

Exploring Jesus' High Priestly Identity

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Abstract

This article explores Jesus' high priestly identity within Christian theology, focusing on its significance in the Old Testament priesthood. The role of the high priest was central to the religious and cultural life of the ancient Jewish community, serving as an intermediary between God and the people. The theological and historical controversy about Jesus' position as high priest is one of the main issues discussed. The paper examines theological, historical and biblical data to explore this issue thoroughly. The research question is: What are the theological implications of Jesus' identity as the High Priest? The research method involves biblical exegesis, historical analysis, and theological reflection. The study clarifies the complex relationship between the role of Jesus and the conventional information about the high priest using the Old Testament image of the high priest and the Jewish religious framework and the New Testament depiction of Jesus in the context of the priesthood. The study also considers how Christian theology, which understands redemption, reconciliation, and mediation, might be affected by Jesus' eventual elevation to the rank of high priest. The research results reveal the profound implications of Jesus' identity as the High Priest regarding its continuity with the Old Testament priesthood and its transformative impact on the Christian understanding of salvation and redemption. In conclusion, this exploration of Jesus' high priestly identity promises to enrich our understanding of the depth and significance of Christ's redemptive work.

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Keywords: High Priest, Christian Theology, Theological Interpretation

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas identitas Yesus sebagai imam besar dalam teologi Kristen, dengan fokus pada signifikansinya dalam imamat Perjanjian Lama. Peran imam besar merupakan hal yang penting dalam kehidupan keagamaan dan budaya masyarakat Yahudi kuno, yang berfungsi sebagai perantara antara Tuhan dan umat. Kontroversi teologis dan historis tentang posisi Yesus sebagai imam besar merupakan salah satu isu utama yang dibahas. Makalah ini meneliti data teologis, historis, dan alkitabiah untuk membahas isu ini secara menyeluruh. Pertanyaan penelitiannya adalah: Apa implikasi teologis dari identitas Yesus sebagai Imam Besar? Metode penelitian ini melibatkan penafsiran al-kitab, analisis historis, dan refleksi teologis. Studi ini mengklarifikasi hubungan yang kompleks antara peran Yesus dan informasi konvensional tentang imam besar dengan menggunakan gambaran imam besar dalam Perjanjian Lama dan kerangka keagamaan Yahudi serta penggambaran Yesus dalam Perjanjian Baru dalam konteks imamat. Studi ini juga mempertimbangkan bagaimana teologi Kristen, yang memahami penebusan, rekonsiliasi, dan mediasi, dapat dipengaruhi oleh kenaikan jabatan Yesus sebagai imam besar pada akhirnya. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkap implikasi mendalam dari identitas Yesus sebagai Imam Besar, baik dalam hal kesinambungannya dengan imamat Perjanjian Lama maupun dampak transformatifnya pada pemahaman Kristen tentang keselamatan dan penebusan. Sebagai kesimpulan, eksplorasi identitas imam besar Yesus ini menjanjikan untuk memperkaya pemahaman kita tentang kedalaman dan signifikansi karya penebusan Kristus.

Kata Kunci: Imam Besar, Teologi Kristen, Interpretasi Teologis

Introduction

The term "High Priest," synonymous with "Servant of God," is primarily used in Hebrews to refer to Jesus' earthly ministry.¹

¹ Chi Ming Yam, *Jesus's Eternal Sonship, Kingship, and High Priesthood in Hebrews*. Dallas Theological Seminary, 2018

Theories based on passages such as Genesis 14:18 and Psalm 110:4 in late Judaism started to elevate the Messianic King to a high priest. Oscar Cullmann explains that the belief in an eschatological high priest who would transform Israel's religious practices stemmed from recognising the lowly status of the high-priestly position in Greco-Roman Judaism. Although Jesus did not take on the title directly, it is believed that He rejected the official cult and priesthood of His day (Mt 12:6; Mk 14:58; John 2:19). Jesus also alludes to Psalm 110 about the idea of the Messiah (Mk 12:35), therefore inadvertently relating it to Himself. The backdrop of His final testimony before the High Priest (Mk 14:62) suggests that He saw it as His mission to perfect the priesthood. Oscar Cullmann's classic *New Testament Christology* states that "Hebrews' development of the High Priest concept offers a full Christology" that "includes all the three fundamental aspects of Jesus' work." "The only comprehensive Christology of the High Priest in the New Testament is the book of Hebrews." As in the rest of the New Testament, Christology in Hebrews is based on identifying Jesus and his actions.

The best way to understand the distinctive emphasis of Hebrews' Christology is to look at this relationship between Christ's person and work. Regarding the notion of Christ's priesthood, the current study could not systematically classify how this doctrine has been interpreted in Christian theology. This indicates that the labels and classifications listed below attempt to list the key theological tenets of Christ's priesthood systematically. In the Old Testament, the functions of the high priest and priest seemed to have changed depending on the political climate and the demands of the times. Their tasks were significantly more complex, even though the most well-known ones were sacrifice, prayer, and the high priest's entry into the Holy of Holies on the Great Day of Atonement on behalf of the people.

The roles of the priesthood, whether Christ was a priest or if we are priests, are mentioned in Hebrews, despite references to Jesus as the "high priest" in Johannine's writings.² Just like with Jesus, the disciples are not given the title "Priest" in the Gospels or Pauline writings, nor are they depicted carrying a priestly role. Jesus did not

² Nicholas Perrin, "Jesus as Priest in the Gospels." *SBJT* 22, no. 2 (2018): 81-99.

mention the priesthood, and his followers did not attempt to establish one. Despite the abundance of priestly imagery in the Letter to the Hebrews, the author does not employ "priesthood" as a metaphor for the Church. All allusions to "priest," "high priest," and "priesthood" allude to Jesus Christ or the Jewish order, both historical and contemporary.

Hebrews cannot be the basis for our calling ourselves "priests." According to the author of Hebrews, Jesus belongs to this order of priests; according to Hebrews 7:11–17, His priesthood is based on authority rather than ancestry and is also kingly. As a result, the priesthood of Jesus establishes a new way of life: "For as the priesthood changes, the law also must change" (Hebrews 7:12). A new covenant is in force, with Jesus serving as its High Priest.

The study of Jesus' high priestly identity is a critical area of research in Christian theology and biblical studies. It is crucial to understand the significance of his sacrificial death and his ongoing intercessory work on behalf of believers. This research is important because it is central to Christian soteriology and understanding of salvation, deeply rooted in the New Testament, particularly in the book of Hebrews. This understanding has profound implications for Christian belief and practice, shaping how believers approach God and understand Jesus Christ's redemptive work.

This research's central problem is exploring the biblical and theological foundations of Jesus' high priestly identity. This involves delving into relevant biblical passages, particularly in the book of Hebrews and examining the Old Testament background of the high priesthood to establish a comprehensive understanding of how Jesus fulfils and transcends the traditional role of the high priest.

The research question involves investigating the implications of Jesus' high priestly ministry for contemporary Christian faith and practice, such as the practical significance of Jesus' intercessory work and the believer's access to God through him as the ultimate high priest. The primary objectives of researching Jesus' high priestly identity include:

1. Exegetical Analysis: Conduct a thorough study of relevant biblical passages, particularly in the book of Hebrews, to discern the

language, imagery, and theological motifs associated with Jesus' high priestly role.

2. Historical and Cultural Context: Investigating the historical and cultural context of the Jewish priesthood in the Second Temple period to grasp the significance of Jesus' role as the high priest within his ministry.
3. Theological Implications: Exploring the theological implications of Jesus' high priestly ministry for Christian doctrine, particularly about atonement, intercession, and the believer's relationship with God.

This study explores Jesus' high priestly identity, a profound theological subject requiring a multidisciplinary approach incorporating historical, biblical, and theological perspectives. The research methodology is primarily qualitative and hermeneutical, aiming to uncover the profound significance of Jesus' role as a high priest within the context of the New Testament and its broader historical and cultural background. The historical context of the concept of high priesthood, particularly within the Jewish tradition, is examined by examining ancient Jewish texts such as the Torah, Talmud, and other relevant sources. This allows for a deeper understanding of societal expectations, rituals, and responsibilities associated with this esteemed position.

The biblical analysis is central to the research methodology, examining passages from the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Book of Hebrews. These offer profound insights into the significance of Jesus' role as the ultimate high priest. Through systematic exegesis of these scriptures, the theological implications of Jesus' priesthood and its implications for Christian doctrine and praxis are explored. A comparative analysis with other religious and historical perspectives on the priesthood is also integral to the research methodology, examining parallels and divergences between Jesus' high priesthood and other religious traditions. A hermeneutical framework guides the interpretation of biblical and historical sources, ensuring a nuanced and contextually sensitive approach to understanding Jesus' high priestly identity.

An Exposition of Hebrews 7:26–28

The primary focus of the Book of Hebrews is the author's frequent discussion of Jesus Christ's High Priesthood³. According to Schreiner, the author of Hebrews could not have imagined a religion apart from the priesthood. According to Brooke Westcott, all major world religions understand the priesthood similarly⁴. "The person through whom and by whose ministry people draw near to God" is the definition of a priest. In Denney's words, "Men are sinners, and they cannot approach near to God at all without some type of mediation."

Hebrews' author works under the presumption that everyone is a sinner and that the only way for anybody to approach God is via a priest⁵. This profound truth—that is, that Jesus Christ is the High Priest of Christians—is where the resources of strength, consolation, forgiveness, and care are hidden. Hebrews 7:11–25 authors made the case that Christ's priesthood is more significant than Aaron's in the Old Testament⁶. He claimed it is superior because it is founded on God's pledge (vv. 20–22).

Furthermore, it is better because it lasts forever (vv. 23–25). Verses 26–28 are referred to as "a great nodal point" in the Epistle's argument by Paul Ellingworth. Then, in verses 26–28, he added one more argument to wrap up everything he had been saying. "Because Jesus is the new priest, the new priesthood is superior"⁷. The following section (8:1–10:18), in which the author explains Christ's sacrifice and priestly service, is similarly introduced in verses 26–28. "A grand statement describing Jesus' character, achievement, and standing as high priest."⁸

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*. Vol. 36. B&H Publishing Group, 2015.

⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: the Greek text with notes and essays*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001, 138

⁵ John W. Tweeddale, *John Owen and Hebrews: the foundation of biblical interpretation*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

⁶ Harold W. Attridge, "The Epistle to the Hebrews. (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)." (2014): 708–710.

⁷ John Brown, *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2008.

⁸ Robert A. Butterfield, *Making Sense of the Hebrew Bible*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016.

The description of the Melchizedek High Priest's lofty moral qualities and the transcending realm of existence, as well as the excellence of His high-priestly labour, is "a victorious cry, in which epithets are heaped upon epithets."⁹ Hering described the piece as "a rhapsody," a sentimental or high poem.¹⁰ Perhaps most importantly of all, verses 26–28 are described as "a hymn to the High Priest as though an outburst of the joy of humanity which has found the high priest qualified to understand its weaknesses and to come to its aid: so far above us and so near us; himself in need of no cleansing and able to cleanse and expiate all our guilt; so different from the Leviticus Priests and so much more effective in the function of his priestly mediation."

His Qualifications [V. 26]

The opening line of verse 26 expresses the author's concern for his readers. He desired to adapt his lessons to their circumstances. They needed precisely "such a high priest," the one he would describe in lines 26–28 and the one he detailed in verses 11–25. Jesus is the only one they need to look to for all their priestly requirements. "Having such a high priest was fitting for us." "Fitting" is an imperfect indicative active of "επρεπεν," emphasising that God the Father should endure pain to perfect the author of salvation.¹¹ Jesus' resources meet the needs of Christians, serving as the perfect priest for their daily problems. The term "us" refers to Christ's intercessory ministry, as believers require His assistance in addressing the diverse demands of believers, making him the ideal priest for this purpose.

The eminent Puritan scholar and pastor John Owen identified eight such demands. People must first have a priest who can atone for their misdeeds (2:17). To serve God, people also require someone who can clear their consciences (9:14). Thirdly, they require someone who can help them gain God's acceptance (10:19). Fourthly, for Christians to live a life of faith, worship, and obedience, they require someone who can dispense God's grace to them (13:15, 21). Fifth,

⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *The Old Testament: It is Background, Growth, and Content*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019.

¹⁰ Jean Hering, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010.

¹¹ Peterson, David. *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Vol. 47. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Christians require support and consolation during their hardships, temptations, and suffering (2:17–18; 4:15–16). Sixth, they require a guardian to keep them safe from transgressions and threats that could destroy them (7:25). Seventhly, they require someone consistently available to answer their cries for assistance (2:18). Eighthly, they require a lifelong companion who will guarantee their ultimate salvation (7:25).

His Present State

The following two traits of Jesus are related to His current heavenly status. He is first described as being "removed from sinners." For two reasons, some people disagree with this viewpoint. Some claim that because Jesus was sinless, He did not need to be elevated to be cleansed.¹² However, the language states that they are "separated from sinners," not "separated from sins".¹³ The Epistle emphasises His proximity to sinners rather than His estrangement from them. The Epistle emphasises Christ's current session in heaven and His proximity to His people. Another interpretation of the phrase "separated from sinners" holds that Christ's isolation was morally justified.

This interpretation takes the phrase with the one that comes before it, "Holy, Innocent, and undefiled." The perfect participle indicates the Incarnation and the perpetual state of Jesus' embodied sinlessness. The word participle refers to the moment of Jesus' ascension when His life among sinners ended. This third perspective holds that Christ's separation is both moral and latitudinal. For Christians, this knowledge has enormous practical implications. All the confines of space and time have been subordinated to the Lord Jesus. He is not a character from history who is stuck in the past. He is constantly available and in the current moment for His people. "If He were only a historical character who was captured and imprisoned by death, He could not serve as our modern-day high priest in mediation."

¹² Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation*. Vol. 36. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

¹³ Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Volume 2. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005.

The statement addresses key theological concepts fundamental to Christian belief, especially concerning the nature of Jesus Christ and His relationship to time, space, and humanity. The assertion that "all the confines of space and time have been subordinated to the Lord Jesus" indicates that Jesus surpasses the constraints of the physical universe. In Christian theology, this indicates that Jesus, as God, exists beyond time constraints. This enables His presence with believers to be personal and immediate, irrespective of time or location. The statement differentiates between Jesus as a historical figure and the belief in His eternal presence. Although He existed in history around 2,000 years ago, Christians maintain that He is currently alive and actively engaged in the lives of believers. This is crucial for comprehending His function as a mediator between God and humanity. In Christian theology, Jesus is frequently identified as the High Priest. This role originates from the Old Testament, in which priests served as intermediaries between God and the populace. The claim posits that if Jesus were solely a historical figure constrained by mortality, He would be incapable of fulfilling this eternal role. His resurrection and continuous presence facilitate His ongoing mediation for believers. The concept of subordination in this context does not suggest that external agents placed restrictions on Jesus. This indicates that through His divine authority and resurrection, He has transcended the limitations of creation. This reflects the Christian perspective on divine sovereignty, wherein God arranges all events to fulfil His purposes and benefit humanity. Christians believe that Jesus is the Creator of all entities, as evidenced in passages such as John 1:3. The relationship between the Creator and creation is intricate. God, including Jesus as part of the Trinity, holds sovereignty over all; however, the created order functions within the parameters of time and space. The concept of subordination indicates that, although God is the creator of the universe, He selectively engages with it to manifest His nature and purpose.

The Finality of Jesus' Work [V. 27]

This is demonstrated by the author's comprehensive summary of the high priest's duties in verse 27. He mentioned the yearly Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The high priest presented a

young bull and, metaphorically, transferred his sins to it as the festival's significant events got underway. Essentially, what he said was, "O Lord! I erred in my decision. I have done something wrong. I have disobeyed You in the past. Oh Lord, me and my home! Please pardon me for all of my mistakes, wrongdoings, and faults. The high priest's confession of crimes began the most important Leviticus ritual! After completing this task, the high priest would sacrifice the bullock (v. 11). The priest would take two goats after the bull was sacrificed, offering one as a sacrifice and confessing the nation's sins over the other (vv. 15, 21). The primary idea is that, like priests in all other religions, the priests of the Old Testament (i.e., the priests chosen by God) were sinners. The author's argument appears to be that Jesus does not need to perform the daily act of offering sacrifices for the people and Himself, as the Leviticus Priests did. In the book of Hebrews, the author emphasises the superiority of Jesus as the High Priest compared to the Levitical priests. The argument is built around Jesus' unique qualifications and the finality of His sacrificial work. The description of the high priest's duties during the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) highlights several key points: The high priest had to perform sacrifices annually to atone for his sins and the people's sins (as outlined in Leviticus 16). This was a repetitive and ongoing ritual. The Levitical priests were sinners, requiring them to sacrifice for their sins before mediating for others. This underscores the imperfection of the old system. The argument in Hebrews, particularly in verse 27, posits that, Unlike the Levitical priests, Jesus does not need to offer sacrifices daily for Himself and the people because He is sinless. His one-time sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to atone for all sins. Jesus' sacrificial death is seen as complete and final. He does not need to repeat the act, as His offering of Himself was perfect and fully satisfied the requirements of God's justice. The implications of this argument are profound: Believers can have confidence in their salvation because Jesus' sacrifice does not need to be repeated. It is a finished work. Because of His sacrifice, believers can approach God directly without needing an earthly priest, reflecting the New Covenant's transformative nature. In summary, the argument about the finality of Jesus' work in Hebrews 7:27 derives from the contrast between the ongoing sacrificial duties

of the Levitical priests and the singular, all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus. The author of Hebrews illustrates that Jesus fulfils and surpasses the old covenant system, establishing a new, definitive means of atonement and relationship with God.

The Sufficiency of His Offering

In contrast to the Leviticus Priests' ceaseless repeating of sacrifices, Jesus presented a single sacrifice that is given "once and for all" (NASB). "once for all" is among the Epistle's most significant phrases. It implies the specificity, oneness, or singularity of Christ's death. It is never necessary to repeat the one sacrifice that Jesus made on behalf of God (10:12–14). Jesus offered "Himself," so His sacrifice never needs to be repeated. Jesus fulfilled the dual roles of victim and priest, sacrificer and sacrifice. There is no need to make that one sacrifice twice or add anything. When the Prophet Isaiah described the Suffering Servant, he pictured this sacrifice as one who "would render Himself as a guilt offering" (Isa. 53:10; see also Lev. 5:6–10; 7:1–10). According to Romans 8:3, He is "an offering for sin." The Apostle Paul stated that God created Christ "to be sin for us" in 2 Corinthians 5:21. This proves the same conclusion. Jesus claimed that He offered His life "a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). All of these verses use substitutionary terminology; that is, just as the goat and the bullock died on the Day of Atonement in place of the people and the high priest, so too did Jesus Christ die to atone for sins, that is, in their place. Sinners might confess their transgressions to Jesus, who died in their place, just as the Leviticus High Priest confessed his sins over the bullock.

The Superiority of Jesus' Priesthood [V. 28]

The author described the significant distinction between the two priesthoods in verse 28. First, a divine oath forms the foundation of Jesus' priesthood. Long after the Law of Moses was revealed, the oath of Psalm 110:4 was given. How could an oath to institute a new priesthood have been necessary if the Levitical priesthood had been successful? The chronology indicates that the Old Testament

priesthood was ineffectual.¹⁴ God's oath also informs the reader that Jesus' priesthood is assured. The efficacy of Christ's work has been affirmed by God the Father. The second distinction can be observed in the priests' character or quality. The previous priests were just guys. Since the new priest is the Son of God, he possesses all of God's attributes. The plural implies that the Old Priests were mortal, whereas the New Priest is the everlasting Son of God, in contrast to feeble humanity. The perfect participle "made perfect" examines the humanity of Jesus. It does not imply that He underwent moral development or correction.

The perfection of Christ is described in three different ways in Hebrews. First, there is the element of ceremony. "To perfect" refers to "establish in office" or "consecrate".¹⁵ And then there is the intimate element. Jesus was "made full," He endured life's hardships to understand what it was like to fulfil the role of the Lord's servant through to the very end on a human level (2:10; 5:8).¹⁶ The official or vocational aspect comes in third. The Cross "qualified" Him to be the Savior (2:9–11), and these experiences "qualified" Him to be a sympathetic High Priest (2:17–18, 4:15–16).

The High Priest is the ideal figure in Judaism

The role of the High Priest is fundamentally Jewish. Judaism contains remnants of a relationship between the High Priest and the Messiah-king. The character of Melchizedek first piqued the Jewish people's interest. The early Christians frequently used Psalm 110:4, which states, "You are a priest forever after the order to Melchizedek." The psalm speaks directly to the king, to whom the high priestly duties of this exalted order are bestowed. It requires the king's enthronement ceremony as an external framework. Similar to how the enigmatic monarch of Canaan's past served as a priest, the new monarch will likewise carry out a priestly role; this role is significantly elevated above any actual priesthood and is eternal

¹⁴ Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation*. Vol. 36. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

¹⁵ Robert Daniel Bell, *The theological messages of the Old Testament books*. Bob Jones Univ. Press, 2010.

¹⁶ Porter, Stanley E., Jeffrey T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O'Donnell. *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek*. Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010.

rather than transient. If Psalm 110 associates monarchy with a perfect priesthood, the ancient East was well acquainted with this idea. The foundation of messianism is the concept of kingship, which is the impetus for a messianic interpretation of the High Priest character. When Jesus used Psalm 110 in Mark 12:35 to demonstrate the difficulties surrounding the Messiah's Davidic sonship, He assumed that the king mentioned in the Psalm—the monarch who serves as a priest forever following Melchizedek's order—is the Messiah.

Psalm 110 must have been interpreted messianically at the time of Jesus, and there must also have been theories in Judaism linking Melchizedek—if not the Messiah, then at least other eschatological figures—with the prophet.¹⁷ ¹⁸ The eschatological utilisation of the priest-king notion in Jewish history is implied by the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews and subsequent patristic attempts to identify Melchizedek as the model for Christ. Beside Elijah, on his own, is an eschatological priest dressed as Kohen Zedek, the Priest of Righteousness. Philo refers to Melchizedek as the "Priest of God" and recognises him as the Logos. It is possible that Gnostic and older Jewish themes were blended into the Gnostic-Christian Melchizedek theories of the Church Fathers.¹⁹ Ernst Kasemann is correct when he suggests that the Epistle to the Hebrews contains a presumption about Melchizedek that is partially Jewish and partially Christian-Gnostic. He draws attention to the fact that this theory links the High Priest to characters from the beginning and end of time, including Shem, Adam, the Archangel Michael, the Original Man, and Metatron.²⁰

The High Priest is the appropriate intermediary between God and his people, and as such, he took a position of divine grandeur from the first, which bound the Jewish conception of the priest. Within a cultic framework, Judaism had a man in the High Priest

¹⁷ John J. Collins, "The Royal Psalms and Eschatological Messianism." In *Aux origines des messianismes Juifs*, pp. 73-89. Brill, 2013.

¹⁸ Matthew H. Emadi, *The Royal Priest: Psalm 110 in Biblical Theology*. Vol. 60. InterVarsity Press, 2022.

¹⁹ Moshe Reiss, "The Melchizedek Traditions." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 26, no. 2 (2012): 259–265.

²⁰ Ernst Kasemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002.

who could meet the people's current need for divine mediation. We conclude that Judaism knew of an ideal priest who, as the one faithful priest, was to fulfil all the requirements of the Jewish priesthood in the end days. To bring the image of the Messiah—the ideal High Priest of the end times—closer, this hope also incorporated the idea of a priest.

Jesus and the Idea of the High Priest

Jesus' criticism of the contemporary priesthood does not preclude His ability to embrace the concept of the High Priest in His mission. On the contrary, the critique of the existing priesthood and the belief in an ideal priesthood are interrelated within the context of Second Temple Judaism. Psalm 110, which designates the monarch as a High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek," elevates this figure above the typical empirical priesthood, positioning Him almost in opposition. This suggests that Jesus likely held a negative view of the traditional high priestly office, particularly given the corruption he witnessed among the Sadducees and other priestly groups. While the Gospels depict Jesus primarily in conflict with the Pharisees, it is crucial to acknowledge that the adversaries seeking His death were predominantly from priestly circles, as evidenced by John 11:47. This historical context does not imply that Jesus rejected the notion of the High Priest outright; instead, it suggests that His critical stance towards the priesthood informed His understanding of what the High Priest should represent. Psalm 110, which is frequently referenced in the New Testament, particularly by Jesus, illustrates this tension. In Mark 12:35, Jesus engages with the psalm to discuss the identity of the Messiah, referred to as the "Son of David." While some scholars debate whether Jesus is explicitly referring to Himself or speaking about the Messiah in general, His interpretation of the psalm implies a self-awareness of His role as the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. If we accept that Jesus identifies Himself within this psalm, He perceives His mission as fulfilling the role of the faithful High Priest. This is further emphasised in Mark 14:62, where He states, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." This statement integrates references from Psalm 110 and Daniel 7, reinforcing His identity as a heavenly figure. The phrase "sitting at

the right hand" aligns with the concept of a priest-king, reminiscent of Melchizedek's unique position. Thus, when Jesus stands before the Jewish High Priest, He asserts His identity not as an earthly Messiah but as the heavenly Son of Man and High Priest. This distinction highlights His role as one who transcends the limitations of the earthly priesthood, embodying a divine authority that offers a new understanding of mediation between God and humanity.

Why Mention the Heavenly High Priest?

The designation of Jesus as a Heavenly High Priest at the end of this sub-chapter serves several purposes:

Transcendence of Earthly Limitations: By identifying Jesus as a Heavenly High Priest, the text underscores His authority beyond the earthly priesthood, which was marked by imperfection and repetitiveness. This emphasises that His sacrifice and intercession are eternal and not bound by the cyclical nature of the Levitical system.

Fulfilment of Prophecy: The mention of His heavenly role aligns with the prophetic expectations of a messianic figure who would reign as king and serve as the ultimate mediator. This dual role is essential for understanding the completeness of Jesus' mission.

Eschatological Significance: The concept of a Heavenly High Priest has implications for eschatology, suggesting that Jesus' role extends into the future, particularly concerning His return and final judgment. This positions Him as an active participant in God's ongoing plan for redemption.

Even though Jesus did not align Himself with the earthly priesthood, He is still regarded as a High Priest for several reasons:

Ideal vs. Empirical: Criticizing the existing priesthood does not negate the validity of the High Priest concept. Instead, it highlights the need for a perfect mediator. Jesus embodies this ideal, fulfilling the requirements of a High Priest by offering Himself as the ultimate sacrifice.

Redefinition of Priesthood: Jesus redefines what it means to be a priest. His role is not limited to rituals but involves a personal relationship with God that invites all believers into direct communion with the divine. This democratisation of access to God is a central theme in the New Testament.

Intercessory Role: As a High Priest, Jesus intercedes on behalf of humanity. His heavenly position allows Him to advocate for believers, assuring them of their acceptance before God. This role is foundational for understanding Christian salvation.

The novelty of this research lies in exploring the dual identity of Jesus as both a critic of the existing priesthood and the embodiment of a higher priestly order. Key themes to consider include:

The Interplay of Critique and Idealism: The relationship between Jesus' disapproval of the empirical priesthood and His fulfilment of the ideal priesthood illustrates a significant theological shift from the old covenant to the new. This dynamic showcases Jesus as a transformative figure who challenges established norms.

Melchizedek's Significance: The reference to Melchizedek emphasises the uniqueness of Jesus' priesthood. Unlike the descendants of Levi, Melchizedek's priesthood is characterised by eternal significance. This connection suggests that Jesus' priestly role transcends time and ritual.

Eternal Implications: Jesus' identification as a Heavenly High Priest carries eternal implications for believers. It reinforces the assurance of salvation and the promise of eternal life through His mediating work.

In summary, while Jesus critiqued the earthly priesthood, He simultaneously fulfils the role of the ideal High Priest. This duality enriches our understanding of His mission, emphasising the transformative nature of His sacrifice and the establishment of a new covenant. The exploration of these themes reveals the depth of Jesus' identity and the theological significance of His role as High Priest, both in the context of His time and for future generations of believers.

Jesus as the High Priest in early Christianity

The Old Testament's account of salvation is strongly tied to the Hebrews' conception of the High Priest, which indicates the New Testament's whole thought process. Christ replaces the temple and fulfils all the roles of the Old Testament priesthood. With his arrival, the Old Covenant priest becomes unnecessary. The entire cultic evolution of the chosen people is summed up in the person of Christ.

Among the several Christological perspectives, the High Priest notion best captures the New Testament's conception of Jesus. The fact that this concept considers all three facets of Jesus' work and explains how the three relate to each other in a way that aligns with the entirety of early Christian thought is noteworthy. While Jesus' earthly sacrifice remains the centre of the high priestly work, the current mediation office specialises in the work of the risen Lord, which is the aspect the Church was most interested in. Although Psalm 110 was especially preferred by early Christians to be applied to Jesus, it is probably not required to conclude that one of these poems is more important than the other.

Conclusion

The study of Jesus' high priestly identity is a significant aspect of Christian theology, rooted in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, high priests served as mediators between God and the people, offering sacrifices for sin atonement. The book of Hebrews highlights the superiority of Jesus' priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. Jesus' high priestly identity is centred on his perfection, allowing him to empathise with human weaknesses and offer the ultimate sacrifice for humanity's redemption. This understanding shapes Christian soteriology, emphasising the exclusive sufficiency of Christ's atoning work. Jesus' high priestly identity encourages believers to approach God confidently and boldly, knowing that Jesus intercedes. This deep sense of assurance and hope in the Christian life is anchored in the unwavering intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ. The scriptural texts assert that Jesus uniquely fulfils the role of a high priest, establishing a new agreement and offering eternal redemption to those who believe in Him.

Jesus' high priestly identity also underscores empathy and understanding, as He can empathise with human weaknesses due to his experience on earth without sin. This understanding encourages believers to approach Jesus with their needs and concerns, knowing He can relate to their experiences. Believers are called to embrace the truth of Jesus' high priestly identity and its implications for their faith and daily walk with God. They should confidently approach God, knowing Jesus intercedes for them as the perfect high priest. This

should lead to a deepened prayer life and greater intimacy with God. Understanding Jesus' empathy and understanding as a high priest should foster a spirit of compassion and empathy among Christians. This understanding should inspire believers to extend grace and support to those in need, reflecting the love and compassion of Christ in their interactions. Recognising Jesus' sacrificial atonement as a high priest should lead to a profound sense of gratitude and worship. Christians are called to live in light of the redemption and salvation secured through Jesus' high priestly ministry, responding with thanksgiving, obedience, and dedication to God's kingdom.

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