

Resources:

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary. 1998

James Strong. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

Charles Ryrie. *Basic Theology*. Pg. 296-298

S. Lewis Johnson. *The offices of Christ*.

What we will learn tonight is this:

AS THE ANOINTED MESSIAH OF ISRAEL, JESUS CHRIST FULFILLED THE ANOINTED OFFICE OF A PRIEST OF GOD.

Question #1 - What is a priest?

While God uses a human prophet to interact with mankind, mankind uses a human priest to interact with God. Charles Ryrie wrote, "a prophet spoke to man from God; the priest speaks to God for men." Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote, "the priest is man's representative before God as the prophet is God's representative sent to man." And S. Lewis Johnson said, "just as the prophet takes the things of God and brings them to man, so the priest is the divinely appointed representative for man who stands before God representing man."

The best way for us to understand and define this word is to see it used in the context of the Bible, so I'd like to take you to **Hebrews 5:1-4**, and we will also look at **Hebrews 7:25**. From these two verses, we can learn much about what a priest is. A priest is chosen to do things for God on behalf of men (5:1). A priest is required to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of men (5:2-4). A priest is a man who intercedes with God on behalf of men (7:25).

A priest is a person called by God to do certain acts for God on behalf of other men and to speak to God on behalf of other men.

Question #2 - What do priests do?

It appears that there are 3 primary functions of a priest.

(Function #1) Priests offer sacrifices to God on behalf of other men. **Leviticus 9:7-8**

This function can be also described by the word atonement. In the Old Testament economy, we see the consistent theme of sacrifices being offered to God. Animal and food sacrifices were made to God by the people in the Old Testament.

As the Law Age was brought in through the Nation of Israel in Exodus 19, God established official order and ceremony requirements for sacrifices that needed to be made to God in order for sinful man to be at peace with Almighty God. While the patriarch of a family acted as a priest

of the family during the days before the Law of Moses (Gen. 8:20; Job 1:15), after the Law of Moses, the priests were limited to being descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother (Exodus 28:1).

(Function #2) Priests stand in the presence of God for other men. **Leviticus 16:2**

This function can also be described by the term mediation. During the Law Age economy of the Old Testament, God ordered Israel to have a place of worship. This place was originally a tent and was called the tabernacle until Solomon built a more permanent structure, the temple. In this place of worship, there was a place called the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was a small room in the tabernacle or temple where God's presence with man dwelled. This is different than today. Today, God's presence is in and with every believer, but in the Law Age, God's presence was found in the room called the Holy of Holies. Once a year, on the day of Atonement, the high priest of Israel was permitted to enter that room when the cloud of the presence of God was there. The high priest had entrance requirements that needed to be met, then he would enter into the Holy of Holies and offered a blood sacrifice (Hebrews 9:7).

Down through the ages, from Aaron on, the high priest was permitted to go into the presence of God and intercede with God on behalf of other people.

(Function #3) Priests pray for blessing on people of God. **Leviticus 9:22-23; Numbers 6:22-27**

This function can also be described as intercession. When the priests would do what was necessary for sinful people to restore fellowship with God through all the requirements of sacrifice, they were able to pray for God to bless the people. This, in some way, is a pronouncement of God's blessing as well as a prayer for blessing.

To summarize the three functions of a priest, we could word it this way. A priest was a qualified and chosen person who was permitted into the Holy presence of God to act as a middle man between man and God. He would offer sacrifices to God for man and He would offer prayers to God for man.

Question #3 - Is Jesus a priest?

Our answer to that question is yes, and I'll give you 4 defenses for that answer.

(Defense #1) The Bible directly calls Jesus a priest. **Hebrews 3:1; 4:14; 6:20**

If the Bible directly calls Jesus a priest, then we really have no need to argue with that, but we will go ahead and look at just how Jesus fulfilled the office of a priest.

(Defense #2) Jesus made a sacrifice to God on behalf of man.

He did this when He Himself went to the cross and offered up Himself to God as a sacrifice for the offer of forgiveness of sins to all sinners. **Hebrews 7:27**

(Defense #3) Jesus went into the presence of God on behalf of man.

The symbolism in the Old Testament of the high priest of Israel going into the Holy of Holies with blood to be in the presence of God and offering a sacrifice of blood to God on behalf of sinner ultimately pointed to the day when Jesus would enter into the presence of God in Heaven offering His own life and blood as the sacrifice for sinners. This is spoken of in **Hebrews 9:11-14**

(Defense #4) Jesus speaks with God on behalf of men and blesses the people of God.

Through the accepted sacrificial work on the cross that Jesus did for man, He now works to intercede with God on behalf of men, and through Him and His work, the people of God are blessed. Jesus' intercessory work is described in **Hebrews 7:25**. Jesus' work as a priest is also what offers people of the entire world to be blessed by God through Jesus. That is spoken of in **Ephesians 1:3**.

Question #5 - Why is it important that Jesus be a priest?

I'll give you 3 reasons why it is important that Jesus is a priest.

(Reason #1) The Old Testament predicted a Priest would come after the order of Melchizedek.

This is found in **Psalms 110:4**. There is also a prediction of the Old Testament that indicated that the Messiah would be a priest. That is found in **Zechariah 6:12-13**. When we read of a person who's name is the Branch, we are reading of a Messianic figure.

If Jesus was to be the Messiah, according to Zechariah, He needed to be a priest that would sit on a throne and be a king. He needed to be a king priest. And if Jesus was going to be a priest, He needed to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek and not after the line of Aaron.

Jesus needed to be a priest king in order to meet the prophetic standard of the Messiah. The problem for the nation of Israel is that that seemed impossible. The kingly line was from the tribe of Judah and needed to be a descendant of David. The priestly line was from the tribe of Levi and needed to be a descendant of Aaron. A levitical priest could not be in the Davidic line of the kings. This posed a problem, but the solution to the problem is that the Messiah would be a priest, but not as a descendant of Aaron. He would be an eternal priest, typified by the Biblical description of a former priest king named Melchizedek.

Melchizedek appears on the pages of Scripture in **Genesis 14:17-19**. The book of Genesis gives no background information about this man and gives no description of what happened to him. All

we learn is that he was a priest of God Most High, he brought out bread and wine, he was greater than Abraham because he blessed Abraham, and Abraham acknowledged his rank because Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils. The only other time we learn about Melchizedek is in the New Testament book of Hebrews. In **Hebrews 7:1-3**, we have the New Testament's commentary on what was said of him in Genesis. What we learn is that this Melchizedek was a priest because the Word of God declared him a priest, and the pages of Scripture almost describe him as having an eternal and indestructible life. There is no record of his birth, his parents, his genealogy, or his death. The writer of Hebrews connects Jesus with Melchizedek, not in the sense that Jesus was like Melchizedek, but more so that Melchizedek is like Jesus. Melchizedek typified Jesus, and Jesus fulfilled that type. Because of Psalm 110:4, there needed to be a priest arise with a description like Melchizedek. Jesus is that priest, not because he was born to Aaron like other priests, but because Jesus truly has an eternal and indestructible life, and the Word of God declares Him a priest. Jesus is from everlasting (Micah 5:3). He has no beginning (John 8:58; Revelation 1:17). He has no ending (Revelation 1:17). He was not born to heavenly parents (Colossians 1:16-17). He is eternal (John 1:1). And through His resurrection, He has proven that He is without end or beginning, and that He lives continually forever (Romans 1:4; Hebrews 7:24). Melchizedek, being a great priest, pictured Jesus being the greatest priest. Jesus was declared a priest by the Word of God, just like Melchizedek was declared a priest by the Word of God. Jesus, being a priest, is greater than Aaron being a priest, just like Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. Jesus' power of endless life declares Him a priest, just like Melchizedek is written in Scripture as though he has an endless life.

(Reason #2) All the Old Testament sacrifices ultimately pointed to the day when Jesus, The High Priest, would make His sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. **Hebrews 10:1-14**.

Every single sacrifice of the Old Testament was simply a picture of the sacrifice that Jesus would make. Jesus needed to be a priest so that He could make and He could be the final sacrifice to end all sacrifices. He went into the heavenly temple of God to make the sacrifice of Himself before God (Hebrews 9:24). He did that on our behalf so that we might be righteous as God in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

(Reason #3) Jesus needed to be a priest to be our connection with God. 1 Timothy 2:5

Jesus is the mediator between God and sinful man. Jesus is the person who became a human (John 1:14). He is the only perfect human (2 Corinthians 5:21), and through Jesus, we have access to God the Father (John 14:6). Apart from Jesus, we have no access to God, but through Jesus, we have direct access to God (Hebrews 4:15-16).

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Extra Reading:

An English dictionary will tell you that a priest is a person having authority to perform the sacred rites of religion; especially: a member of the Anglican, Eastern, or Roman Catholics clergy ranking below a bishop and above a deacon. My Webster's dictionary also notes that the English word *priest* is derived from the Greek word *presbyteros* (pres-boo'-ter-os), and the Latin word *presbyter*. In both Late Latin and Koine Greek, the definition refers to someone who is elderly or older in age, and it implies that time and experience has made that person wise.

New Testament is written in Greek, and when you look at the Greek word *presbyteros*, you find that it never once is translated into English as the word *priest*. It is translated into English (KJV) in four ways - elder (64x), old man (1x), eldest (1x), elder woman (1x).

In our English Bibles, we have three words relating to a priest - priest (74 verses KJV), priests (83 verses KJV), and priesthood (7 verses KJV).

When the English words *priest*, *priests*, or *priesthood* is found in our New Testaments, they are translated from 3 Greek words - *hierous* (priest/priests), *hierateuma* (priesthood), and *archiereus* (priest/priests).

According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon, the word *hierous* has the Biblical meaning of a person who offers sacrifices and is busy with sacred religious rites and rituals, the word *hierateuma* is a word that refers to a group or body of priests, and the word *archiereus* refers to the chief of priests, the high priest who is honored above other priests.