

## The Priesthood of Aaron

The high priest is spoken of in the fifth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. The high priest was chosen from among men. He was called to represent man and to bring gifts to God as well as sacrifices for the atonement of sin. Because he himself was only a sinful and weak man, he was thus able to relate with understanding to people's weakness and inability. Being the high priest was being a human being and thus full of understanding and sympathy for others. In addition to offering sacrifices for the sins of the people, because of his own weakness he also had a responsibility to offer sacrifices for his own sins. For this reason, his own sinfulness and position before God could not be forgotten.

Not just anyone could be the high priest. Man could not take that honor and duty for himself, rather God called the high priest. He called the first high priest, Moses' brother, Aaron. After that, according to God's decree, the office of the high priest descended only in the family of Aaron. Anyone that did not belong to the family of Aaron could not come before God in the sanctuary (Num. 17:5 [18:7]).

Aaron and Moses were descendents of Levi, the son of their forefather Jacob (Ex. 6:14–22). Aaron was also the chief of his tribe, the Levites (Num. 17:18 [17:3, 8]). Only Aaron and his sons could be priests; others that belonged to the tribe of Levi could care for the duties to be performed before the sanctuary and in the tabernacle.

### **The Levites**

Those that served in the tent of the sanctuary were called Levites. They were able to help the priests with the work in the tent of the sanctuary, but they could not however go near the holy vessels and altar. If they had gone there, they would have died. Only the priests, those that belonged to the family of Aaron, could go into the actual tabernacle or to the altar (Num. 16–18).

The priests were not promised any land in the coming conquest of the Promised Land, because God was their inheritance. God decreed their livelihood separately (Num. 18:8–20). Neither could the Levites own land like the other tribes of Israel. The tithes were to be given to them. They lived on these. It was their wage for the work done in the tent of the tabernacle/sanctuary (Num. 18:23–31).

The priests of the family of Aaron and their Levite relatives were a part of the nation separated to God from the entire nation of Israel. The question of who performed the service before God was not at all immaterial. The foundation and background for everything was God's choosing, His ordinance.

### **Christ as the High Priest**

According to the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus, God's Son, is the great High Priest. He understands our weaknesses because He, like us, has been tempted in all things but without sin (Heb. 4:15).

Jesus did not come to destroy the Scripture but rather to fulfill them. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews discusses how Jesus could be a high priest when He was not of the family of Levi, but of Judah, a completely different forefather. How could He in this respect fulfill all that which God had decreed and revealed as His will, for if the priesthood was to change the law must also change?

Jesus did not raise himself to the rank of high priest, but God himself raised Him: "Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee" (Heb. 5:5). The priests of the earthly tabernacle belonged to the tribe of Levi. Jesus did not belong to this family, but his priesthood was not according to the earthly priesthood. Jesus was not a priest according to the tribe of Levi rather His priesthood is the priesthood of Melchizedek. Melchizedek lived already during the time of the patriarch Abraham. Abraham paid him tithes, which God later decreed were to be paid to the Levites. Also, in the Psalms it is said: "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4).

We need exactly this kind of high priest, who does not need to first offer sacrifice for his own sins and then for the atonement of the people. He has made a one-time sacrifice by sacrificing himself (Heb. 7:27). The priesthood of Aaron has been an allegory of the office of Christ. He was not bound to the earthly tabernacle, in which He should have sacrificed sin-offerings again and again.

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