

Hebrews 5:1-4 ESV (Pg. 582) For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. **2** He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. **3** Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. **4** And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

- I. In our series on the prophet, priest and king so far, we've looked at the the role and function of Old Testament prophets. We saw how their lives and ministries pointed forward to Christ Jesus, who would not only appear as the world's premier Prophet, but One who embodied and personified the Word of God, making perfect intercession for us by his death, and who still intercedes for us before the Father.
 - A. Today, looking at the Old Testament, you'll notice the functions of prophet and priest (as well as king) often overlap, but are still distinct. For example, we'll see that the priest's ministry involved making intercession for the people before God; similar to what the prophets did, but operating differently.
 1. But this was their primary role; to be a mediator between God and the people. They stood as God's human representative before the people, and they presented the people's needs and petitions before the presence of God.
 2. As mediators, this involved blessing the people of God, teaching them God's law and offering animal sacrifices for them so that they could be forgiven of their transgressions, be a part of the congregation, and approach God.
 - B. Before we get into details of what priests did, we have to see who they were. The people of God did not have a specific priesthood that was called and ordained to play a mediatorial role until the law was given at Mount Sinai.
 1. But we see foreshadows of the priestly role from the Bible's earliest history.
 - a) When we talked about the prophets, we saw how Adam played a prophetic role in that the Word of God was revealed to him and he was to guard it, proclaim it (at least to his wife), and obey it. When the serpent came to deceive Eve, he should have intervened for her safety. But Adam failed to steward the Word and stand up in his wife's vulnerable moment.
 - b) Adam also had a kind of priestly role to play. The garden was a temple where he participated in the worship of God. As the Father of the human race, he stood as our representative before God. But he failed in his priestly role as much as he failed in his prophetic one. **Romans 5:12 ESV** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—
 2. The Bible says after Cain killed Abel, human beings began to call on the Name of the Lord. We see this happening in the offering of animal sacrifices. God had shown by killing animals to clothe Adam and Eve with their skins, that blood was required to cover the nakedness and shame of our sin.
 - a) After the flood, Noah offered sacrifices to God. Abraham also built altars and offered sacrifices to God, as did his son, Isaac, and grandson Jacob.
 - b) Job served as a priest for his children. **Job 1:5b ESV** Job would send and consecrate (his sons), 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 children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts."

- II. But it was on Mount Sinai, after he had given the 10 Commandments, that God gave Moses directions for establishing a recognized, ordained priesthood for Israel.
 - A. Hebrews says, “For every high priest **chosen** from among men...”. By using the word “chosen”, it is understood that not just anybody could apply for the job.
 1. Only the descendants of Aaron (Moses’ brother) could be part of the priesthood. Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16) because they were offended by this exclusivity. “*You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?*”
 2. But the Lord proved that he had chosen Moses and Aaron when He caused the ground to open beneath the rebels’ feet and swallow them up alive.
 - a) This is why the writer of Hebrews says “**And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was**”.
 - b) We call the priesthood God established in his law for Israel the “Aaronic priesthood”, because God ordained only Aaron’s family (from Levi) for it.
 - B. There were many things about the priests that made them distinct among the people besides being selected from the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron.
 1. Their ordination (Lev. 8) included being washed. This was not just a bath taken for hygienic purposes, it was a symbolic washing (a baptism) to set them apart as holy and separated to the service of the Lord and his people.
 2. Next, they were dressed in special garments that made them stand out from the others. Aaron (the high priest) wore vestments more elaborate and highly symbolic than his sons, which are described in Exodus 28.
 - a) Linen undergarments: **Exodus 28:43 ESV and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die.** This was also emphatic of their holiness. Adam and Eve had to be covered after they sinned, and the priests’ shame couldn’t be exposed as they ministered either, but must be covered by God’s righteousness.
 - b) Linen ephod (apron with shoulder straps): The ephod had two onyx stones attached, one on each shoulder, that had engraved the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (6 on each). This symbolized that the priest bore the burden of the whole congregation’s sins and needs on his shoulders.
 - c) Breast-piece: Over his heart, the high priest wore a beautiful breast-piece with 12 precious stones embedded into it; one for each of the tribes of Israel. He was not only bear the weight of the people on his shoulders, but he would also carry them close to his heart, loving them. He was to love them individually, not just as a nation (as the ephod showed) The breast-piece held the Urim and Thummim, stones with which God made his will known. This proximity to his heart of a decision-making apparatus showed that the priest was to trust the Lord his God entirely.
 - d) Turban: The Turban was emblematic of the priest’s standing as Israel’s mediator between God’s holiness and the people's sinfulness. It had a golden plate attached to the front with the words “Holy to the Lord”. As people appeared before the priest to consecrate their sacrifices, the priest would be able to carry away their guilt in the Name of the Lord.

- C. The priest had be arrayed in these garments in order to perform their ordained functions for the people and before the Lord. Once properly dressed, a specially-formulated anointing oil was poured on Aaron's head (not just dabbed with a finger). The sweet fragrance followed him everywhere he went.
1. Anointing with oil always signifies the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, prophets, priests and kings were anointed for service.
 2. The idea was that the priests were not empowered to minister by the law or their calling only, but by the nearness and empowering of the Spirit of God.
- D. Three sacrifices were then made to prepare the priests for service.
1. First, a bull was offered as a sin offering, making substitutionary atonement for the sins of the priests. Its blood was sprinkled on the altar in order to cleanse it for God's purposes to be carried out on it by sinful, faltering men.
 2. Next, an offered ram was wholly consumed by fire, signifying that the priests are now wholly God's. These two offerings are what the writer of Hebrews referred to when he said: **"(the priest) himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people"**. He must be cleansed in order to cleanse.
 3. Lastly, another ram was offered for their ordination. Instead of sprinkling the altar, its blood is placed on the right earlobe, thumb, and big toe of the priest (the right side denotes strength). This shows that since the priest is completely God's, having been purchased with the blood of an innocent animal sacrifice, he is now ready to listen to God, work for God, and walk in God's ways. The ceremony ends with a meal, showing the covenantal fellowship bond existing between God and the priests he has chosen.
- E. Now we can look into what the priests did while operating in their ministries. Hebrews says they are **"appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins"**. This relates to three main activities:
1. The priests were to teach God's law to the people. **Malachi 2:7 ESV For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.**
 2. The priests were to bless the people. As God's human representatives, they must do what God does - bless his creation. In the garden of Eden, before God gave any command to Adam and Eve, we are told he blessed them.
 - a) Although teaching the law was important, the priests were to bless the children of Israel, so they would understand the compassionate nature of the God they were to obey, and could love him, serving him gladly.
 - b) This important duty was designed to connect the people to God intimately. He said that his blessing was to "put his name" on the people.
 3. The priests were to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. This was their most important intercessory duty. There were 5 unique types of sacrifices the people offered to God, and the priests were know the differences in the regulations concerning each one of these.
 - a) Three of these offerings (burnt, sin and guilt offerings) were specifically designed to make atonement for the people. The gruesomeness of them reminded people of the wages of sin and the costliness of forgiveness.

- b) This was clear in the requirement that the one offering the animal was to place his hand on the beast's head. It was understood that an innocent animal must die in exchange for the life of a guilty human being.
- III. The most important sacrifice of the year happened on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest would go alone into the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle (later the Temple) to make atonement through sacrifice for the people.
- A. He went alone, the only one before God on the people's behalf. What a sobering moment as he stood before the Mercy Seat, pleading pardon for a stubborn people who had nothing to offer but animal's blood. Would it be accepted?
1. In that moment, God Himself would appear in a cloud over the mercy seat. When the priest went inside, he placed incense on the fire so that the smoke would cover the mercy seat, preventing him from seeing God in his holiness.
 2. He didn't wear his High Priestly vestments, but rather simple linen garments and a linen turban. This represented the humility that is always appropriate when we stand before God.
- B. After offering a bull for his own sins and the sins of his family, two goats were brought forward. One would be a sacrifice for the people. The priest would lay hands on the other one and confess over it the sins of the people. It was then led into the wilderness and set free, carrying all of the sins of the people with it, never to be seen again. This goat was called the scapegoat.
- IV. It would be impossible to calculate how much animal blood was spilled in Israel over the centuries. Animal sacrifice was a covering, and not a full atonement; meaning they could never take away sins, only cover them, making mercy possible.
- A. **Hebrews 10:1 ESV** For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. **4** For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
1. Blood offered on the Day of Atonement year after year was a nagging reminder that our moral engine light was on. Something was wrong. If sacrifice had been a lasting solution, we would not have kept offering them.
 2. The writer of Hebrews shows us that while sacrifices were important for the purpose they were given, they failed to deal with our sin permanently.
- B. We didn't ultimately need more faithful administration of the Aaronic Priesthood, we needed a better sacrifice. Jesus was that sacrifice. **Hebrews 9:12 ESV** He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.
1. Christ died on a cross so that he would be the final sacrifice; that his blood would be the last offered; that he would not just cover our sins so we could be temporarily acceptable to God, but so our sins would be fully removed.
 2. **Psalms 103:12 ESV** as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. East to west is a continual line. You never reach east by traveling west. That's how far God removes our sin by Christ Jesus.

- C. It is also glorious to consider that Christ is not only the perfect sacrifice, but the great High Priest who offers that sacrifice, which is a reality we'll explore next week, if God is willing.
- V. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
- VI. **Benediction: Numbers 6:24 ESV** The Lord bless you and keep you; **25** the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; **26** the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (In the Name of the Father, In the Name of the Son, In the Name of the Holy Spirit, Amen)