

Summary of the Priesthood

I. The Principle of Priesthood

- A. Man faces this dilemma: no sinful human can have dealings with the just and holy God (Job 9:2). If he is to approach God, he must be represented by another whom God will accept as a mediator (Job 9:30-33; 33:23; cf. 1 Tim 2:5-6).
- B. Priesthood is a principle by which God deals with sinful man through an intermediary whom he appoints (Heb 5:1).
- C. Thus, the priesthood(s) were established so that...
 - 1. People might communicate with God (Heb 4:14-5:3)
 - 2. God might communicate with people (Mal 2:7)

II. The Biblical Priesthoods

- A. Throughout redemptive history, God has established several “orders” of priesthood:
 - 1. Levitical priesthood
 - 2. Priesthood of Christ
 - 3. Priesthood of NT believers
- B. Each order of priesthood shares areas of similarity in detail and background.
- C. Yet none of these priesthoods is a “type” of any other. Their similarities overlap because of common functions, not because any one of them foreshadowed another.

A Comparative Study of Three Biblical Priesthoods

Adapted from William D. Barrick, Leviticus notes

	Old Testament Levites	Christ	New Testament Believers
<i>Appointment</i>			
<i>Divinely Chosen</i>	Hebrews 5:4	Hebrews 5:5-6	1 Peter 2:9
<i>Anointed</i>	Exodus 29:7 Exodus 40:12-15 Leviticus 8:12	Isaiah 61:1 Acts 10:38	1 John 2:20, 27
<i>Sanctified/Set Apart</i>	Exodus 28:36 Leviticus 8:30 Leviticus 21:6-8	John 10:36 John 17:19	1 Corinthians 1:2 Hebrews 10:14 1 Peter 1:2
<i>Ministry</i>			
<i>Receiving/Keeping Revelation Teaching</i>	Deuteronomy 33:8, 10	John 17:8	Philippians 2:15-16 1 Thessalonians 2:13
	Leviticus 10:11 Deuteronomy 17:11 Deuteronomy 33:10a Nehemiah 8:9	Matthew 5:2 Matthew 7:29 John 3:2	Colossian 3:16 Hebrews 5:12

<i>Offering Sacrifices</i>	Leviticus 9:7 Deuteronomy 33:10b Hebrews 5:1	Hebrews 9:11-10:18	Hebrews 13:15-16 1 Peter 2:5
<i>Interceding</i>	Exodus 28:12, 29 Cp. 1 Samuel 7:5; 12:23	Romans 8:34 Hebrews 7:25	1 Timothy 2:1
<i>Judging Controversies</i>	Deuteronomy 17:8-13	John 5:22 Acts 10:42 2 Timothy 4:8	1 Corinthians 6:1-5
<i>Entering the Holy Place</i>	Exodus 30:7-10 Hebrews 9:1-7	Hebrews 9:12, 24	Hebrews 4:16 Hebrews 10:19-22

III. Melchizedekian Priesthood of Christ

- A. Melchizedek is a mysterious OT figure
- B. He appears for the first time in Genesis 14 following Abram’s victory over a coalition of kings who had taken his nephew captive during their raid against the cities of the plain.
- C. He is described by several unique features:
 1. His name means “righteous king”, indicating his royal and godly status
 2. He is said to be the king of Salem, the ancient city of Jerusalem, which eventually was inhabited by the Jebusites before it was captured by David (Josh 15:63; Judg 1:21; 2 Sam 5:6-9).
 3. He is also described as “priest of the Most High God”
- D. In this way, Melchizedek represents a consolidation of kingship and priesthood into one office.
 1. Israel’s national function reflects this type of consolidation—a “kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6).
 2. This national manifestation of priestly rule actually reflects God’s original intent for mankind to rule over God’s creation (kingship) as God’s representative mediator to creation (priesthood).
- E. Melchizedek is mentioned only one other time in the OT, where Yahweh appoints David and his progeny to be priests in the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4)—that is, kingly priests.
- F. The priesthood of Melchizedek becomes a key point of contact for the writer of Hebrews in establishing Christ’s superiority to the Levitical priesthood.
 1. His priesthood was not based on genealogy (7:3). Contrast this with the Leviticus priesthood, which required that all priests been descendants of Levi.

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2. His origins are irrelevant to his priesthood. The OT text does not record his birth nor his death. Meanwhile, Aaron's death receives a rather detailed account (Num 22:22-29).
 3. This doesn't mean that Melchizedek didn't have any parents. That's not the point the writer of Hebrews is trying to make. He is simply saying that his origins are not connected to his priesthood.
 4. Thus, he is "made to be like" Christ—his priesthood foreshadows the priesthood of Christ—a perpetual priesthood uninterrupted by death.
 5. "The implication is that the resemblance to Christ rests upon the way Melchizedek's history is reported in the OT, not upon Melchizedek himself. Melchizedek was not the pre-incarnate Christ, as some maintain, but was similar to Christ in that his priesthood was universal (v. 1), royal (v. 1, 2; cf. Zech. 6:13), righteous (v. 2; cf. Ps. 72:2; Jer 23:5; 1 Cor. 1:30), peaceful (v. 2; cf. Ps. 72:7; Is. 9:6; Rom. 5:1), and unending (v. 3; cf. vv. 24, 25)" (MacArthur Study Bible).
- G. Hebrews provides a contrastive analysis of the Levitical and Melchizedekian priesthood, with the goal of demonstrating irrefutably the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood over and against the Levitical priesthood:
1. Based on character
 - a) Christ is sinless. Therefore, his sympathy as a high priest is based on his experience of temptation, not his weakness (Heb 4:15).
 - b) Levites were sinful. They could sympathize because they too were weak and sinful (5:2), and were obligated to offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could do so for others (5:3).
 - c) Since Christ is sinless, he only needed to offer one sacrifice—himself (7:26-27).
 2. Based on receiving tithes from Abraham
 - a) Abram, possessor of covenant promises, paid tithes to Melchizedek, even though he was not his descendant (7:4, 6). This demonstrates that he was Abram's superior (7:4, 7).
 - b) The Levites received tithes from their fellow Israelites because the law required it, not because they were of superior rank (7:5).
 - c) The Levites were mortal men, while Melchizedek's death is never recorded (7:8).
 - d) The Levites actually paid tithes to Melchizedek seminally through Abram, demonstrating further his superior position compared to the Levites (7:9-10).
 3. Based on giving a blessing to Abraham
 - a) Melchizedek blessed Abraham (7:6).
 - b) This, once again, demonstrates his superiority even to Abram.
 4. Based on replacement of Levitical priesthood

- a) Levitical priesthood was unable to save anyone from their sins (7:11).
 - b) The law that established the Levitical priesthood was “weak” and “useless” for such purposes (7:18-19), dealing only with the temporal and physical matters (7:16).
 - c) Christ belonged to the tribe of Judah, which was not authorized to serve as priests under the old covenant (7:13-14).
 - d) Thus, if there is a change of priesthood from Levitical to Melchizedekian, then there must be a change of law as well (7:12).
 - e) The New Covenant in which Christ serves as priest offers a “better hope” in that it enables us to “draw near to God” (7:19).
 - f) “His priesthood is clearly beyond the law which was the authority for the Levitical priesthood (cf. v. 11). This is proof that the Mosaic law had been abrogated. The Levitical system was replaced by a new Priest, offering a new sacrifice, under a New Covenant. He abrogated the law by fulfilling it (cf. Matt. 5:17) and providing the perfection which the law could never accomplish (cf. Matt. 5:20)” (MacArthur Study Bible).
5. Based on surety
- a) Priests under the old covenant received their office based on an impermanent law, not by divine promise (7:20).
 - b) Christ received his priesthood based on divine oath (7:21-22), which is unchangeable.
 - c) Thus, Christ’s priesthood acts as surety of a better covenant than the old one—a covenant which cannot be abrogated as the old one was (7:22).
6. Based on permanence
- a) There were many Levitical priests throughout Israel’s history. They could not keep their priesthood because they were limited by their mortality (7:23).
 - b) Christ’s priesthood is permanent because he never dies (7:24), enabling believers to approach God because of his perpetual intercession of their behalf (7:25).
7. Summary: “For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever” (Heb 7:26-28).