

# **THE PRIESTHOOD OF BAPTIZED BELIEVERS**

**1Pet.2:5-9**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. In both the O.T. and the N.T. we are introduced to the matter of priesthood among God's people, as to its identification, character, and function in God's plan for man.
2. Though there was a priesthood in the O.T. and there is a priesthood in the N.T., they differ widely in several aspects.
3. Even though the N.T. reveals, all baptized believers are priests, in fact, they constitute "an holy priesthood" (1Pet.2:5), "a royal priesthood" (1Pet.2:9), "a kingdom of priests" (Rev.1:6), we still need to understand something of the nature and function of priesthood under the O.T. before we can properly appreciate our function as priest in the N.T. system.
4. Therefore, in this study we shall identify and compare the two, but with emphasis on that of the N.T., i.e., the priesthood of baptized believers.
5. Our plan or order of study is as follows.
  - a. First, we shall survey the meaning of the Jewish priesthood in the O.T.
    - (1) An understanding of the development of that priesthood is crucial to our understanding of several N.T. books and the priesthood set forth therein.
    - (2) In fact, to thoroughly understand N.T. Christianity and its priesthood, one must be able to see how different it is from the priestly character of the Jewish priesthood of the O.T.
  - b. Second, we shall study briefly the high priesthood of Jesus Christ in the N.T. system of faith particularly as it is developed in the book of Hebrews.
    - (1) This, of course, will help explain the nature and function of the priesthood of baptized believers in the N.T. system.
  - c. Thirdly, we shall take note of the priesthood of baptized believers in the N.T. system of faith as taught in the five N.T. passages of 1Pet.2:5; 1Pet.2:9; Rev.1:5,6; Rev.5:9,10; Rev.20:6.

## **II. DISCUSSION**

## A. First, Our Survey Of The Jewish Priesthood Of The O.T. System Under The Law Of Moses

1. The Jewish priesthood was a prominent, vital part of the law of Moses, with the words **priest, priests, and priesthood** being mentioned several hundred times, while Exo.19:4-6 is perhaps a key passage. Cf. Isa.61:6; Lev.20:24; Deut.7:6; Isa.62:12.
2. Of course, most of the some seven hundred reference to **priests** in the O.T. do not refer to the priesthood of **ALL** the Israelites; they refer to the priesthood of **SOME** Israelites who are priests, with the common people coming to God with their sacrifices and offering through the priests by means of the high priest, of whom Aaron was the first.
  - a. This does not minimize the truth that Israel, as a whole, as a nation, was to be a priestly people.
  - b. But it does require a further look at the meaning of priesthood under the law of Moses, as to who the specific priests were, and as to the nature and function of those priests in God's plan for man under the law.
  - c. Meticulous care was given to the establishment, ordination, and even the dress of the select priesthood under the law in Exo.28 and 29, with the entire book of Leviticus being devoted to the role of the priesthood, all of which are filled with rich symbolism about the nature of Israel's God and the purpose of the priesthood under the law.
  - d. Those priests, constituting the priesthood of the O.T., were from the tribe of Levi, and the family of Aaron, the sons of Aaron, all of whom were supported by the tithe required from the other eleven tribes of Israel. Thus it was identified as the Levitical priesthood, Exo.28; Lev.1:8; Heb.7:5-11-14.
3. As to the function of the Levitical priesthood, it involved **intercession** for and **interpretation** and/or **instruction** of the people.
  - a. The priests of the Levitical order functioned in a dual role: they were **mediators** who brought the people to God, and they were **teachers** who brought God to the people.
    - (1) This dual role is set forth clearly in the blessing of Moses upon Levi as recorded in Deut.33:8-11, note esp. V.10.
  - b. That they were interpreters or teachers bringing the people to God is evident from Lev.10:8-11; Deut.24:8; Neh.8:1-13; Jer.18:18; Mal.2:1-7.
    - (1) Their instructions to Israel involved almost every kind.

- (2) On questions of right and wrong.
- (3) Interpreting the law, they distinguished between “the holy and the common, and between the clean and the unclean,” Lev.10:10.
- (4) This included, among other things, what to eat, matters of hygiene, and medical diagnosis, Lev.11-15.
- (5) They taught God’s ordinances and law.
- c. That they were also mediators, especially the high priest, bringing the people, sins and all, to or before Jehovah is also evident:
  - (1) From Exo.28:6-30, where the priestly dress and priestly acts indicated this function.
    - (a) One feature of the priestly dress consisted of two shoulder pieces, on each of which was fixed an onyx stone.
    - (b) On each stone six of the names of the tribes of Israel were inscribed.
    - (c) When the high priest went “before the Lord”, therefore, he symbolically took the people with him (Vv.12,29,30).
    - (d) Thus **one** man entered the holy presence of God on behalf of **all** the people.
  - (2) From the Day of Atonement described in Lev.16, which was not the work of just any priest on any day.
    - (a) For only the high priest could enter the “holy of holies” on this special day of atonement once a year.
    - (b) At which time he made an atonement for his own sins, for the sins of the priests, and for all the people of Israel. Cf. Heb.9:6,7; 51-4.
- 4. The priesthood of the O.T. system was also hereditary.
  - a. Ancestry and sex determined who would be and could be priests under the Levitical priesthood of the O.T.
  - b. Physical birth, not worth, blood, not gift, gave to one the right of priestly function.
  - c. Priests could come from only one tribe, Levi; priests were men only.
- 5. What happened to this system of priesthood?
  - a. It ended when the law or the system under which it operated ended or changed, Heb.7:11,12.

- b. Cf. Mt.5:17,18; Col.2:14-17; 2Cor.3:6-11; Heb.8:6-19 (Jer.31:31-34); Gal.5:4.

**B. UNDER THE N.T. SYSTEM, THE NEW AND BETTER COVENANT, THE GOSPEL SYSTEM, JESUS CHRIST IS OUR HIGH PRIEST, OUR PROPHET, OUR KING, AND OUR SAVIOR.**

1. Heb.1:1-4 summarizes this four-fold office of Jesus Christ. Herein He is portrayed:
  - a. As Prophet, as God's authorized spokesman, through whom God has spoken his final and complete revelation to man, 1:1,2a.
  - b. As Savior, being "appointed heir of all things," 1:2b. Cf. Gal.4:4-7; Rom.8:16,17; Eph.1:3-11.
  - c. As Priest, who has by himself, by his offering of himself as our sin-offering, purged our sins, 1:3b.
  - d. As King, who presently sits enthroned on "the right hand of the Majesty on high," 1:3c. Cf. Ac.2:36.
  
2. However, throughout the book of Hebrews the writer focuses, not on the prophet role or the kingship of Jesus, but on his **priesthood**, i.e., on the fact of his being our **High Priest**.
  - a. "We have a great high priest...Jesus the Son of God," Heb.4:14.
  - b. Jesus was "in all things...made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation (atonement, propitiation) for the sins of the people," Heb.2:17.
    - (1) Note the significance of and the reason why he was made like his brethren "in all things", Heb.2:11-18.
  - c. He is "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession," 3:1.
  - d. He is a "high priest" (who is able to) "be touched (or to sympathize) with the feeling of our infirmities (our weaknesses)," Heb.4:15.
  - e. Outside the Levitical line of priesthood Jesus is a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb.7:11-21), who has opened for us a "new and living way" by means of his being "an high priest over the house of God" (Heb.10:19-22).
  - f. As a result we have "a better hope," which is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (i.e., heaven)" where Jesus our high priest is, Heb.7:19; 6:18-20.

3. Jesus Christ is not only “the Apostle and High Priest of our profession”, but his priesthood is superior to that of the Levitical priests under the law of Moses in different ways.
  - a. As indicated in Heb.4:14-7:28:
    - (1) His superior priesthood is found in the fact that he is both divine and human.
    - (2) His priesthood is superior also because it is not restricted to genealogy or limited by death and the grave. See Heb. 7:24,25.
  - b. As indicated in Heb.9:1-10:18:
    - (1) He offered a superior sacrifice to that of the Levitical priesthood, which had only the blood of bulls and goats, which could not take away sins, 10:1-4.
    - (2) He offered himself. Thus he is both priest and the victim offered. See Heb.9:11,12; 9:22-26; 10:7-14,15-18.

**C. FINALLY, WE TAKE NOTE OF AND STUDY THE PRIESTHOOD OF BAPTIZED BELIEVERS OF THE N.T. SYSTEM, THE FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST.**

1. First, our plan of study is to consider the fact that it is **implicitly** taught in the book of Hebrews.
  - a. While profoundly theological, the book was written for a very practical purpose.
    - (1) It was not the purpose of the book to merely make an ideological comparison between the superiority of Christ over Moses, of the New over the Old, the 2<sup>nd</sup> over the 1<sup>st</sup>, or Christianity over Judaism.
    - (2) But the writer, by making this comparison, exhorts and encourages these believers, who being under great trial of persecution, and tempted to give up the ship of faith, to persevere (2:1; 12:1), to lift their drooping hands and strengthen their weak knees (12:12), and not grow weary or fainthearted (12:3).
    - (3) The writer even describes his epistle as “the (a) word of exhortation,” 13:12.
  - b. A study of the word “therefore” and its equivalents in the book underlies the writer’s intent to exhort to this end, 2:1; 3:1,7; 4:1,11,14-16; 6:1; 9:15; 10:19; 12:1,12; 13:13.

- (1) He is not primarily a theologian in the book; he is pre-eminently a preacher, exhorting them to faithfulness in view of the prevailing situation at the time.
  - c. In view of the superior priesthood and superior sacrifice of their Great High Priest, Hebrews reveals that they as Christians, baptized believers, have strong consolation to fulfill their own calling and to lay hold on the hope set before them, Heb.6:18-20.
  - d. Though Hebrews never refers **explicitly** to the priesthood of baptized believers, the concept of it is **implicit** throughout the epistle.
  - e. Heb.10:19-24 is an example which opens with a “**therefore**” and brings together **implicitly**, but beautifully, both the priesthood of Jesus Christ and the priesthood of believers, with a three-point sermon on the priesthood of believers, and that in view of the “confidence” we have “to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” our high priest. “Therefore”, he says:
    - (1) “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,” V.22.
    - (2) “Let us hold fast the profession (confession) of our faith (hope) without wavering,” V.23. (Cotton Patch translation: “Let us hang on with tooth and toenail to our promising commitment.”)
    - (3) “Let us consider one another to provoke (stir up) unto love and good works,” V.24.
    - (4) “Draw near” “Holy fast” “Stir up” – Priestly work for believers.
  - f. Heb.13:15,16 is another example where the priesthood of believers is **implicitly** taught in the epistle.
2. Secondly, our plan of study is to consider the five specific N.T. passages in 1Pet. and Rev. that **explicitly** teach the doctrine of the priesthood of baptized believers, which are 1Pet.2:5; 1Pet.2:9; Rev.1:5,6; Rev.5:9,10; Rev.20:6.
    - a. First, identification of those who constitute this priesthood is in order. Who are they?
      - (1) The specially ordained? The clergy? The Pope? College of Cardinals? Parish Priests? The local church Pastor? The official church staff of some kind? No!!
      - (2) Those who have been in the church for years? The theologically literate? No!!

- (3) They are:
  - (a) The “living stones” of the “spiritual house” of the Lord, which is the church, 1Pet.2:5.
  - (b) The “you” whom the Lord “hath called out of darkness into his marvelous light,” 1:et.2:9 – thus the saved, the baptized believers.
  - (c) The “us” whom the Lord loved “and washed us from our sins in his own blood,” and who have been “made a kingdom of priests unto God and his Father,” Rev.1:5,6.
    - (ii) But all who are in the kingdom are “born again” (Jno.3:3-5), are “redeemed”, have “forgiveness” of sins (Col.1:12-14).
  - (d) The “us” who have been redeemed to God by the blood of Jesus Christ “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,” and who now reign with him on earth, Rev.5:9,10; 20:6.
- b. Note the two characteristics of the priesthood of believers taught in 1Pet.2.
  - (1) They constitute “an holy priesthood” (1Pet.2:5), and “an holy nation” (1Pet.2:9).
    - (a) These two verses and placed within a larger context, that of 1Pet.1:13 to 2:12, in which Peter appeals to them to remember whose they are and what they are to be and to do as the people of God.
    - (b) Furthermore, their model for their holiness is none other than the Lord himself.
  - (2) Also, baptized believers are a “royal priesthood” (1Pet.2:9), a kingly priesthood, that reign with Christ.
    - (a) Cf. Rev.1:5,6; 5:9,10. See Eph.2:4-6; Col.1:13; 2Tim.2:11,12; Rev.3:21.
    - (b) Being a “kingdom of priests” with him now; believers reign with him now!
    - (c) All baptized believers are both kings and priests, something which was not possible under the O.T., 2Chr.26:18.
- c. Finally, note the vocation, the function, or the work and worship of the believer as a priest.
  - (1) The calling of the priesthood of believers is to worship and work, or to faithfully function in spiritual matters and

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, and to his glory, by Jesus Christ, Rom.12:1,2; Heb.13:15,16; 1Pet.2:5,9; Rev.1:6.

- (2) The priest must have somewhat to offer, Heb.8:3.
- (3) Priests work and worship in offering their bodies a living sacrifice. They relate to God in both work and worship and sacrifice.
- (4) A priest who doesn't work, worship and offer sacrifice is as inconceivable as a doctor who doesn't practice the healing art, or a teacher who doesn't teach, or a brick mason who doesn't lay brick. It is a contradiction of terms.
- (5) Their work, worship and sacrifice are, of course, person, or on an individual level, but also on a congregational level as a collectivity.
- (6) Priesthood implies meeting with other priests for work and worship in presenting our "bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual service."
- (7) The work and sacrifices divinely required of the priesthood of believers involved taking the gospel to the lost both near and far, the lost of the community and of the world.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

1. Remember: Under the O.T. system there was a priestly tribe (Levi), and priestly family (Aaron). But under the N.T. system there is a priestly body (the church made up of bapt. bel., over which Christ is head), a kingdom of priests, over which Jesus Christ, our High Priest, reigns as king. Heb.10:21.
2. With all baptized believers being priests it means:
  - a. There is no other mere human standing between us and free access to God, the Father, in heaven.
  - b. Each and every single bapt. bel. has the same ready, equal access to God the same as every other bapt. bel.
  - c. No one bapt. bel. has an advantage over another in his access to God.
  - d. Both men and women are priests in the N.T. system.
  - e. Both Jews and Gentiles, people of all nations are priests, if bapt. bel.
3. Access to God in our prayers, and in the offering of our sacrifices acceptable to Him, is by an through Jesus Christ, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession.



4. The priesthood of believers does not rule out the existence of Evangelists, Elders, and Deacons in local churches, along with the saints, nor nullify their work as such. But as to the privileges, blessings, work, worship, and sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, they, too, are simply one of the priesthood of believers.
  - a. For “we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another,” Rom.12:4,5. Cf. 1Cor.12:12,13,27; Gal.3:26-29; Mt.23:8-12; Job 32:21,22
  
5. Being priests is not a religious title we wear, but describes what we are, who we are, and what we are expected to be and do.

--credit to and notes from “The Doctrine of The Priesthood of Believers,” by Walter B. Shurden, Convention Press, Nashville, TN, 1987. The Church Training Department, The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.