- The writer of Hebrews quotes God’s reference to Christ’s connection with Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4)
 - Later (7:1-4), our author will refer to Melchizedek’s brief mention in the Scriptures (Gen. 14:18-20)
 - Background—Gen. 14:1-20

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Duerksen says, “Everything the writer says initially leads up to his quotation of Psalm 110:4 as evidence for the priestly position of Christ”
- Bauer suggests that “according to the order of” may be translated as “according to the nature of,” which is equivalent to “just like Melchizedek” and refers to “the entirely different nature of Melchizedek’s priesthood as compared with that of Aaron” (*Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*)

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- At this point the writer gives no additional explanation, but he will soon return to the reference he made to Melchizedek (v. 10)

5:7—“who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear”

- The Lord experienced all the sensations and feelings inherent in becoming human

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Jesus became “acquainted with grief” (Is. 53:4), and he knew the full extent of undeserved, inescapable suffering
- In connection with Jesus’ prayers and supplications, the writer says he “offered” them
 - The deliberate use of the technical term for offering sacrifice draws a parallel with the Levitical high priest’s offering of “gifts and sacrifices” (v. 1)

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Jesus sacrificially “offered up prayers and supplications”
 - “Vehement cries and tears” vividly describe his sacrifice
 - The word translated “vehement” means “strong, mighty, robust” (Perschbacher)
 - Jesus’ fervent prayers were accompanied with outcries, wailing, and tears

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Moffatt says, “Later Rabbinic piety laid stress on tears,” with the three kinds of prayers being entreaty, crying, and tears
 - He further states, “Entreaty is offered in a quiet voice, crying with a raised voice, but tears are higher than all”
- Jesus engaged intensely in praying and pleading “to Him who was able to save Him from death”
 - We see Jesus in Gethsemane praying fervently and urgently requesting deliverance from death

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest

5:5-11

- He prayed, begging the God who could have rescued him, tearfully pleading with him to do so
- Graphically, Jesus prayed unembarrassed shouts and outcries along with tears of agony
- In this context, God, who has accurately preserved the accounts of his Son's harrowing ordeal, undeniably takes our minds to the Garden of Gethsemane where the shadow of the cross loomed ever nearer

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest

5:5-11

- We are given a glimpse of Jesus' agony through the words of the Lord himself, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Mt. 26:38)
- Jesus prayed, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Mt. 26:39)
- Our Lord pleaded with the Father that he would not have to drink the cup of anguish, sorrow, suffering and death—and ultimately yielded to the Father's will and drank the bitter cup in its entirety

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Just as God told Hezekiah, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears” (Is. 38:5), so the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus “was heard because of His godly fear”
 - “Godly fear” does not refer to “fear of death,” but rather to our Lord’s submission and devotion to God’s will
 - It indicates cautious and alert reverence in every situation

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Being heard by God did not result in the granting of Jesus' request for deliverance
 - After all, Jesus prayed for the Father's will to be done, and that part of Christ's request was accomplished
 - God heard his Son's plaintive cries and saw his every tear
 - Just as in answering our prayers, God showed no partiality to his own Son

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- The God of Heaven does not always answer exactly as the petitioner wishes
- No matter what the cost, the will of Heaven could not be thwarted
- Jesus struggled arduously in committing himself entirely to fulfilling his mission
 - His struggle was an inevitable part of his humanity and of the “weaknesses” with which he is able to sympathize (Heb. 4:15)

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- In order to pay the ultimate price, the bitter battle was essential to the resignation of Christ's will to the Father's will
- His “godly fear” prevailed and he surrendered all
- 5:8—“though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered”
- Jesus “learned obedience” through suffering, and his suffering yielded obedience to God
 - Therefore Jesus learned obedience by actually obeying

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- God established the boundaries of obedience, even for his own Son
- From the accounts of the gospel, we see the obedient, perfect life of our Savior
 - At the tender age of twelve, our Lord clearly stated his mission, “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Lk. 2:49)
 - Jesus’ sustenance was in doing the Father’s will: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (Jn. 4:35)

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest

5:5-11

- Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (Jn. 6:38)
- Jesus stated, “I always do those things that please Him” (Jn. 8:29)
- The faithfulness of our Savior was absolute
 - He was “obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8)

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest

5:5-11

- So that we might sing redemption's sweet song, the Son of God suffered for our sins
 - He paid the highest price that has ever been paid—
“You were bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:20)
- Jesus placed the greatest value on salvation
 - Two songs beautifully express our Savior's love:
“Out of the Ivory Palaces, into a world of woe; only
His great eternal love made my Savior go” and “In
loving kindness Jesus came, my soul in mercy to
reclaim; and from the depths of sin and shame,
through grace He lifted me”

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- John introduced Jesus as, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29)
- Peter says, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19)
 - Truly, “Jesus paid it all”

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- The writer of Hebrews says, “For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer” (8:3)
- Jesus offered himself as the atoning sacrifice for sin (Heb. 7:27; 9:26, 28), and then he became our perfect high priest

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

5:9—“And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”

- Previously, the writer referred to Jesus as “the captain of their salvation” who was made “perfect through sufferings” (2:10)
- “Having been perfected” means “advance a person to final completeness of character” (Perschbacher)
 - Jesus’ perfection involved maintaining his integrity throughout every kind of assault on his character, which resulted in firmly establishing his integrity

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- In discussing the perfection of Christ, the writer says, “For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever” (7:28)
- The word “author” means “the cause, source” (Bauer)
 - As a result of his perfection, Jesus became the only source of eternal salvation
 - “But Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation” (Is. 45:17)

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- The salvation that Jesus has secured is eternal, like:
 - the “eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12)
 - the “eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15)
 - the “everlasting/eternal covenant” (Heb. 13:20)
- The eternal nature of the salvation that Jesus provides is based on his sacrifice, which has been accomplished once for all, is never to be repeated and is permanently valid

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost” (Lk. 19:10)
- “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15)
- “For in this way God loved the world that he gave his Son, the unique one, that everyone believing in him might not be lost but might have everlasting life. For God did not send the Son into the world that he might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn. 3:16-17, translation mine)

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10)
- “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6)
- Faithful followers of Christ are “in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Tit. 1:2)
- Jesus accomplished his mission of making salvation possible, and in doing so he became the source of eternal salvation “to all who obey Him”

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven’” (Mt. 7:21)

5:10-11—“called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek,’ of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing”

- Jesus was “called by God as High Priest,” and as a result, he is divinely qualified to be our high priest
- The writer now briefly returns to discussing Melchizedek

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- In making a connection between Jesus as the “author of eternal salvation” and being “according to the order of Melchizedek,” we will learn later that Jesus has arisen “in the likeness of Melchizedek” as our high priest “according to the power of an endless life” (7:15-16)
- The writer quickly interrupts his discussion as he considers the Hebrews’ deficiency in biblical knowledge
 - He says, “of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain”

The Qualifications of Christ as High Priest 5:5-11

- Keener states, “Many Greek writers used ‘much to say’ to indicate how important their topic was”
- Although the information the writer of Hebrews wishes to communicate is vitally important to his discussion, he must first rebuke them since they have “become dull of hearing”
 - The word translated “dull” described the numbed limbs of a sick lion, and means “slow, sluggish” (*A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*)
 - The Hebrews had become lazy and negligent in “hearing” God’s Word

The Failure to Qualify as Teachers

5:12-14

5:12—“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food”

- Their “hearing” problem resulted in a “teaching” problem
- While the high priests had to meet proper qualifications, and Christ had fully qualified to be the perfect high priest, the Hebrews had failed in maturing to become teachers of God’s Word
 - Now, instead of being able to teach others, they needed to be taught themselves

The Failure to Qualify as Teachers

5:12-14

- The statement that someone needs to teach them again “the first principles” reveals the writer’s sharpness
 - The Greek expression is equivalent to our “ABCs”
 - They need to start all over and go back to the very beginning of the most basic fundamentals of the faith
 - They are in need of “milk” rather than “solid food”
 - Instead of feasting on the “solid food” or “meat” (a reference to the teaching concerning Christ’s priesthood in connection with Melchizedek), they need “the milk” of elementary biblical principles

The Failure to Qualify as Teachers

5:12-14

5:13-14—“For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”

- The word “unskilled” means “inexperienced, unskillful, ignorant” (Perschbacher)
- The writer first tells them they need “milk”
- Next, he says they are inexperienced

The Failure to Qualify as Teachers

5:12-14

- He then uses the word “infant” to refer to their state of spiritual immaturity
- The writer, in essence, portrays the Hebrew Christians as infants whose growth has been stunted for such a long time that by now they should be full-grown adults
 - Only those who have spiritually matured can feast upon the solid food or “meat” of the Scriptures
 - The maturation process involves persistence in sharpening our ability to judge between right and wrong, coupled with the determination to do what is right

The Failure to Qualify as Teachers

5:12-14

- Popkes says, “Spiritual growth is not an automatic process working by itself; rather, it means growing in understanding, a renewal of our minds, ‘learning to distinguish good from evil’ and ‘discerning the will of God’ (Heb. 5:14; Rom. 12:2)”
 - Eph. 5:17

Conclusion & Summary

- Jesus is our superior, sympathetic and sinless high priest
- He can identify with our weaknesses because he was tempted just as we are; yet he did not sin
- Through him we have confidence to approach God's gracious throne with our requests, knowing that he will provide the help we need
- Every earthly high priest had to meet God's qualifications, which included coming from "among men" and being called by God

Conclusion & Summary

- Jesus, too, was human, and during his days on Earth he went through much suffering
- He proved his obedience and was perfected, becoming the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him
- God called Jesus as high priest “according to the order of Melchizedek”
- Before telling the Hebrews more, a stern rebuke was in order
- They needed to mature past being spiritual infants

Memory Verse Review

- 1 Tim. 3:14-15—“These things...”
- 2 Tim. 2:15—“Do your best...”
- Titus 2:11-12—“For the grace...”
- Philem. 20—“Yes, brother...”
- Heb. 3:12—“Beware...”