

The Priesthood Of All Believers

The priesthood has its origins in the Old Testament.

The priest was one who stood before God as His servant or minister.

The priest's function was that of a bridge between God and His people.

The priesthood was made of men from one tribe, that of Levi.

What was the theological significance of the Old Testament priesthood?

- a) Represented Israel's union with God.
- b) The priesthood became the mediator of the Covenant.
- c) The priests therefore acted as representatives of the people.
- d) The duties of the priests were mostly connected with the Tabernacle, temple sacrifice and worship.
- e) The priests were the teachers of the law.

Sadly God had to send prophets to correct the priests for failing to perform all these duties.

In Israel the priesthood was hereditary.

A priest was born, not made.

However able a person was to fit the position of a priest, if he was not of the house of Levi, he need not apply and if he was a gentile it was out of the question.

The priest was regarded as possessing special knowledge of God and was dispenser and interpreter of any message from God.

Luke 1:5, 11-13 [NIV] *“In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.” ... “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.”*

John the Baptist was of priestly lineage.

Matthew 1:1-2 [NIV] *“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,”*

Jesus was **not** of the Levitical priestly stock but of the tribe of Judah.

Christianity brought about a radical development in the concept of priesthood.

The transferral of the role of High Priest to Jesus.

Hebrews 3:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on **Jesus**, the apostle and **high priest** whom we confess.”*

Hebrews 4:14 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a **great high priest** who has gone through the heavens, **Jesus the Son of God**, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.”*

The life and sacrifice of Jesus is seen as the perfect fulfilment of the Old Testament priesthood.

All the Old Testament priests did was but a “*shadow*” of what Christ did in His life, death and resurrection.

Colossians 2:16-17 [NIV] *“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are **a shadow** of the things that were to come; **the reality, however, is found in Christ.**”*

All the religious rituals overseen by the Levitical priest were but shadows of the reality that was in Jesus Christ.

By fulfilling what the work of the Old Covenant priesthood foreshadowed Christ brought the Old Testament style priesthood to a definitive end in history.

Christ became the one and only mediator between God and humanity.

1 Timothy 2:5 [NIV] *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,”*

John 14:6 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”*

There is now no need of an earthly mediator.

Jesus Christ is the one and only mediator but some of the other priestly tasks have been given to all who become Christians.

1 Peter 2:5 [NIV] *“you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, **offering spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

Spiritual sacrifices!!

Revelation 5:8 [NIV] *“And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of **incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**”*

Our prayers are the sacrifice of incense.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Our whole life, body, mind and spirit should be a sacrifice we make.

1 Peter 2:9 [NIV] *“But you are a chosen people, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may **declare** the praises of him who called you out of darkness into **his wonderful light.**”*

We are to bring light to this darkened world by teaching God’s Word mostly by loving example rather than spoken words.

Revelation 12:10-11 [NIV] *“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him*

by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

We overcome the spirit of darkness [deception] by proclaiming the power of Jesus Christ’s blood to forgive sins and by our own example of loving concern for our neighbour.

Revelation 1:6 [NIV] *“... Jesus Christ who has made us to be a kingdom [family] of priests to serve His God and Father. To Him be power and glory for ever....”*

Our job is to bring the praise of people to glorify God.

We do this by helping people to know God, then praise Him for what He has done for all humanity, and finally loving God even as He first has loved us.

Revelation 5:10 [NIV] *“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”*

This job will be ongoing throughout eternity.

What is the relevance of all this for us today?

We have One Great High Priest.

Hebrews 4:14 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.”*

This function is carried out by Jesus at God’s right hand.

Romans 8:34 [NIV] *“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”*

Interceding as our mediator.

We confess our sins only to God, through Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5 [NIV] *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,”*

God absolves those who confess to him through Jesus.

1 John 1:9 [NIV] *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

1 John 2:1-2 [NIV] *“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

We are all priests.

All else that was said of the Levites’ relationship with God may be generally transferred to us individually.

We have to live a holy life, the priest cannot do it for us.

1 Peter 1:16 [NIV] *“for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

We have to worship God ourselves, the priest cannot do it for us.

Hebrews 13:15 [NIV] *“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name.”*

We do not require that the priest answer questions pertaining to God, we do it ourselves.

1 Peter 3:15 [NIV] *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,”*

We do not ask a priest to seek God’s Will and guidance, we seek it ourselves.

Ephesians 5:17 [NIV] *“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”*

The fact that we are all priests does **not** mean that there are not special functions that are largely carried out by some who are called by God for a special ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-13 [NIV] *“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.**”*

There is some overlap between the ancient priesthood and the New Testament ministry.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 [NIV] *“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.”*

Just because some are chosen by God to serve in this way as Elders or Pastors, [an Elder or Pastor is a servant to God’s people], they do **not** have a “head start” in fellowship with God because of their special calling.

Conclusion

In the worship system of ancient Israel, priests were born not made.

In the New Covenant, Jesus is the High Priest and all believers are priests because of their faith in Him.

Believers still need Jesus as a Mediator, He alone fulfils that function.

Because believers are priests, all believers can have equal intimacy with God.

“You can have as much of God as you want.” [Quote: A.W. Tozer]