

LESSON 2

THE PRIESTHOOD IN ISRAEL

Reading : Exo. 28 & 29; Heb. 4: 14-5: 10; 7:1-8:6

Memory Verses : Heb. 4 : 14-16

Theme: To learn that the priesthood given to Israel was only a shadow for the High Priestly office for our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we can boldly approach the presence of God and receive blessings.

Introduction: Have you seen people who are called priests? How do you recognize them? What is their job? In the Old Testament days, Israel had priests. Clear instructions regarding their priesthood were given to them on Mount Sinai through Moses (Exo. 28: 1-4, 30: 18). Before that the eldest son in the family used to do priestly duties for the family (Exo. 29: 22). The Aaronic priesthood was established through the Law of Moses.

Priests : There were two offices ordained by God in the Old Testament times: Priests and Prophets. Priests are those who stand between man and God and speak to God on behalf of man. But the prophets are those who stand between God and man and speak to man on behalf of God. At the time when the law was given to the people of Israel, God separated the tribe of Levi from among them to carry out the priestly services (Deut. 10: 8). When all Israel turned to idolatry, Moses called out those who are on the Lord's side to come near him. Then the tribe of Levi came

forward and showed their opposition to idolatry and their allegiance to the Lord (Exo. 32: 25-27; Deut. 33: 8-11). Hence Aaron and his sons belonging to the family of Kohath in the tribe of Levi were appointed to do priestly duties (Exo. 29: 44). Other Levites were appointed to assist the priests in worship services. There was only one High priest at a time. Aaron was the first High Priest. When the High Priest died, his official garments and position were handed down to his eldest son. Thus the high priestly position remained traditionally with the family of Aaron. From the family of Aaron, one would be the High Priest and other sons would be ordinary priests. If anyone was disabled or afflicted with leprosy or unclean in any other way, he had no right to do any priestly duty. The High Priest stands symbolically as our Lord Jesus Christ and the priest represent the believers.

The Priestly Ministry : The duties of the priests were confirmed to the Outer Court and the Holy Place of the Tabernacle. The altar for sacrifices and the laver of brass containing water for cleansing were placed in the outer court. The golden candlestick, the table of shewbread and the incense altar were kept in the Holy Place. Priests go to the Holy Place every day with the blood of sacrifices. The New Testament believers are all priests (1 Pet. 2:4,5,9; 1:6). We are duty-bound to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices every day. We approach the presence of God on the basis of the supreme sacrifices of Jesus Christ. We enter the Holy Place, the church, after cleansing ourselves by God's Word and the Holy Spirit. There we shine as candlestick filled with the olive oil of Holy Spirit, obtain nourishment through Jesus Christ the Bread of Life and offer the incense of prayer and praise to God. As priests of the New Testament, it is God's will that we offer sacrifices continually like this in His presence. Let us examine ourselves how we stand in this matter.

Ministry of the High Priest : The Aaronic high priest entered the Holiest Place with the blood of sacrifice only once in a year on the tenth day of the seventh month known as the Day of Atonement (Lev 16: 1-28; Heb 9: 3-8). He sprinkled blood and burnt incense in fire on the altar for his own sins and for the sins of the people. This act foreshadowed the redemptive act of Jesus Christ. Christ who came as the High Priest of all future blessing offered Himself as sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. He has gone to the Holiest place in heaven with his own blood to intercede for us in the presence of God. It is not necessary for Him to offer sacrifices again and again for His own sins and for the sins of the people as the Aaronic high priests had to do. Jesus Christ is our High Priest: The greatness of our High Priest is described in the Epistle to the Hebrew (Heb. 3:1,4:14-5:10;6:19-20;7:1-28;8:1-6,9:11-28). There is no High priest other than Jesus Christ. "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Let us draw near to the Throne of Grace boldly and receive blessings.

QUESTIONS

1. When was the Aaronic priesthood established? In what circumstances?
2. What was the special function of the high priest of Israel? Explain the New Testament truth to which it is pointing.
3. Compare the ministries of the Israeli high Priest and Jesus Christ.
4. Whom do the ordinary priests of Israel represent? Explain their duties and compare them.
5. Prove that Jesus Christ alone is our High Priest.