

Week 34: *The Four Offices: Priest*

Hook



Main Point: Jesus is our great High Priest whose sacrifice for sin was once for all.

Have you used the services of a travel agency recently? The emergence of the Internet dealt a hard blow to the industry; many folks chose to navigate travel sites themselves, cutting out the middleman. The number of travel agents working in the United States was 124,000 in the year 2000; that number plummeted to under 38,000 in 2021.¹²

Q: Do you make a habit of using travel agencies? Why or why not?

Q: What other industries were negatively impacted by the emergence of the Internet?

Transition: Today's lesson will examine the role of priest in the Old Testament. We'll discuss Jesus' role as the High Priest and how Jesus brings us direct access to God.

RECAP: In the last lesson, we saw how the role of prophet in the Old Testament pointed us ahead to Jesus as the ultimate prophet promised by God in the beginning. This week, we look at the Old Testament role of priest and see how Jesus is the great High Priest of a superior covenant and how His blood saves us once for all.

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1 Samuel 2:12–17, 22, 27–36; Leviticus 3:16; and Deuteronomy 18:1–5 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Priests are servants of God and His people.

Q: Why were the priests given a portion of the sacrifices? What was God's portion?

Q: Why was what Samuel's sons were doing wrong?

One of the first things God did after He rescued His people from Egypt was establish the priesthood (Exodus 28:1). He gave them sacred garments to wear, including a breastplate bearing stones engraved with the names of the 12 tribes, so the high priest bore the names of Israel before the Lord when he went into the Holy Place as a representative of the people (Exodus 28:12,29). The ephod also included the *Urim* and *Thummim*, stones the high priest could use to inquire of the Lord for the people (28:30). Priests were consecrated with a unique recipe of anointing oil and sprinkled with sacrificial blood and set apart as sacred to the Lord to minister in the tabernacle (Exodus 29:1–21; 30:22–38).

The priests did all the work related to the sacrifices in the tabernacle. The Levites performed other non-priestly duties and assisted with the burnt offering on special occasions (1 Chronicles 23:28–32). The Gibeonites collected water and cut wood for the altar but did not actually serve in the tabernacle (Joshua 9:27). The people slaughtered the sacrificial animals they brought, but the priests drained the blood and sprinkled the blood on the altar and/or the curtain. Afterward, the person making the offering cut the animal into pieces, and the priests arranged the pieces on the altar and burned the offering (Leviticus 1:1–9). They also burned the incense and kept the candles burning in the Holy Place. The high priest performed the ritual of the Day of Atonement once a year, offering a sacrifice and making atonement with blood in the Most Holy Place and releasing the scapegoat into the wilderness (Leviticus 16).

The priests were also charged with distinguishing between what was clean and unclean and what was holy and common (Leviticus 10:10). They examined skin diseases to determine whether they were leprosy, quarantined the person, and then checked again. If a leprous person claimed to have been healed, the priests examined the person to verify (Leviticus 13–14). They also examined mold in houses to determine if it was "leprous" or "unclean" and needed to be destroyed (Leviticus 14:33–56). The priests were also responsible for teaching the people the Law (Leviticus 10:11).

For doing all of this, the priests received a portion of the sacrifices that were not completely burned up to the Lord. This portion of the sacrifices (grain, wine, oil, meat) was God's provision for the priests and Levites, who did not have their own land on which to grow crops or keep flocks (Deuteronomy 18:1–5). So, in 1 Samuel, Eli's sons weren't wrong to expect a portion of the offerings, but only specific portions – the shoulder, cheeks and stomach – were allotted for the priests to share among themselves. But Eli's sons were just taking what they wanted out of the pot. And they were demanding meat before it was boiled, before the fat had even been burned. This was especially egregious because all fat belonged to the Lord and was to be burned completely on the altar (Leviticus 3:14–16). They were taking God's portion! It was against God's law for any Israelite to eat the fat or blood of an animal because fat belonged to the Lord, and the blood was the "life" of an animal (Leviticus 7:25; 17:11–14).

Eli's sons were also sleeping with the women who served at the tabernacle entrance, which was not only wrong because it's adultery but also because it was a pagan worship practice banned in God's law (Deuteronomy 23:17–18). Priests were supposed to be servants of God and the people, but Eli's sons were abusing their role to take whatever they wanted. They were not only sinning against the people, but they were also sinning against God Himself and making themselves spiritually unclean (1 Samuel 2:25). Through an unnamed prophet, God told Eli He would cut off his family from the priesthood and raise up a faithful priest who would do what was in God's heart. Like God's promise to David being about both Solomon in the short term and Jesus in the eternal, this promise was both about Samuel's being a faithful priest in the immediate future and Jesus' being the ultimate High Priest eternally (Hebrews 7:23–25).³ Unlike Eli's sons, Jesus was a true servant of God the Father and people. He is called the Suffering Servant who came not to be served but to serve, even to give His life for us (Isaiah 53; Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:1–8).

Q: If believers are called to be a "kingdom of priests" to the world (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5), what does that tell us about our role in the world?

Q: In what ways could you live out a more servant-minded life?

Hebrews 9:1–28 and 1 Peter 1:13–19 and Leviticus 17:11 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus is both the eternal High Priest and the once-for-all sacrifice.

Q: Why does atonement for sin require blood? Why is Jesus' blood able to save us once for all eternity while the blood of animals was temporary?

In every animal sacrifice in the Old Testament, the priest drained the blood out of the animal first. What they did with the blood varied depending on the type of sacrifice. For the peace offering and burnt offering, they threw some of the blood against the sides of

the altar at the entrance of the tabernacle (Leviticus 1:5; 3:2). Neither of these offerings was for atonement of sin.

Two offerings made atonement for sin, the guilt (or reparation) offering and the sin (or purification) offering. The guilt offering involved making reparation by full repayment plus one fifth (Leviticus 6:5). The priest threw the blood of the animal against the sides of the altar (Leviticus 7:2). For the sin offering, the priest sprinkled the blood in different places, depending on who committed the sin. If it were a common person or a leader of the people, some blood was put on the horns of the altar at the entrance to the tabernacle and the rest was poured out at the base (4:25, 30). If it were the sin of the whole congregation or the high priest, some blood was sprinkled seven times before the curtain of the Holy of Holies, some on the horns of the incense altar inside the tabernacle, then on the horns of the altar, and the rest poured out at the base (Leviticus 4:5–7,16–18).

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of his sin offering on the mercy seat upon the Ark of the Covenant seven times and the blood of the people's sin offering over all the horns of the altar and sprinkled on it seven times (Leviticus 16:14–19). This was to purify the tabernacle and the altar from the uncleanness their sins brought upon it (Leviticus 16:15-20).⁴

When a person had been healed from leprosy, he was to offer both a sin offering and a guilt offering. The priest took some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the person who has been healed – on their right earlobe, right thumb and right big toe (Leviticus 14:14). Moses did the same with the blood from the ram of ordination for Aaron and his sons when he anointed them as priests, but it wasn't a guilt offering; it was a special offering just for ordination (Leviticus 8:24). This is to purify the person.⁵

There is a lot of detail about blood in the sacrifices, but it is all about purifying from sin and making atonement for sin (Leviticus 16:33). We might logically think that water, not blood, cleanses or purifies. Blood makes things messier! But this was not about a physical cleansing. The word "make atonement" literally means "to cover." Sin can't just be washed away as dirt is; it must be atoned for. Leviticus tells us that atonement for sin requires blood because the "life" of an animal is in its blood (Leviticus 17:11). That Hebrew word is more literally "soul" or "self" or "living being." It's a different word than "inner person," which is usually translated to "heart" in English. It's the word used at creation when God breathed into the dust and "the man became a living creature" (Genesis 2:7). It's about life and death. Because the wages of sin is death, sin requires life to atone for it (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:22).

Hebrews tells us that the priests had to keep making offerings over and over, day after day, year after year because the blood of animals wasn't sufficient to cover sin permanently. But the precious blood of Christ was able to cover all the sin of all people in every time and place once for all (Hebrews 9:12). The Holy Place Jesus entered wasn't

the earthly tabernacle; it was heaven itself (9:12,23). He was both the High Priest who came into the heavenly tabernacle to spread the blood and the sacrifice that was made – He used His own blood (9:26). Because He is the only perfect human to have ever lived, spotless, just as sacrificial animals had to be, and because He willingly offered Himself instead of an animal that had no choice in the matter, His blood is priceless and sufficient to cover all sin for all people forever (Hebrews 9:25–28).

Q: How does it make you feel to know that life/blood is required to cover your sin? How does it make you feel about Jesus?

Q: What does it say about Jesus that He was the great High Priest, but He also offered Himself, not an animal, as a substitute?

Q: We can never repay Jesus, but how can you respond to His sacrifice for you?

Hebrews 4:14–16; 7:11–28; and Genesis 14:17–24 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jesus is the mediator/priest of a better covenant.

Q: Why is it significant that Melchizedek was a priest of God who was not a part of the Levites?

Q: Why does it matter that Jesus can relate to our human struggles?

Hebrews describes Jesus as our permanent High Priest, the ultimate mediator between us and God, who can save all those who draw near to God through Him (Hebrew 7:25). Yet Jesus was not a “priest” in the traditional sense, according to the law. He was not from the tribe of Levi; He was from the tribe of Judah, a descendent of David, the kingly tribe, not the priestly tribe. Yet, as we read above, God promised Eli that He would take the priesthood away from Eli’s family and give it eternally to another faithful priest (1 Samuel 2:35). Also, the writer of Hebrews called Jesus a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek” instead of the order of Levi.

Melchizedek is a fascinating, somewhat mysterious character in the book of Genesis. He was the king of Salem, which would later become Jeru-*salem*, the city of David. But he was also a “priest of God Most High,” Abraham’s God (Genesis 14:18). He was outside of the covenant family of Abraham. Melchizedek acted as both a priest and a king, filling at least two of the four leadership roles we are studying

What is significant about Melchizedek is that he gave the writer of Hebrews an Old Testament model to connect to Jesus as priest. It’s OK that Jesus wasn’t of the tribe of Levi; that doesn’t mean He can’t be labeled a priest. In fact, Jesus’ priesthood is both eternal and superior to that of the Levitical priesthood.

Jesus can continually intercede for us before the Father because He lives forever (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). As the only perfect person who has ever lived – “holy,

innocent and unstained” – Jesus is our ultimate eternal High Priest . The Levitical high priests all had to offer sacrifices for their own sin too, but Jesus was sinless. The perfect High Priest.

But Christ’s being mediator for us isn’t just about that one-time sacrifice of His life. Hebrews says He *continually* intercedes for us before the Father. Because He knows what it is like to be human, to be us, we can draw near to the throne of grace with confidence. We can come before Him with all our worries, doubts and struggles and receive mercy and grace and help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16). Jesus’ role as our advocate wasn’t just a one-time thing. He continues to advocate for us every single day. Any time we need help, we can come to Him. We do not have a God who is far away, but one who is near to the brokenhearted and longs for us to come to Him (Psalm 34:18; Isaiah 30:18). He cares deeply for us and cares about even the little things we bring to Him (Matthew 7:7–11; 10:29–31). Because of Jesus, the veil was torn and access to the Father was blown wide open (Hebrews 10:19-22). As sinful people cleansed by His blood, we can approach God’s holy presence with confidence (Psalm 24:3–4).

Q: How can we balance respecting God’s holiness as Lord with also knowing that He desires to be our Father and have us come to Him intimately in prayer?

Q: How does it change your prayer life to know that Jesus is able to sympathize with you?

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How would you describe your prayer life? Does it reflect the truths that we've discussed today?

What would help you reach the next level in your prayer life?

For helpful prayer resources, visit <https://www.tandemprayer.org/>. The website provides instructional videos to help you mature in this important area of your spiritual life.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Why is sin such a big deal? Why does atonement require a blood sacrifice? Do you have any questions or doubts about that? How would you explain it to a person who is questioning Christianity?

PRAY: Thank God for the gift of Jesus' sacrifice for you. Thank Jesus for being willing to go to the Cross. Spend time in simple praise and thanksgiving for a God who loved us enough to sacrifice His own Son for us.

ACT: Think of one way this week you can be a "mediator" between someone else and God – obviously not taking the place of Jesus who offered the sacrifice but telling someone about Jesus and how he or she can be saved through Him.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we will look at the last office of leadership in Israel, the one 1 and 2 Samuel really focuses on, the establishment of the monarchy, the king. We will see how God did not want a human king for Israel but allowed it to show them what would inevitably happen. We will see how the failure of the kings of Israel points us ahead to our need for Jesus as the perfect King and how we can live with Jesus on the throne of our lives.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes413041.htm>

² [https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelgoldstein/2019/09/24/did-the-internet-kill-thomas-cook-/?sh=76678de554ae](https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelgoldstein/2019/09/24/did-the-internet-kill-thomas-cook/?sh=76678de554ae)

³ Stephen B. Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2016).

⁴ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (Yale University Press, 1998).

⁵ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (Yale University Press, 1998).