

We are Priests

1 Peter 2:4–8 (NKJV)

4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” 7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” 8 and “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

The word priest is one of those words that has different meanings for different people.

The most predominate use is the way that the Catholic Church uses it.

I remember years ago when one of my grandchildren referred to me as a priest.

It the true sense I am but in the way they understood it I am not.

In the New Testament there are no priests as taught by the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, many people associate “priesthood” with the unbiblical model found in the Roman Catholic Church. But when the Bible speaks about believers being “priests,” it does not refer to the Catholic system, nor to the old covenant priesthood in which only a single tribe of priests could officially serve God in sacred ceremonies. *John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 107–108.*

The following definition of a priest may be found sufficiently comprehensive: A man who officiates or transacts with God on behalf of others, statedly, or for the occasion. McClintock & Strong

Exodus 19:3–6 (NKJV)

So because of the confusion, I do not want to pass over this point without us knowing the basics of priests and priesthoods in the Bible.

It seems probable that Abel built an altar to offer his sacrificial offerings on.

Even Cain must have had an altar on which to offer his grain to God.

The earliest altars mentioned in the Old Testament are associated with the patriarchs. Noah (Gen 8:20), Abraham (Gen 12:7–8; 13:4, 18; 22:9), Isaac (Gen 26:26), and Jacob (Gen 33:20; 35:1–7) all constructed sacrificial altars. These altars were built in connection with a promise or instruction from God, and were likely used for worship or commemoration. *A. Chadwick Thornhill, “Altar,” ed. John D. Barry et al., The Lexham Bible Dictionary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).*

Animal sacrifices had their basis on the atoning blood of the animals offered.

So the whole idea of priests is the idea of dealing with sin.

Hebrews 5:1 (NKJV)

1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

I. Original Priests and their duties.

A. Noah (Gen 8:20)

1. Genesis 8:20 (NKJV)

- a. 20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

B. Abraham (Gen 12:7–8; 13:4, 18; 22:9),

1. Genesis 12:7-8 (NKJV)

- a. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent *with* Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

2. Genesis 13:4 (NKJV)

- a. ⁴ to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

3. Genesis 13:18 (NKJV)

- a. ¹⁸ Then Abram moved *his* tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which *are* in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD.

4. Genesis 22:9 (NKJV)

- a. ⁹ Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

C. Isaac (Gen 26:25)

1. Genesis 26:23–25 (NKJV)

- a. ²³ Then he went up from there to Beersheba. ²⁴ And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, “I *am* the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I *am* with you. I will bless you and

multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake.”²⁵ So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

D. Jacob (Gen 33:20; 35:1–7)

1. Genesis 33:20 (NKJV)

a. 20 Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.

2. Genesis 35:1-7 (NKJV)

a. 1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother." 2 And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. 3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone." 4 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. 5 And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. 6 So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. 7 And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.

E. Job

1. Job 1:5 (NKJV)

a. 5 So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.

F. Jethro

1. Exodus 3:1 (NKJV)

a. 1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

II. The Levitical Priesthood

- A. God had intended for Israel to be priests to the world.
 - 1. Exodus 19:5–6 (NKJV)
 - a. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”
 - 2. It seems that God would have made all the people priests if they had not sinned and rebelled against God.
 - 3. Aaron and his sons would be consecrated later to serve as priests to the nation (Ex. 28–29), but it was God’s intent that all Israel live as priests, manifesting His truth and sharing His blessings with the world. Israel was to be God’s “showcase” to the Gentiles, proving to them that there is but one true and living God and that serving Him is the way to fullness of blessing (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). Unfortunately, instead of Israel influencing the nations to worship Jehovah, the nations influenced Israel to worship idols! *Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Delivered, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1998), 103.*
 - 4. I think about Christians and the church today.
 - a. Are we being an influence on the world or is the world being an influence on us.
 - b. Are we converting the world or is the world converting us.
 - B. The Levites were to be the priestly tribe for the whole nation.
 - C. But of the Levites God chose Aaron and his sons to be the High Priest and the officiating priests to make the sacrifices, especially with regard to anything going on inside the tabernacle.
- III. But God set aside the Levitical Priesthood when Jesus came as the High Priest.
- A. He is now our only mediator.
 - 1. 1 Timothy 2:5 (NKJV)
 - a. 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,
- IV. We then, being connected with Jesus are the new priesthood.
- A. Every believer is a priest.
 - B. We are a kingdom of priests.
 - 1. This had been God’s design for the nation of Israel but they failed.

2. Deuteronomy 7:6 (NKJV)
 - a. 6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.
3. Exodus 19:3-6
 - a. 3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

V. What were the duties of the priests.

- A. They were to be holy to the Lord in all that they did so that the nation would know how they also were to live.
- B. They were to intercede for the people with sacrifices.
 1. Although their's were animal sacrifices, today our's is the sacrifice of praise.
 2. Hebrews 13:15 (NKJV)
 - a. 15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.
- C. They were to mediate between God and the nation.
 1. Christ is our only mediator.
 - a. 1 Timothy 2:5 (NKJV)
 - (1) 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,
 2. But we are to pray for this old world and for our fellow believers.
- D. They were to be salt among the nation.
 1. The Levites were not given a certain continuous allotment of land
 2. Instead they were given 48 cities and the surrounding land for the Levites.
 3. Thus they were scattered among Israel to be salt and light to the nation.
- E. They were to be teachers of or witnesses to the nation.

1. This function was dependent upon how far people had gotten away from the Lord.
2. Ezra the priest saw this as one of his major duties.
 - a. Nehemiah 8:5–6 (NKJV)
 - (1) 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.
 - b. Nehemiah 8:7–8 (NKJV)
 - (1) 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. 8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.
3. Acts 1:7–8 (NKJV)
 - a. 7 And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

We are the priests of God in this time and in our land.

What a great privilege Aaron had to be chosen to minister to God for the people.

What a blessing we can be to ourselves and those around us by being the priest God has called us to be.

VI. Six basic characteristics of the Old Testament priesthood that have great relevance to New Testament believers' spiritual privileges as priests. *John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 108.*

A. They were chosen by God.

1. 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 (NKJV)

a. ²⁶ For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence.

B. God cleansed them from sin before they embarked on their duties

1. Leviticus 8:6-36

2. Every part of the cleansing ceremony—the washings (v. 6), the sin offering (vv. 14–17), the burnt offering (vv. 18–21), the consecration and wave offerings (vv. 22–29)—indicated the same thing: no one, not even a man from the tribe of Levi or the family of Aaron, could enter the priesthood unless God had completely cleansed him from sin. *John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 110.*

3. Titus 2:14 (NKJV)

a. 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

C. God clothed the priests for service.

1. Leviticus 8:7–9 (NKJV)

a. ⁷ And he put the tunic on him, girded him with the sash, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him; and he girded him with the intricately woven band of the ephod, and with it tied *the ephod* on him. ⁸ Then he put the breastplate on him, and he put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastplate. ⁹ And he put the turban on his head. Also on the turban, on its front, he put the golden plate, the holy crown, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

2. Philippians 3:9 (NKJV)

a. ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is*

from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

D. God through Moses anointed the Levitical priests for service

1. Leviticus 8:30 (NKJV)

- a. ³⁰ Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood which *was* on the altar, and sprinkled *it* on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him; and he consecrated Aaron, his garments, his sons, and the garments of his sons with him.

2. John 7:38–39 (NKJV)

- a. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

E. God called the priests to obedience

1. Leviticus 10:1–3 (NKJV)

- a. 1 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. 2 So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. 3 And Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD spoke, saying: ‘By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.’ ” So Aaron held his peace.

2. Ephesians 5:8–10 (NKJV)

- a. 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

Romans 12:1–2 (NKJV)

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Hebrews 13:14–16 (NKJV)

14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. 15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.