

The High Priest

Many Old Testament narratives from the life of the people of Israel are allegorical. They open the New Testament and above all Christ and His kingdom. Two Old Testament priesthoods are allegorical and metaphorical pictures of the high priestly duties of God's Son. The better known of these is the priesthood associated with the tribe of Levi. At the same time the priesthood of Aaron is also mentioned. Aaron too belonged to the family of Levi. Less well-known, but more significant, as a pattern of the high priesthood of Christ is the priesthood of Melchizedek. There are only brief mentions of it in the Old Testament. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews has written of both priesthoods of the Old Testament period and compared them to the high priestly and royal duties (Heb. Chapters 4–8).

Sacrifice for Sin

God had appointed care for the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. The office of the high priest was established in the midst of the priests. It often moved within the same family, from father to son. The family of Aaron was this kind of high priestly family. The office of the high priest was especially emphasized in the Old Testament sacrificial worship. The high priest led it. Only the high priest could enter the part of the Tabernacle that was called the Holy of Holies (or Most Holy) and he only once a year. There he was to sacrifice sin-offerings for both himself and the whole nation. In his office, the high priest was also a giver of divine prophecies and answers as well as the guardian of the law's teaching.

The High Priesthood of Melchizedek

The Levitical high priesthood portrays the high priesthood of God's Son more through its differences than through its similarities. The high priesthood of Melchizedek on the other hand is a precise picture of Christ. Melchizedek was both high priest and the king of Salem (Jerusalem). His priesthood, unlike the Levitical priesthood, was not decreed by the Law and was not hereditary. He was "priest of the most high God," "King of righteousness," and "King of peace" (Heb. 7). His birth and family are not known, and his priesthood is called eternal.

Christ—Sacrifice for Sin and High Priest

The priesthood of God's Son is a Melchizedek-like priesthood: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4). The Law established the priesthood of Levi, but the Son of God was born of love. The Father and Son agreed upon it before time began. The agreement contained the decision of a sacrifice. The Son promised himself as a sacrifice. That's why God's Son as a high priest does not need a sacrifice for sin like the Levitical high priest needed. He is himself a spotless sacrifice on behalf of the people.

METAPHORS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Letter to the Hebrews says that He is the great high priest and the Son of God. He is able to have compassion upon us because He has been tempted in all things like us, but without sin (Heb. 4). As a high priest Christ does not perform His office in temples made with human hands. His throne is in heaven. He sits on a throne of majesty in the glory of heaven but at the same time on the throne of grace on earth. For that reason, His dwelling place here is called the kingdom (or heaven) of grace. He is its king and high priest like Melchizedek in Salem. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we are exhorted to boldly go to the throne of grace. From that throne is heard the message of mercy and grace. It is also called the voice of the blood of Jesus. Through His sacrifice the way into Holiest of Holies, eternal life and the unperishing glory of heaven, opens to us.

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