

The Christian Pastor--High Priest?

The bible tells us that Jesus is the High Priest of the new covenant. I'm sure that every Christian and Christian group would agree with me. In fact I have often heard this concept taught and encouraged. I've heard it said many times from pulpits that Jesus is High Priest, that He is in control-- that He is the Head of all things concerning the church. But do we realize what a high priest is biblically? How does the Bible define and describe a high priest?

The very first high priest the Bible describes was Melchizedek. He is called the king of salem, the high priest of God.

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. (Genesis 14: 18)

The Bible makes mention that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek.

7:1* ¶ For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;

2* To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; (Hebrews 7:1-2)

Scripture describes it as a tithe of the spoils.

4* Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. (Hebrews 7:4)

Spoils means grain, specifically the top part of grain. The bible does not elaborate on exactly what Melchisedec did with this spoil nor does it elaborate on his functioning as a priest or as the high priest. There is a small mention that he, as high priest, "brought forth bread and wine"..

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. (Genesis 14:18)

.....this gives us a clue that his function as high priest had to do with offerings--that is, payment for sin. However, we do see that he had a specific title of authority, he was "the king of Salem". The word salem in hebrew means peace. Of course it is part of the word Jeru-salem.

So from Melchisedec we see some of the functions, requirements and authority of a high priest. The biblical definition of high priest is someone who is a king or ruler who has authority over others that bring him tithes. A high priest makes offerings to God for sin. Specifically the high priest in the Bible must be a ruler of Jerusalem--a "king of peace".

Next we see the Levitical high priest that the Bible describes. We can say all the same things about them however we see further functions in their office or position. The Levitical high priest ministered in the temple in Jerusalem. They ministered upon an altar. They had authority over the congregation of Israel. There were twelve tribes of Israel but the ministry of the high priest had to come from the Levitical tribe. The word congregation in the Bible most often describes the non-ministry tribes of Israel, those that had the job of working to bring in the tithes/offerings to support the Temple and the Levites.

The Levitical high priest received the tithes and offerings but the central purpose of these were sacrificial in nature. That is to say the most important function of the high priest was to bring the blood offerings as well as the other crops offered into the presence of God to make atonement for the sin of Israel.

6* Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God.

7* But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: (Hebrews 9:6-7)

So the Levitical high priest was a ruler in the temple in Jerusalem, ministered on an altar in the house of God or the sanctuary and had authority over the congregation of Israel who supplied the offerings and tithes which supported their ministry and built the temple. The offerings and tithes had to be done continually since these offerings of animals in crops were imperfect to fully forgive sin. So these practices were done as rituals. They needed to be done over and over and over again in order to continue to forgive sin for Israel.

8* ¶ The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:

9* Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

10* Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

11* But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

12* Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

13* For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

14* How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:8-14)

Now when I mention the functions of the Levitical high priest I think they ought to sound familiar to most Christians. By tradition, Christians function within a system that utilizes the Old Testament Temple for many of its practices. Christians meet repeatedly in a building, they build an altar and have a minister upon the altar. This minister can be very well described by these old covenant standards. That is to say the Christian pastor ministers in the sanctuary with exclusivity, builds the house of God from the support of the congregation which brings in tithes and offerings as continual, repeated, on going payment. The Christian pastor lives off of part of these tithes/ offerings. The pastor has authority over the congregation. When he speaks the only correct answer is "amen"-- this is very very big authority! (perhaps greater than the Levitical priest). The Christian pastor has a ministry that is ongoing, centered around a sabbath day, in most cases a lifetime ministry and while it is not necessarily a birthright, it often can be.

I could at this point out the many disagreements this system of function has with the New Testament church. Just to say it briefly, the New Testament church functioned as many small groups of equals in which everyone could teach, pray, prophesy-- that is to say everyone could be a minister at any given time as God ordained. The central purpose of these groups was not to meet repeatedly but to form gospel ministry. The New Testament church had gospel witnessing meetings. Furthering the gospel was the highest call. They did not meet repeatedly in one place or build and maintain a building, and they did not pay tithes and offerings.

But the main thought that I would like you to consider is how much we have set up the position and function of a Christian pastor as a type of high priest. Let's go back to what we originally said. The Bible tells us in no uncertain terms that Jesus is the High Priest of the New Covenant. What does this mean?

Jesus, today, functions as the High Priest of Christianity. He is both the offering and High Priest of the New Covenant. Jesus stands in the Temple, the true Temple in heaven, and makes the offering of his perfect blood sacrifice as the payment for the sin of all mankind. Again I'm sure that all Christians would agree with me on this. However do we also understand His title of High Priest, the "Prince of Peace" that is to say Prince of Salem the-- King of peace means that He is also a ruler? Jesus is meant to be the Head of the Church. He is meant to be the leader of everything that Christians do. I don't mean to question any individuals in their attempts and striving to be led by Christ however my question is why do we have the need to set up another person as a high priest in the earth when we have Jesus to be our High Priest?

Do you realize how the position and function of a pastor within traditional Christianity resembles the Old Testament Levitical high priest? Remember those men in the earth who were the priests had the central function of carrying on the offerings for sin. The temple functions are clearly and specifically redefined in the New Testament. In the New Testament the temple is not a physical building but it is people (1Cor. 3:16). In the New Testament the priesthood is in all believers not in a specific delegated position (1Peter 2:9). In the New Testament ministry is not authority over other other believers but rather be granted by God for all to function (Luke 22:25-29).

Finally, to the degree that we follow another high priest, is the degree that we are not following the true leadership of our High Priest in heaven, who is fully able to lead billions of Christians all at the same time.

Why do we need another high priest beside Jesus?