

Priest
Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9-10 (2 Cor 5:16-6:2)
July 26, 2026

Prayer

If someone asked you the question, who are you, how would you reply? Think about the question. They did not ask for your name. You were not asked for your vocation or your status in life or the hobbies that define you. The question is, who are you?

How would you answer that question? Do you know who God has made you to be in Christ and have you considered the difference that makes in your day-to-day choices, activities and attitudes? Who are you, really?

Our summer series is called Genesis to Jesus as we explore what the Old Testament teaches about Jesus. Today we don't just learn about who Jesus is. We also get a glimpse into who we are in Christ and why God has been working to bring this about for a very, very long time.

We are going to look at what God has in mind for His priests. What was their function. How did someone become one. How does Jesus fit in. And then, most importantly, what difference does all this make for us.

Best place to begin is to have a common understanding of what a priest is and does. As we start, Let's make this personal. Rather than think of "those people over there" ask how this might fit with you? What if you were a priest? What impact would this have on you?

Let's start by asking about their function. Why are they needed? What do they do?

In the Bible, priests have both an active and a passive role. They are an active mediator between God and humans, a bridge between two different worlds. They help humans maintain a relationship with God through their prayers and offerings. But they work in the other direction as well as they offer God's grace and share God's words to the people (Lev 10:10-11). That's the active role.

There is also a passive function. As God's representatives in the world, they are expected to model what it means to live in the presence of God. Their lives are to be holy. In other words, their words, actions and attitudes are to be set apart from the ways of the world and dedicated to the ways of God.

A priest is an active mediator and a passive example. If the prophet is God's spokesperson, the priest is His representative. Most of us are familiar with priests in the Old Testament or priests today who are set apart from common pursuits and ordained to a spiritual task. To be a priest requires one to fulfill specific expectations.

The requirements for biblical priests are detailed in Exodus through Deuteronomy. Even so, centuries before these requirements were established, we run across the very first priest mentioned in the Bible. His name was Melchizedek. Not much is known about this guy. His name only appears twice in the Old Testament.ⁱ Even so, he plays a very significant role.

Genesis 14 is the story of how Abram rescued his nephew Lot, and Lot's family, from a raiding party who had kidnapped them and stolen their possessions. In rescuing them, he also freed the people and possessions that the raiders had taken from five other cities. Abram was on his way home, passing by the city of Salem, when that king came out to greet him. We pick it up in 14:18.

¹⁸ And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought Abram some bread and wine. ¹⁹ Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And blessed be God Most High,
who has defeated your enemies for you."

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.

Melchizedek is a royal priest of God Most High, the same God who called Abram to go to Canaan. Melchizedek was in the land of Canaan before Abram ever got there!

Let's read this through Jewish eyes for a moment. This is the patriarch, Abraham. Who is greater than the patriarch Abraham? Everything we have today comes from him. Without him there is no chosen people, no Passover, and no Messiah. He's at the top of the org chart. But consider this.

Typically, the greater blesses the lesser and the lesser gives to the greater. Melchizedek blessed Abram and Abram gave a tenth to Melchizedek. Who is this guy?

His name means "King of Righteousness" and he rules over the city of Salem. Many believe he is the King of the city that would one day be called Jerusalem. The King of Righteousness ruling over the City of Peace.

He plays a significant role and yet scripture does not record his genealogy or his death. Some rabbis assumed that if the scripture does not mention it then it does not exist. The conclusion, then, is that Melchizedek had no beginning or end.

The King of Righteousness, with no beginning or end, who rules over the city of peace, and who represents God Most High even before Israel existed or knew God's personal name. It is easy to see how elements of Melchizedek's life became connected with the promised Messiah.

Let me just pause here and say that Melchizedek is one of many examples of typology in scripture. A Type could be understood as a lesser thing that points to a greater reality. The

type is real. It exists, but part of its purpose is to introduce us to something greater that is yet to come. It could be understood as the shadow of the fullness that is yet to be revealed.

Think of it like a hyperlink in the text. If it were on your computer screen his name would be blue and underlined. Click on it and you will be taken to another spot in scripture to gain more information on that topic. Here's how it works using a different example.

You are reading through Exodus and you find that the word "tabernacle" is hyperlinked. Click on tabernacle and it takes you to the temple. Click on temple and it takes you to the Garden of Eden, that place where heaven and earth intersect and humans and God dwell together in unity. Click on the Garden and it takes you to the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 and how "Now the dwelling of God is with people." And somewhere in there is a footnote that takes you to Luke 23:43 where Jesus tells the criminal on the cross "today you will be with me in paradise" and you will see that the word paradise is the word "garden" which points you back to Genesis 2.

When you click Melchizedek's hyperlink it takes you on a fascinating journey that leads you straight to Jesus. But we get ahead of ourselves. We need to make one other stop before we make that jump.

The interaction between Abram and Melchizedek establishes several things, including the fact that there can be legitimate priests of God Most High who did not follow the typical path or meet the usual requirements.

Fast forward a few centuries. Abram's family was enslaved in Egypt. God heard their cries for help and freed them. Two months later they were at the base of Mount Sinai. Moses was with God on the mountain and received this message for the people. This is information God wanted to make sure they heard.

⁵ Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. ⁶ And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel."

Even though all creation belongs to God, He considers this group of people to be His special treasure. Not everyone has a treasured possession but most of us know someone who does. Maybe it is great grandmother's ring or some other family keepsake that has been passed down through the generations. It could be a special photo album of a season long gone or some other memory.

The point is that even though someone has a house filled with wonderful things, this one possession carries unique priority for them. They keep it in a guarded place and hold it in high regard.

Of all the galaxies in the heavens, species on the earth and mysteries we've yet to even discover, God set aside a group of people to be his special treasure and He bound

himself to them by a Covenant. He has promised to watch over and care for them because they are called to be God's holy nation, a kingdom of priests.

A priest represents God and is an intermediary between God and another. Who will a *nation* of priests minister to? Is it not other nations? Israel was to become priests to the nations, bridging the gap between God and the rest of the world. If they are faithful, God will make himself known to the world through His priests.

As a nation of priests they would be active and passive. They would actively proclaim God's word to the nations and intercede for them. And they would passively be an example to the world of what God intends as they safeguard the scriptures so others can be blessed by their divinely revealed message.

These individual priests who make up the nation of priests are not perfect. They need priests to mediate for them. So God appointed Aaron and all his male offspring to be their priests.ⁱⁱ And the best of them all is called the High Priest. He is the exemplar who represents the people to God and God to the people. Aaron was the first High Priest.

Aaron and his sons are the priests most of us think about when we read about priests in the Bible. Their job was to serve the nation of priests who acted as God's priests to the world. This system was very effective at communicating their need. It could not, however, meet their need.

The problem is that the system they had was not the final product. It was only a type, a hyperlink that points to something greater to come. The author of Hebrews explains it this way in 10:1-3.

The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. ² If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared.

³ But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. ⁴ For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Did you catch this? All the priestly instructions and laws found in *Torah* are only a shadow. A dim preview of the good things to come but not the good things themselves.

God wants to have a nation of priests who carries His grace to the world. But all their activities and requirements are but a shadow that cannot meet their true need. In fact, that shadow only reminds them of how bad off they actually are!

Even though their High Priest met all the qualifications and did everything according to the rules, he still fell short. Both the one making the offering and the offering itself only communicated the need. It did not meet the need. The entire nation needed to be represented by a different kind of High Priest, one who comes from the order of Melchizedek rather than the order of Aaron (Heb 7:11).

The author of Hebrews makes the compelling argument that Jesus is this High Priest, "one who has become a priest not by meeting the requirement of being from the tribe of Levi, but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed." Like Melchizedek who was "without beginning of days or end of life" (7:3).

This is one place where we just need to unleash the power of God's word on its own. It needs no extra comment. Think about everything you know about our need and the role of a priest as you listen to these words.

Consider Hebrews 4:14-16

¹⁴ So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Hebrews 7:23-26

²³ There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office. ²⁴ But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. ²⁵ Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

²⁶ He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven.

Hebrews 10:11-14

¹¹ Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. ¹² But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. ¹³ There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. ¹⁴ For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

By offering His sinless life, Christ forever made perfect, complete, whole, those who are being made holy. This is a picture of you, and of me and of anyone who has placed their faith in Christ. This is who we are. From our perspective we are being made holy as God transforms us and sets us apart to serve Him alone. From God's perspective, we have forever been made perfect through Christ's sacrifice. We are his holy people.

Titus 2:13 says that "Jesus Christ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

From the very start with Adam and Eve, God intended that humans be His royal priesthood, kings and queens who were priests of God Most High. As God's representatives their calling is to be God's ambassadors, helping God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But they were more intent on having their will be done on earth. So they were stripped of their priesthood. Now they needed priests to mediate for them. But what priest or offering was good enough to pay for their treason?

Whether it was the blood of bulls and goats back then or our tearful promises or acts of devotion or any expression of contrition or commitment we make, anything we can offer will fall short. Both the offering, and the one making the offering, are not adequate.

Enter Jesus, the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, who offers the sacrifice of His own life so that both the offering, and the one making the offering, are fully adequate and acceptable.

When we place our faith in and allegiance with Jesus His perfect holy Spirit comes to live inside of us. Now, those who are being made holy are forever made perfect. We become His priests who gather as a nation of priests, the ones God intended from the start.

Peter puts it this way.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Who are you? If you are in Christ, then you are a royal priest of God Most High. Part of a nation of priests who minister to the world, actively seeking to bridge the gap between God and people and people and God and passively seeking to represent His character in your actions, words and even your attitude.

This identity requires several things from us. It requires that we devote ourselves to knowing God and God's word. It requires that we live in community with other priests so that we can encourage and sharpen each other. And it requires that we rely on the Holy Spirit who transforms us from the inside out, making us holy and setting us apart for God.

From the very start, God's heart has been to reconcile others to Himself through His royal priesthood, His holy nation. You and I are now part of that plan and carry that purpose.

Paul admonished the Roman Christians with three words: know, consider, and yield. This is good counsel for us as well. Know what it means to be a priest of God Most High.

Study it and as your clarity grows, consider how it applies to your life. Take what you know and consider how that impacts your day to day life. Finally, once you know and consider, then yield yourself to this truth.

Know that you are God's priest. Take the time to consider how this impacts your current context. And then yield to what you know to the glory of God.

Communion Intro

The sacrament of communion is another one of those hyperlinks. When you click on it you find many different messages, including the message of commissioning.

When we eat this bread and drink this cup we are His priests, actively proclaiming Christ's sacrifice and passively receiving the grace we need to represent Him well.

None of us are perfect as His priests. He knows that. "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet He is without sin."

If you have placed your faith in and given your allegiance to Christ then this meal is for you. No matter how badly you may feel your service has been you have already been made perfect. This moment is for you. Don't let it go by.

If you are investigating the faith then this may be the perfect time to step across that line. Go ahead. Take the bread then drink the cup. Give yourself fully to Christ and let Him give Himself fully to you. Then please let me or your Christian friend know that you did that.

If you are not convinced that Jesus is your High Priest then this moment is a chance for you to observe and be open to how God may want to speak to you today.

Communion

ⁱ Genesis 14:18-20; Psalm 110:4

ⁱⁱ Exodus 28:1; 40:15