

*Short Studies in*  
**BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**



**THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD**  
**AND THE GLORY OF GOD**

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DAVID S. SCHROCK

“The biblical teaching on the priesthood seems foreign and forbidding to many readers today. David Schrock helps us see how a theology of the priesthood permeates the storyline of the Bible and how the priesthood climaxes in Christ and finds its fulfillment in him.”

**Thomas R. Schreiner**, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“David Schrock helps Christ’s royal priesthood exult in Christ, the supreme royal priest.”

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“With the recent surge in biblical-theological studies, especially thematic developments across the canon, it is a little surprising that the theme of priesthood has not received more attention. David Schrock’s work fills this gap beautifully! Specifically, this book probes the significance of the priesthood for a precise understanding of the gospel, as well as our own calling as royal priests through Jesus. Essential reading on this major biblical theme!”

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“Schrock has given us an absolutely fresh analysis and perspective on priesthood through the lens of biblical theology. While some may find his proposals provocative at times, none who read these pages—layperson or scholar—will fail to benefit from his study.”

**Peter J. Gentry**, Distinguished Visiting Professor of Old Testament, Phoenix Seminary

“Identity formation is a pressing challenge facing the church in this generation. David Schrock has provided vital aid for this task by drawing attention to the church’s true identity as a royal priesthood. I have waited for a book like this for two decades. May all who read it have their eyes opened to the transforming power of participation in Christ’s royal priesthood.”

**Hank Voss**, Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries, Taylor University

“David Schrock has the uncommon ability to weave together biblical, systematic, and pastoral theology. This book is no exception. *The Royal Priesthood and the Glory of God* not only unfolds the Old Testament’s theology of priesthood but also shows us how to think rightly about the work of Christ and the doctrine of the church in light of those truths. If you want to understand what it means for Christ to be our great high priest or for the church to be a royal priesthood, I can’t imagine a better book to get you started.”

**Sam Emadi**, Senior Pastor, Hunsinger Lane Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky; Cohost, *Bible Talk* podcast

“The Bible is full of priestly images crucial to our Christology and our Christian identity. David Schrock guides us through the whole canon, from its opening chapters to its closing pages, spotlighting essential passages and many possible allusions to a pervasive theme that’s often overlooked or undervalued in today’s church.”

**Andrew Malone**, Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Dean, Ridley Online, Ridley College, Australia

“Capturing the theme of royal priesthood from Adam to Christ and then applying it to the church is a crucial and marvelous way of summarizing God’s glorious plan of redemption centered in our Lord Jesus Christ. Understanding how this theme is revealed through the unfolding biblical covenants allows us to grasp not only how all of God’s plan is fulfilled in Christ Jesus as our royal great high priest but also how, in Christ, the church is restored to her vocation of being God’s royal priesthood. I highly recommend David Schrock’s discussion of this magnificent truth.”

**Stephen J. Wellum**, Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

*The Royal Priesthood and the Glory of God*

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# The Royal Priesthood and the Glory of God

David S. Schrock

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*To the family of royal priests  
who gather at Occoquan Bible Church*





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## Series Preface

Most of us tend to approach the Bible early on in our Christian lives as a vast, cavernous, and largely impenetrable book. We read the text piecemeal, finding golden nuggets of inspiration here and there, but remain unable to plug any given text meaningfully into the overarching storyline. Yet one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God’s covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity.

This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.

Each volume in this series takes a whole-Bible theme and traces it through Scripture. In this way readers not only learn about a given theme but also are given a model for how to read the Bible as a coherent whole.

We have launched this series because we love the Bible, we love the church, and we long for the renewal of biblical theology in the academy to enliven the hearts and minds of Christ's disciples all around the world. As editors, we have found few discoveries more thrilling in life than that of seeing the whole Bible as a unified story of God's gracious acts of redemption, and indeed of seeing the whole Bible as ultimately about Jesus, as he himself testified (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The ultimate goal of *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* is to magnify the Savior and to build up his church—magnifying the Savior through showing how the whole Bible points to him and his gracious rescue of helpless sinners; and building up the church by strengthening believers in their grasp of these life-giving truths.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

# Introduction

## Recovering the Glory of the Royal Priesthood

In 1956 the film *The Ten Commandments* showed a generation of Americans a picture of the Passover, the Red Sea, and God's relationship with Israel. With cinematic flare Charlton Heston, portraying Moses, battled Pharaoh, led the people to Sinai, and smashed the stone tablets in response to the golden calf. On the silver screen, *The Ten Commandments* portrayed a vision of God's glory as told through the story of the exodus. Yet, every Easter when it plays on television, *The Ten Commandments* can never fully capture the glory of God. Why? Because it takes more than good camera work to see God's glory. It requires the Spirit to open sin-blinded eyes to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

From the New Testament, we can see more clearly why *The Ten Commandments* misses the mark. The ancient glory of exodus cannot display God's glory without the final revelation of God in Christ. As the New Testament explains, God designed the exodus to foreshadow the later glory of Christ. As Paul puts it, Moses's face shone with glory when he descended from Sinai (2 Cor. 3:7), but this glory paled in comparison to Christ's. With Moses, God's glory



was found in a ministry of condemnation, but with Christ, glory is seen in his ministry of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:9–11). Righteousness is what Christ grants his people by means of his covenantal obedience, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, and heavenly intercession. In other words, through the various phases of Christ's priesthood, the glory of God is fully revealed. And not just revealed but given. Whereas Moses's priestly ministry displayed God's glory from a distance, the greater ministry of Christ clothes his people with righteousness, as the greater high priest brings many sons to glory (Heb. 2:9–10; cf. Rom. 8:29–31).

Consider how vital this priestly vision of God's glory is for ministry today. From the athletic arena to the concert stage to the IMAX theater, countless worshipers flock to experience the glory of sport, song, and cinema. As Jamie Smith has observed, venues like these provide a series of secular temples complete with their own idolatrous liturgies.<sup>1</sup> Set in these temples are a priestly class of people who distribute "grace" to a world hungry for glory. And just as Charlton Heston once entertained a generation of glory-seekers, so today's athletes and entertainers regale modern inquirers. These cultural icons are the priests of our secular age, and they bestow glory on all who draw near to them, wear their signature brands, and enter their temples. Nevertheless, their "priestly" services only mislead their followers from true glory, even as they confirm a basic truth—fallen humanity requires priestly intervention to restore the glory we were made to receive and reflect.

Priestly glory is also found when we enter the Bible. From the first use of the word in Genesis 14:18 ("Melchizedek . . . was *priest* of God Most High") to the last in Revelation 20:6 ("Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! . . . they will

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1. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

be *priests* of God and of Christ”), priesthood is central to redemptive history. And though it takes some time to learn the language, the concepts, and the purpose of priesthood, a pleasant reward awaits all who study what Scripture says about priesthood. As Psalm 111:2 says,

Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.

The aim of this book is to study the priesthood so that we might delight more fully in the glory of God’s Son, our great high priest. Moreover, by learning the history and purpose of priesthood in the Bible, we will better understand God’s work in redemption. Because God’s gospel of the kingdom centers on the priestly offering and exaltation of Christ, a right understanding of royal priesthood is necessary for seeing God’s glorious plan of salvation. Because the church of Jesus Christ is called to share in his vocation of priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 5:9–10), learning what priests do is essential for discipleship.

In a world of competing glories, therefore, studying the priesthood is basic for Christian discipleship. When secular priests entice Christians to worship in their temples, we need the true priest-king interceding for us and applying his blood to atone for our sins. We need a biblical vision of Christ’s priestly glory to empower us to reject all substitutes and worship him alone. In short, we need a biblical theology of royal priesthood that leads us to Christ. For to be made in God’s image and created for God’s glory means Christ’s disciples are called to be a family of royal priests—sons and daughters who serve in the presence of the Lord by means of the finished work of Christ, our great high priest.

That’s the big picture; now let me define a few priestly terms.

## **A Glorious Family of Royal Priests**

If we survey all the places where priests show up in the Bible, we find quite a spectrum. There are pagan priests like Potiphera, the father-in-law of Joseph (Gen. 41:45, 50; 46:20), and true priests like Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18). Aaron and his sons are identified as Israel's chosen line of priests, and these priests are joined by their brothers, the Levites, to serve in God's tabernacle (cf. Deut. 33:8–11). Yet, before Yahweh chose Aaron as priest (Ex. 28–29), Yahweh identified Israel as a “royal priesthood” (Ex. 19:6). Likewise, when Moses led the nation to make a covenant with Yahweh (Ex. 19–24), unnamed “priests” served at the altar with Moses (19:22, 24; cf. 24:5). Moses too is identified as a priest, as is Samuel (Ps. 99:6). Yet neither is a descendant of Aaron or called a priest in his own day. Moreover, David wears the priestly ephod when the ark of the covenant is brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:14), and in one instance his sons are even called “priests” (2 Sam. 8:18).

Despite the “separation of powers” between the priestly tribe of Levi and the royal tribe of Judah, we discover royal sons who bring sacrifices to the altar. This combination of priest and king goes back to Adam and Melchizedek. And looking in the other direction, the prophets tell of a son of David who will be priest (Ps. 110) and a priest who will sit on the throne (Zech. 6:9–15). Admittedly, all these twists and turns can seem daunting at first. But if we read the Bible patiently, we can learn how the priesthood rises and falls and rises again.

Already, this series has books devoted to the themes of sonship and kingdom.<sup>2</sup> So this book will not repeat their work. Still, it is necessary to see how priesthood relates to both. To say it differently,

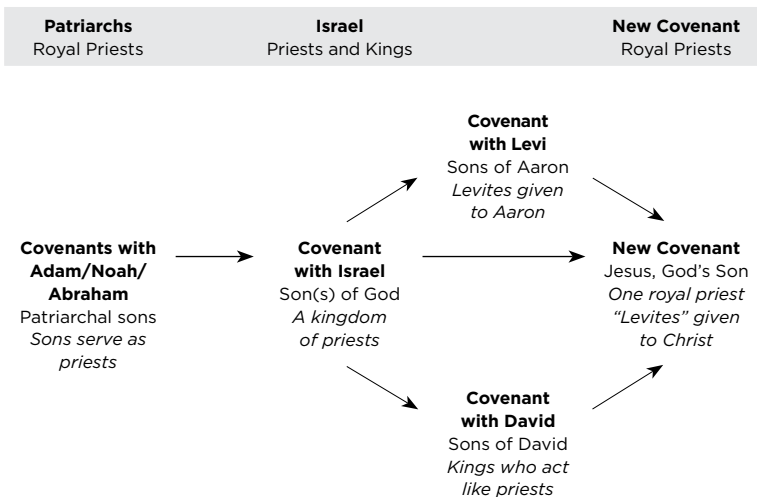
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2. Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Son of God and the New Creation*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

priesthood is restricted to the sons of Aaron only under the law of Moses, explicated in the covenant with Levi (Num. 25:9–13; Mal. 2:1–9; cf. Deut. 33:8–11). Prior to the Sinai, Scripture identifies *royal* priests in Adam and his sons, the patriarchs. Israel, as God’s firstborn son (Ex. 4:22–23) is also called a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6). And many of the patriarchs, who were promised a kingdom (Gen. 17:6, 16), built altars—a task later associated with Aaron and his sons. In the beginning then, there is a strong unity between priest and king.

This unity will fracture in Israel’s history, but when Jesus fulfills the requirements of the law, he will become a priest like the king of Salem, Melchizedek. David himself saw this coming (Pss. 110; 132), as did the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Jer. 30:21; Zech. 3:1–10; 6:9–15). Thus, the church is not simply a priestly people. In Christ, it is a *royal* priesthood. To put it graphically, we might say Aaron’s priesthood, which would come to be known as the Levitical priesthood, always stood as a halfway house between Adam’s royal priesthood and Christ’s (see fig. 1).

Figure 1. Israel’s temporary division of priesthood from kingship



As with the rest of the law, the priesthood of Aaron was not an end in itself; it was given as a pattern and placeholder for something greater—namely, Jesus Christ and the royal priesthood he would inaugurate through his death and resurrection. To be certain, it takes the whole Bible to see this develop, but as we begin, we need to see where we are going. In particular, it is vital to see the historical development of priesthood in relationship to kingship. To help explain how these concepts relate, let me define them.

*Priest.* Hebrews provides the most detailed explanation of priesthood in the Bible. And in Hebrews 5:1–4 we find a concise definition of the high priest, his appointment, his people, and his service:

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. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he 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. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

From these verses, we can draft a working definition of priesthood in four parts. First, Hebrews defines a “high priest” (5:1), which is the term given to the sons of Aaron in Numbers 35. This identification does not encompass everything we can say about priests, but it does provide a start. Second, a high priest is chosen by God and does not appoint himself (Heb. 5:1, 4). This received ministry repeatedly identifies true priests. No priest in the Bible ever asserts himself before God and lives to tell about it. God always does the choosing and the consecrating for service at his altar. Third, God appoints the high priest to serve a particular people and to mediate a covenant.<sup>3</sup> So great

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3. Notice again the close relationship between priesthood and covenant in figure 1.

was the priest's place in the covenant, Hebrews 7:12 says, "When there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well." Notice: the change in the law followed the change in priesthood, not the reverse. Fourth and finally, priests brought sacrifices for sin to the altar of God. While all Israelites worshiped God with sacrifices, the priest applied the blood to the altar. Under the Sinai covenant, this task was reserved for Aaron and his sons. Not even Levites could serve at the altar. Yet, before Sinai, the sons of Adam and Abraham built altars, made sacrifices, and applied the blood. These actions identify them as patriarchal priests.

In defining what a priest is, Hebrews 5 gives a clear starting point: *Priests are consecrated mediators between God and his covenant people who stand to serve at God's altar and bring sacrifices to atone for sin.* Yet, as Hebrews 5 focuses on Israel's high priest, we should remember that more can be said. From what we will see in the Old Testament itself, I will define priesthood in this way: *Priests are consecrated mediators between God and his covenant people, who stand to serve at God's altar (1) sanctifying God's Holy Place, (2) sacrificing God's offerings, and (3) speaking God's covenant.*<sup>4</sup>

This more expansive definition considers *where* priests serve and *what* priests do. Namely, priests *sanctify* the house of God where the altar is located; they *bring the sacrificial blood* to that altar; and they *bless the people with their speech*—for example, intercessory prayer, benediction, and teaching are priestly activities. More could be said, but this definition gets at the heart of what priests do. Others have defined priests by where they stand—as servants in God's house.<sup>5</sup> As we go, we will see the importance of where the priests stand, but our

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4. This definition is unique to the sons of Aaron. Levites, by contrast, do not stand at God's altar, but serve as assistants to Aaron, guarding God's house (not his altar) and carrying the word of the covenant to the people. In this way, they too are "priestly," but not "priests" in the official sense of the word.

5. Peter J. Leithart, "Attendants of Yahweh's House: Priesthood in the Old Testament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 24, no. 85 (1999): 3–24.

focus will be on what priests do—that is, priestly actions. And this definition will be a guide throughout the book.

*Levitical priesthood.* In the law, priesthood came to be associated with Aaron and the house of Levi. In Hebrews we find the term “Levitical priesthood,” which—counterintuitively—does not mean all the Levites but refers only to the sons of Aaron. As Hebrews 7:11 explains, “Levitical priesthood” is another way of describing the “order of Aaron.” As we will see, priesthood is given only to Aaron and his sons. Later the sons of Levi will be “given” to Aaron, to protect him and to assist him at God’s house (Num. 3:9; 8:16, 19; 18:8), but the term itself (“Levitical priesthood”) does not appear until Deuteronomy.<sup>6</sup> “Levitical priesthood,” therefore, is a term that speaks of the entire priestly system centered on Aaron and his offspring.

Under the old covenant, the priestly “order of Aaron” is the one that serves at the altar. The Levites stand with them to protect God’s house, assist God’s priests, and serve God’s people. Importantly, this system of mediation is the one established by Moses; it is also the one that Jesus confronts as he speaks of the temple’s defilement and coming destruction. In between Moses and Jesus, the Levitical priesthood serves as Israel’s thermostat for worship. For as it goes with the priests so goes the spiritual climate of the nation.

*Royal priesthood.* Hebrews also speaks of a priesthood that supersedes that of Aaron. This priesthood is described as the “order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:11), the king of Salem and priest of God Most High (cf. Heb. 7:1–10). Though he is identified only in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, Hebrews makes Melchizedek the key figure to explain how Jesus can be a priest. In this book, we will see how Melchizedek is the major figure in a biblical theology of priesthood.

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6. See Deut. 17:9, 18; 18:1; 24:8; 27:9; cf. 21:5; 31:9.

To rightly trace the priesthood through the Bible, it is important to see that the goal of priesthood is a *royal* priest. Priesthood decoupled from kingship is not the final goal. As Hebrews teaches, God always intended to replace the covenant with Israel (and its covenant with Levi) with a new covenant—the covenant inaugurated by a king invited by God to “draw near” (Jer. 30:21).<sup>7</sup>

Priesthood tied to the tribe of Levi, therefore, was always provisional. As we will see, God created Adam to serve as a priest *and* to have rule over the earth. The priests and kings of Israel, taken by themselves, recover only “half” of what Adam lost by his disobedience. Like Adam, God gave Israel the chance to be a “royal priesthood” *if they kept the covenant* (Ex. 19:1–8). Yet, because the nation broke God’s covenant, Israel proved themselves unfit to be a royal priesthood. Nevertheless, what God promised conditionally to Israel, Christ fulfilled perfectly. And only as we keep track of the Bible’s presentation of priesthood *and* kingship can we rightly make sense of Scripture’s view of priesthood.

## The Glory of the Priesthood

In this book, we will focus on the glory seen in the beauty of God’s house and its priestly servants. Once again, Hebrews is instructive. In Hebrews 3:1–6 we find a contrast between the glory of Moses and the glory of Jesus. Both are glorious in their respective roles—Moses serving in God’s house, Jesus ruling over God’s house. This glory comes from the work each does with the resulting effects of their priestly service.

Truly, Christ’s glory begins with the purifying power of his priestly sacrifice. It continues with the high priest enthroned in heaven, who

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7. “Drawing near,” which repeats often in Hebrews (4:16; 7:19, 25; 10:1, 22; 11:6), is a priestly phrase, one that comes from the priest’s God-given permission to approach God’s altar (cf. Ex. 28:1).



lives to intercede for his household. And it extends to all the earth as he sends the gospel throughout creation. In these three ways (sacrifice, sanctification, and speaking), we see the beauty and glory of Christ's perfect priesthood. In the chapters that follow, we will trace Christ's priestly glory through the Bible, learning how a biblical theology of priesthood informs our own discipleship as royal priests.

Still, before jumping in, let me outline the six chapters of this book. Each chapter corresponds to one of six stages in the development of the priesthood:

1. The *pattern of royal priesthood* in Adam and the patriarchs
2. The *legislation of the Levitical priesthood* in the five books of Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy)
3. The *compromise of the Levitical priesthood* and the *promise of a royal priesthood* in the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve<sup>8</sup>)
4. The *rising anticipation of a royal priesthood* in the Writings (1–2 Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah, Psalms, and Daniel)
5. The *arrival of the royal priest(hood)* in the Gospels (Matthew–John)
6. The *meaning and multiplication of the royal priesthood* in Acts through Revelation

While the biblical story of priesthood has many moving parts, these six escalating stages help us stay on track. Like a map that identifies various regions with a corresponding color, these six stages will help color each chapter of our journey. In this way, the details of this story, which become dense at times, can be organized by these stages.

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8. The Twelve are the “Minor Prophets” taken collectively.

In all, this book will chronicle the hard-but-ultimately-happy history of God's royal priesthood. At the end of our journey, we will find a vision of royal priests worshiping God and serving alongside Jesus Christ. This is the goal of the Bible and the goal of creation, but long before seeing the glory of God's new Jerusalem, we must start in Eden—the place where royal priesthood begins.



# In the Beginning

## The Royal Priesthood Patterned

In the beginning God created a priest. And not just any priest, but a royal priest—a man made in God’s likeness, a son fashioned to reflect God’s beauty, an image bearer commissioned to rule God’s world with holy affections. God commissioned the first family—Adam and his fellow image bearer, Eve—to be fruitful and multiply and fill the world with God’s glory.

The first few chapters of Genesis bring the reader into a foreign world with many ancient places, practices, and people. Presented as symbol-laden history, Genesis tells us where humanity came from, why we are here, and what went wrong. It also hints at who will “fix” it. This is where the Bible begins, and so does our priestly journey. In this chapter we will observe the pattern of royal priesthood found in Adam and his sons. In particular, we will see how priesthood begins with Adam, echoes in the patriarchs (esp.

Abraham), and finds its most concrete yet enigmatic example in Melchizedek.

While priesthood is not defined or assigned until Sinai, we can see how priesthood in Israel finds an original pattern in Genesis. Indeed, by reading Genesis with the rest of the Pentateuch (Exodus–Deuteronomy), we learn how Moses portrays these men as patriarchal priests, which in turn gives us an original pattern for royal priesthood.

### **Evidence for the First Priest**

Genesis 1–2 presents Eden as a garden sanctuary and the first man as royal priest. Later, after humanity’s fall (Gen. 3), sacrifice will be added to complete the cultic system. Together, the indivisible complex of sanctuary, priesthood, and sacrifice begins in Genesis 1–3.<sup>1</sup>

As we observed in the introduction, even secular societies participate in cultic worship. Malls, models, and merchandise form a materialistic cult alluring worshipers to make a sacrifice at the altar of Apple or REI. Similarly, worship in the Bible requires a Holy Place (a temple), a devoted priesthood, and a sacrifice on the altar.<sup>2</sup> As strange as ancient religions may look, patterns of priestly worship still surround us. And going back to Eden, we discover why. In fact, Moses gives at least four ways to see priesthood in Eden.

*First, Adam is placed in a garden sanctuary.* Set on a mountain where the waters flowed down from Eden, the “garden of God” (Isa.

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1. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 81–121; T. Desmond Alexander, *The City of God and the Goal of Creation*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 18–20.

2. This does not deny Jesus’s words in John 4:21, “The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.” Rather, under the new covenant God’s worshipers do not worship in one place; they gather in every place (1 Cor. 1:2; cf. Mal. 1:11). But in every place, those worshipers come to Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22) when they assemble as God’s living temple, locally gathered by God’s Spirit.

51:3; Ezek. 28:13; 31:9) was the place where Adam and Eve enjoyed Yahweh's presence. While Eden was a perfect environment for man to dwell, Genesis 1–2 is theological, not agricultural. The garden was far more than verdant farmland; it was the place where God approached Adam, and Adam entered God's presence—hence a garden sanctuary.

Like the tabernacle, which had three spheres of increasing holiness (the courtyard, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place), Eden also had three regions of ascending holiness (the world outside the garden, the garden itself, and the top of God's mountain, where his presence dwelt). In all, God created Adam and all of his children in his image to commune with him and to serve as his priests in his Holy Place.<sup>3</sup>

*Second, image bearers are royal priests who mediate God's presence.* Genesis 1:26–28 says God made humanity in his own image and likeness. And while Adam and Eve's royal function is observable in the words “subdue” and “have dominion over” in verse 28, there is reason to assign priesthood to these words too. In the ancient Near East, image bearing was inherently priestly, as the king mediated the presence of God to the people and vice versa. Similarly, Adam plays a priestly role whereby he mediates the relationship between God and his children.<sup>4</sup> The blessing Adam receives from God (v. 28) is to be communicated to his family as he serves as their priest. Conversely, standing as the head of his family, he is to lead them to worship and serve their Creator. All of this fails when Adam sins, but in Genesis 1–2 we can see God's original intent. Even more, when we read 1:26–28 with 2:15, it becomes clearer that Adam, as God's image bearer, is commissioned to be a priest.

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3. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 75; Beale, “Adam as the First Priest in Eden as the Garden Temple,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 2 (2018): 9–24.

4. These children would also bear the image of God, communicated to them through their father (see Gen. 5:1–2).

*Third, Adam is given a priestly commission.* Genesis 2 says that when God planted a garden in Eden (v. 8), “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *work* it and *keep* it” (v. 15). Adding to the ruling commands of Genesis 1:28, Adam is given the priestly task of “serving” Yahweh in his garden sanctuary and “guarding” his sacred space. We know this double command (i.e., “work/serve” combined with “keep/guard”) is priestly because of the way Moses uses it later in Numbers 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–7. In Numbers these two words, when used together, are uniquely assigned to the Levites, who are called to assist in the priestly service of the tabernacle.<sup>5</sup>

Adam is therefore presented in priestly terms. He is “an archetypal Levite.”<sup>6</sup> Confirming his priesthood, God calls him to serve in his presence and to guard the boundaries of his holy space from anything unclean.<sup>7</sup> Later, Levites are called “guards” (1 Chron. 9:23) and “gatekeepers” (1 Chron. 9:17–27; Neh. 11:19). Moreover, the Levites’ service begins because of their willingness to draw the sword against their brothers to defend God’s holiness (Ex. 32:25–29; Deut. 33:8–11). Such zeal for God’s holy dwelling is a defining characteristic of priests and Levites, and in the beginning, God assigns Adam to be guardian of the garden sanctuary.

*Fourth, the rest of the Bible presents Adam as a priest.* When Moses identifies Aaron and his sons as the chosen priests of Israel (Ex. 28–29), he makes multiple connections between the creation of the world (Gen. 1–2) and the fabrication of the tabernacle (Ex. 25–31). For instance, both passages are organized by seven

5. Beale, “Adam as the First Priest,” 10.

6. Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 52; see also Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 211–13.

7. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 69.

divine words—that is, seven divine acts of creation formed the cosmos, and seven divine words organized the tabernacle.<sup>8</sup> Thus, “the tabernacle is portrayed as a reconstruction of God’s good creation.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the six days of creation, which led to the seventh day of “rest” (Gen. 2:1–3), prefigure the construction of the tabernacle and appointment of Aaron to stand at the altar, which is associated with Sabbath (Ex. 31:12–18).

Additionally, God designed the tabernacle to reflect the floral beauty of Eden, and the priestly garments to point back to Adam. As Moses wrote for a people whose worship centered on priests clothed in beauty and glory (Ex. 28:2), these glorious garments capture a vision of the Edenic priest (see Ezek. 28:11–14). As we will see in chapter 2, Aaron’s priestly attire includes a golden crown (Ex. 29:6; 39:30), a golden ephod (Ex. 28:6–14), and onyx shoulder pieces with the names of the twelve tribes engraved on them (Ex. 28:9–11). Strikingly, gold and onyx are found in Eden (Gen. 2:12), making another connection between Aaron and Adam.<sup>10</sup>

In these ways, Moses demonstrates how the formation of the world is temple-like (cf. Ps. 104), and the fabrication of the tabernacle is creation-like. Accordingly, when Aaron is given access to the tabernacle, it is as if a new Adam has reentered God’s garden. Whereas the first priest compromised God’s command and failed in his priestly commission, God begins anew with Aaron to recover what Adam lost. Indeed, when we see the connections between Aaron and Adam, we begin to see how the original pattern of priesthood is meant to inform the rest of the Bible.

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8. See Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26; cf. 1:11, 28, 29 and Ex. 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12.

9. See John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 298–99.

10. For more on the relationship between Aaron and Adam, see Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 39–49.



We also find confirmation of Moses's connection between the priesthood of Adam and Aaron when we read Ezekiel 28. When Ezekiel issues an oracle of judgment against Tyre, he portrays the king in priestly garments. Listing the stones emblazoned on Aaron's robe to portray the prince of Tyre in priestly garb (v. 13; cf. Ex. 28:15–21), Ezekiel compares the fall of Tyre to the fall of Adam.

Son of man, sing a lament for the king of Tyre, and say to him,  
 “This is what the sovereign LORD says:

“You were the sealer of perfection,  
 full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.  
 You were in Eden, the garden of God.  
 Every precious stone was your covering,  
 the ruby, topaz, and emerald,  
 the chrysolite, onyx, and jasper,  
 the sapphire, turquoise, and beryl;  
 your settings and mounts were made of gold.  
 On the day you were created they were prepared.  
 I placed you there with an anointed guardian cherub;  
 you were on the holy mountain of God;  
 you walked about amidst fiery stones.  
 You were blameless in your behavior from the day you  
     were created,  
 until sin was discovered in you.” (28:12–15 NET)

Unlike the ESV and NASB, which identify this glorious being as an angel (v. 14), the NET juxtaposes Adam and the cherub, which makes better sense of the surrounding context.<sup>11</sup> In Genesis 3, it is

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11. Cf. William J. Dumbrell, “Genesis 2:1–17: A Foreshadowing of the New Creation,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 61; Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 99–112, 117.

the man whom God removes from his holy mountain, just as Ezekiel 28:16 records:

You sinned;  
so I defiled you and banished you from the mountain  
of God—  
the guardian cherub expelled you from the midst of the  
stones of fire. (NET)

As far as we know, it was only Adam and his posterity that God cut off from Eden. Job 1:6; 2:1 and 1 Kings 22:21–22 indicate angelic beings standing before God. By comparing the king of Tyre’s judgment to Adam’s, we find imagery that suggests how glorious Adam was and how far humankind fell. Created as a priest to rule over God’s creation, humanity now suffers under God’s curse in a world plagued by death—the very thing, because of its uncleanness, that priests were called to avoid (Lev. 21:1–4).

Last, Luke 3:38 bears witness to Adam’s priesthood. When Luke traces Jesus’s genealogy back to Adam, he calls Adam “the son of God.” The priestly significance of this title is associated with the way firstborn sons were set apart as priestly assistants. As Michael Morales observes, firstborn sons were consecrated to the Lord (see Ex. 13:2), and until Numbers 3:40–51 replaced firstborn sons with the Levites, the firstborn sons “were to serve in a lay-priestly role.”<sup>12</sup> And part of this connection between sonship and priesthood goes back to Adam.

In all, when we read Genesis with the rest of the Pentateuch, we find considerable evidence for seeing Adam as a priest. And in the rest of the Bible, we will continue to see how Adam’s priesthood

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12. L. Michael Morales, “The Levitical Priesthood,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (2019): 8–12.

echoes through redemptive history until it finds its climax in Jesus Christ.

### **Echoes of Eden: Priesthood in the Patriarchs**

If Genesis 1–3 gives evidence for Adam’s priesthood, the rest of Genesis echoes his priesthood. Only now, because sin has torn asunder the covenant between God and man, the mediating role of priests will center on the offering of animal sacrifices. Similarly, because Genesis precedes the giving of the law, the priesthood that echoes among the patriarchs is not as clear as what will be revealed in the Sinai legislation. Nevertheless, in the patriarchs we find priestly echoes that range from priestly actions among various figures to one striking priest figure, Melchizedek, who is called the priest of God Most High.

Going back to our definition of priesthood,<sup>13</sup> we can see how the patriarchs are presented as priests in three primary ways: (1) serving at and/or sanctifying a holy place, (2) bringing a sacrifice to the altar, and (3) speaking to God for people (prayer) or speaking to others from God (blessings). With these priestly actions in mind, we find Abel, Seth, Noah, and Abraham doing priestly things (see table 1). Because these men are never called priests, we must be cautious about overstating their roles. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the way Moses presents their actions. In what follows, we will trace the echoes of priesthood through these four men, focusing most of our attention on Abraham, before coming to Melchizedek, the priest who stands out in Genesis and the rest of the Bible.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Priests are consecrated mediators between God and his covenant people who stand to serve at God’s altar (1) sanctifying God’s Holy Place, (2) sacrificing God’s offerings, and (3) speaking God’s covenant.

14. Technically, Potiphera is another priest mentioned in Genesis (41:45, 50; 46:20), but his service in Egypt puts him beyond the scope of this study.



Israelites would bring their sacrifices to the “entrance of the tent of meeting” (e.g., Lev. 1:3, 5; 3:2).<sup>16</sup> In this context, Abel proves his faith by offering the “firstborn of his flock” (Gen. 4:4). Cain’s offering, by contrast, displeases God because his unacceptable sacrifice indicates a deficiency in both his heart (cf. 1 John 3:12) and his sacrifice.<sup>17</sup> As William Symington once observed, “Had Cain possessed Abel’s faith, he would have presented Abel’s sacrifice,” but instead Cain “trusted to [*sic*] his own merit for acceptance,” thus sealing God’s displeasure with his offering and highlighting the faith required to approach God (cf. Heb. 11:4).<sup>18</sup>

Seth also demonstrates his priestly faith when he and the people “began to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen. 4:26). As Scripture testifies later, calling upon the Lord reflects praise and prayer (Ps. 116:13, 17),<sup>19</sup> but it also describes the priestly actions of Samuel, Aaron, and Moses. Psalm 99:6 states,

Moses and Aaron were among his priests,  
 Samuel also was among those who *called upon his name*.  
 They called to the LORD, and he answered them.

In these two examples, the priestly duties of Abel and Seth are faint. Yet the pattern of priesthood is seen in their composite: together they (1) have a holy place, (2) bring an acceptable sacrifice, and (3) “call upon . . . the LORD” in prayer. These actions suggest that these sons of Adam are priestly servants of God, servants whose priesthood will be magnified in the life of Noah.

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16. Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 57. Morales goes on to argue persuasively that Gen. 4:7 should be translated as “a sin offering lies at the door/entrance [*petah*]” (rather than ‘sin crouches at the door,’ as in the door of Cain’s heart or tent).”

17. William Symington, *On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ* (Pittsburgh, PA: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864), 66–92, esp. 80–83.

18. Symington, *The Atonement and Intercession of Jesus*, 83.

19. See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Prayer and the Knowledge of God: What the Whole Bible Teaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 72, 110–11.

*Noah.* Noah's story is well known, but his priesthood less so. When we stand Noah next to Adam, however, we begin see how Moses presents him as a priest. Likewise, when we read his story in light of the Levitical priests, we also see how Noah exhibits priestly actions.

First, Noah builds the first altar in the Bible (Gen. 8:20). In Scripture, altars are the designated "place [for] slaughtering the sacrifice."<sup>20</sup> In time, altars become the place where priests apply the blood of the offering. As Leviticus 1–7 makes clear, it is not the sacrifice that makes someone a priest; it is the application of the blood to the altar. Before the law appoints Aaron and his sons to serve at the altar, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all build altars to offer sacrifices (Gen. 12:7–8; 13:4, 18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 3, 7). Following the pattern of priesthood, this announcement that Noah builds an altar speaks to his priestly calling.

Next, the words used to describe Noah's sacrifice in Genesis 8:20–21—"clean," "burnt offerings," "pleasing aroma"—are all Levitical (i.e., from the priestly book of Leviticus). Identifying the type of Noah's offering is tempting but such a connection may not be possible. Noah makes a sacrifice without a full knowledge of Moses's law. Nevertheless, Moses's language suggests that Noah's sacrifice is "a prototype of the work of later priests who made atonement for Israel."<sup>21</sup> Certainly, it furthers expectations for a priesthood that is to come.

Third, Noah mediates a covenant with creation. Yahweh states in Genesis 9:9–10, "I establish my covenant with you *and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you.*" In these

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20. Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2006), 138; cf. Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship*, The Gospel according to the Old Testament (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 15–16.

21. Gordon J. Wenham, "The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 80.

verses, Yahweh identifies Noah as the individual through whom he will preserve the world.<sup>22</sup> Like Adam's, Noah's mediating role between God and man identifies his priestly vocation. In the rest of the Bible, priests play a significant role in maintaining God's covenants, and so it is here. Even more, Noah speaks the word of God's blessing to Shem and Japheth (Gen. 9:26–27). In this blessing, we find another mark of his priesthood—namely, speech that communicates God's blessing. Later, it will be the Levitical priests who bless God's people (cf. Num. 6:24–26) and pronounce blessings and curses (Deut. 27:9–10; Josh. 8:33).<sup>23</sup>

In sum, Noah's actions (e.g., building an altar, offering a clean sacrifice, mediating a covenant, and pronouncing a blessing) highlight his priestly service and add another layer to the story of priesthood developing in Scripture. Still, his priesthood remains faint, especially as we come to Abraham.

*Abraham.* After the people of Shinar attempt to build a tower into the heavens (Gen. 11:1–9), the account of Genesis turns to Abram (later renamed Abraham). Elected by God to be the recipient and conduit of blessing to all the families of the earth (12:1–3), Abraham is a central figure in redemptive history. Like Noah's, his priestly identity is found in (1) the altars he builds, (2) the intercession he makes, and (3) the sacrifice he offers on Mount Moriah.<sup>24</sup> From these three actions, we see the pattern of priesthood in Abraham's life. Yet the most compelling reason to see Abraham's priestly status is his relationship to Melchizedek, the priest-king from Salem. From these

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22. Genesis 9 goes on to explain the covenant of common grace. Noah's covenant promises universal preservation, not eternal salvation.

23. Richard D. Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 44–46.

24. I have argued at length for this in "Restoring the Image of God: A Corporate-Filial Approach to the 'Royal Priesthood' in Exodus 19:6," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 2 (2018): 37–41.

four lines of evidence, we will see how Moses describes Abraham in priestly terms.

First, Abraham builds altars to worship God. Actually, he builds three altars (Gen. 12:7–9; 13:18) before he builds the climactic altar on Mount Moriah where God provides a ram in place of Isaac (Gen. 22:9). Each of these altars is a place of worship, which harkens back to Eden and Adam’s role as priest. As Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum note, “Canaan is depicted in Edenic language as a mountain sanctuary,” and Abraham is the one “fulfilling an Adamic role, [as] he offers sacrifice as a priest and worships God in this mountain sanctuary.”<sup>25</sup> While Moses takes little time to explain these altars, they identify Abraham as a priest in his own day.

Second, Abraham’s intercession before God points to his priesthood. Yahweh tells Abraham of his plan to destroy Sodom because of its wickedness (Gen. 18). In response, Abraham pleads for God to spare the righteous, making multiple petitions for God’s mercy (vv. 22–33). Of note, the language of these verses—“*stood* before the LORD” (v. 22) and “*drew near*” (v. 24)—are often used of priests.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Genesis 19:29 explains why God spares Lot: “When God destroyed the cities of the valley [Sodom and Gomorrah], God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.” Whether this rescue is a direct result of Abraham’s efficacious prayer or more generally from the blessing God would bestow on those in Abraham’s family (Gen. 12:3), Lot is delivered because God remembers Abraham. Throughout the Bible, priests take up this position of mediating between God and man, and in Abraham we see the same.

25. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 235. Cf. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 83.

26. Peter J. Leithart, *The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 64–71.



Admittedly, prophets also play a role in covenant mediation and intercessory prayer. Abraham is called a “prophet” when asked to intercede for Abimelech in Genesis 20:7. This might suggest Abraham is a prophet only, and not a priest. Yet this would miss three points. First, the fact that prophets intercede for others does not deny the essentially priestly nature of prayer (cf. Gen. 4:26; Ps. 99:6). In fact, God often resorts to sending prophets to Israel when the priests fail to fulfill their ministry of teaching and intercession. Second, many Old Testament prophets are also identified as priests (e.g., Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). Thus, there can be some overlap between the offices and their respective assignments. Third and most importantly, the point is not that intercessory prayer is *sufficient* to make one a priest but that it is *necessary*.

Third, Abraham’s priestly duties are evidenced in his (near) sacrifice of Isaac. In Genesis 22 we find three reasons why Abraham’s sacrifice is priestly. First, the location of the offering on Mount Moriah is associated with priestly sacrifices (vv. 2, 14). Second Chronicles 3:1 indicates Solomon’s temple was built on this mountaintop, which David purchased from Araunah to offer sacrifices for his own sin (2 Sam. 24:18–25). Not only does the shared location of these altars prefigure the location of Christ’s sacrifice (on a hill outside the city of Jerusalem), but if “Salem” in Genesis 14:18 is Jerusalem, as Psalm 76:2 suggests, then Abraham would be returning to the mountain of Melchizedek in order to offer his priestly sacrifice of his beloved son. We will consider the priestly connections between Abraham and Melchizedek shortly.

A second reason why Abraham’s sacrifice is priestly is that some of the language of Genesis 22 suggests a priestly sacrifice. For instance, Abraham says that his three-day journey to the mountain of the Lord will result in “worship.” Likewise, Moses uses the word “burnt offering” six times to speak of Isaac’s sacrifice (vv. 2, 3, 6,

7, 8, 13). In Genesis, “burnt offering” is only used of Noah’s sacrifice (8:20) before it is used in Exodus–Deuteronomy to speak of tabernacle sacrifices. Moreover, Yahweh’s provision of a sacrifice on Mount Moriah (22:13–14) foreshadows the provision of sacrificial lambs that would redeem the firstborn of Israel in the Passover and comprise the heart of worship in Leviticus.

The third reason is that Abraham’s obedience to the Lord at the expense of his family is unmistakably priestly. In obedience to God, he does not raise his knife as bloodthirsty father; he does so as a loyal, God-appointed priest. That Abraham functions as a priest is evident from applying Deuteronomy 33:9 to Abraham. Whereas this verse would explain why the priests and Levites were called to serve at the Lord’s house, it could be applied to Abraham: “[Abraham] disowned his brothers and ignored his children. For [he] observed your word and kept your covenant.” In Exodus 32:25–29, God ordains the Levites to be a priestly tribe because of their allegiance to God *against* their kinsman. So here we find that Abraham, Levi’s ancestor, is equally faithful to God as he secures the blessing by his sacrificial obedience (Gen. 22:18; 26:5).

Truly, faithfulness of this kind is what secures the place of the Levites to serve in God’s tabernacle (Deut. 33:9–10). Likewise, priestly faithfulness is what secures the covenant with Levi in Numbers 25. As we will come to see, God’s priests are chosen by God (as Abraham is) and prove their faithfulness by doing all they are commanded at God’s altar (as Abraham does). In his testing (Gen. 22:1), therefore, Abraham proves himself to be a faithful priest and one whose actions bring blessing to others.

In these three ways, we find solid evidence for identifying Abraham’s actions as priestly. Yet Abraham’s priestly identification is further clarified through his connection to Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who is priest of God Most High. Though enigmatic in

himself, this mysterious figure will become the most important priest in the Bible—or at least, the most important until another comes in his priestly order (Heb. 7:11). In Genesis, it is Abraham’s interaction with Melchizedek that both confirms his own priestly identity and sets up a priestly expectation that will take the rest of the Bible to reveal.

### **The Enigma of the Priesthood: A Priest Like Melchizedek**

In Genesis 14:18 Moses identifies Melchizedek as the king of Salem and priest of God Most High. This royal priest shows up *by name* only three times in the Bible (Gen. 14; Ps. 110; Hebrews), but his appearances mark some of the most significant developments in redemptive history. Because this historical figure plays such an important part in understanding the royal priesthood of Jesus, I will include the full text:

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
 Possessor of heaven and earth;  
 and blessed be God Most High,  
 who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Pos-

essor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share." (Gen. 14:17–24)

In these eight verses, we find Abraham returning from battle, where he has defeated the armies of Canaan (v. 17). On his return, Abraham encounters two kings who “represent two different kinds of kingship.”<sup>27</sup> Discerning the difference, Abraham rejects the offer of Sodom’s king (“Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself”) and honors voluntarily Salem’s king. Though Genesis 14:1–16 presents Abraham as greater than all the kings in Canaan, his tithe to Melchizedek evidences Abraham’s acknowledgment that Melchizedek is a greater priest-king.

As Hebrews 7 will show us, every feature of Genesis 14 is valuable for interpretation. For our purposes, it is illuminating that he is a king of *righteousness* (“Melchizedek” means “king of righteousness” in Hebrew) and a king of *peace* (“Salem” is a variation of the Hebrew word for “peace”). Likewise, he is a priest of the Most High God (v. 18). In Genesis 14, Abraham recognizes Melchizedek’s greatness (Heb. 7:7). First, he honors him by receiving Melchizedek’s bread and wine and eating a meal with this royal priest. Next, he joins in blessing Melchizedek’s God Most High (Gen. 14:22). And last, by returning a tithe to Melchizedek from the spoils of war (Gen. 14:20), he acknowledges Melchizedek as superior to himself. In this exchange, Melchizedek provides a glimpse of what Adam might have been, what Israel was meant to be(come), and what Jesus Christ would ultimately be—a glorious royal priest.

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27. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 237.

Yet the reader of Genesis does not have to wait until the New Testament to see a righteous royal priest. Rather, by keeping our finger on the text, we see in the next chapter how Abraham is declared “righteous” when he believes God (Gen. 15:6). Then, in Genesis 17:6, 16, Yahweh promises Abraham that royal sons will come from his line. And finally, in Genesis 22, Abraham brings a sacrifice to the altar on Mount Moriah, the hill associated with Melchizedek, the one that David will later claim by means of his own costly sacrifice (2 Sam. 24:24–25). Read together, Abraham’s righteousness, the promise of royal sons, and the presentation of a priestly sacrifice identify Abraham as a royal priest like Melchizedek.

Indeed, while Melchizedek disappears from the pages of Scripture after Genesis 14 (until Ps. 110), his shadow remains. In Abraham and his offspring, the combination of righteousness, priesthood, and kingship will be passed down from generation to generation, until the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16) becomes the priest-king like Melchizedek. Therefore, we find in the annals of Israel’s history the hope of a royal priest who will surpass all others.

In some ways, this hope will be realized at Sinai, when Israel as God’s son (Ex. 4:22–23) will be called a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6). In other ways, David will take up the mantle of being a priestly king like Melchizedek when he brings the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. Still, the ultimate fulfillment of Melchizedek’s legacy will be the son of Abraham and the son of David (Matt. 1:1), Jesus Christ, who will prove to be the superlative royal priest.

In all these ways, Genesis gives us a pattern of priesthood. In Adam, we find the evidence of the first priest; in the patriarchs, especially Abraham, we find echoes of Adam’s priesthood and anticipations of a greater priest to come. Finally, in Melchizedek we find an enigmatic figure that stands out among all the other patriarchal priests. By his interaction with Abraham, we begin to see how

this royal priest of Salem enters the story of the priesthood, but we will have to wait until Psalm 110 and the New Testament before we understand his role completely.

For now, we need to see how this original pattern of priesthood is formalized in the law. Indeed, what comes next is the legislation of the pattern and the narrowing of the priesthood from all of Abraham's offspring to one tribe in Israel. Indeed, the union of priesthood and kingship will soon be legally divided, but not forever—only until a righteous son of Abraham will come to be a royal priest after the order of Melchizedek.