

Jesus the Priest

Hebrews 4:14-5:10

A prophet is sent by God to represent him to man. But a priest is man's representative to God. He acts "on behalf of men in relation to God" (5:1), leading us in love and service to our creator. Before the fall this duty included guarding the garden just as after the fall it included guarding the sanctuary (Gen. 2:15; Num. 3:32; 2 Chron. 26:16-20). Primarily and positively, faithful priests led in worship. They ministered in ascension, sin and peace offerings. They taught Israel how to sing and be thankful, to live faithfully and joyfully before God. Jesus is our true high priest to which all priesthood in the old covenant foreshadowed. He continues as our high priest today.

Priests are Appointed Representatives

While Adam had priestly duties before the fall, after the fall mankind needs a priest to mediate between sinners and God. We see this in all sorts of religions where holy men come between people and the divine. The idea is that God is righteous and men are sinful, and therefore a mediator is necessary to draw near to God on their behalf. Men sinfully appoint themselves as priests, but in God's economy he alone calls them to this position of honor (5:1, 4). Aaron and his sons were chosen to serve as priests and set apart to lead in worship (Ex. 28:1-2). Even Jesus did not exalt himself to be high priest but was appointed by the Father (5:5). Priests sympathize with people they serve because they too are weak (5:2). Jesus sympathizes much more, being tempted in *every way* that we are, though never giving in to sin (4:15).

Priests offer Gifts & Sacrifices

Priests offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, both for themselves and the people (5:2-3). The writer of Hebrews is summing up the sacrificial system and its many offerings. This system and holiness code reveals to us a heavenly pattern of worship, which Moses saw on Mt. Sinai (Heb. 8:5). The sin, guilt, ascension, and peace offerings teach us about confession, devotion, communion and thanksgiving. They also teach us how awesome and terrible it is to come near the living and holy God. The climax of access to God in Israel came once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On this day the high priest would come into the Holy of Holies where God would appear over the mercy seat. The priest would bring the blood of a bull for his sins, the blood of a goat for Israel's sins, and another goat would be released into the wilderness having the sins of Israel confessed over it and bearing them away (Lev. 16). Both the sacrifices and those sacrificing indicated that at that time God's people couldn't get very near him, nor could their consciences be perfected (Heb. 9:8-10). He wanted them near, but as of yet it wasn't possible. They had the type, not the reality. Jesus is both the sacrifice and the priest who sacrifices. He isn't the perfect Levitical priest descended from Aaron; he is from Judah and made an everlasting priest of the order of Melchizedek because of his indestructible life (Heb. 7:17).

Jesus Continues as our High Priest

As a man who suffered and was tempted in every way, Jesus sympathizes with us entirely (4:15). He wept and loudly called on his Father save him from death (5:7). He left aside his divine privileges to learn as a man, to obey in suffering (5:8). He conquered death and went *as a man* into the heavenly presence of God (Heb. 8:1-2). And there he reigns as our high priest forever (5:10); the offering has become the priest. This meaty doctrine (5:11) summons us to hold fast to our confession (4:14). Because he is there, you are here. It also results in the deepest humility and boldest confidence, the kind that we take to the throne of grace (4:16).