

The Roles of the High Priest

Explanation

The Epistle to the Hebrews draws particular attention to the parallels between the traditional roles of the Jewish High Priest and the ways in which Jesus fulfilled many of those functions. A major teaching of this letter is to prove “that we,” as Christians, “have such an High Priest” (Heb 8:1). Jesus serves as the great atoning High Priest, although not by entering “into the holy places made with hands, which are figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24).

Chart 8-15 contrasts some of the main ceremonial functions performed by the Jewish High Priest with the corresponding elements in the ministration of Jesus. These range from his status and birth, to his designation, ordination, performance of vicarious sacrifices for the benefit of others, and his standing before God as mediator and judge of his people. To people who understand the commission of the High Priest under the Law of Moses, the counterparts in the mission of Jesus are transparent.

Reference

Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 240–42, 298–99, 416–51.

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JEWISH HIGH PRIEST

A teacher of the law
(Deut 33:10; Lev 10:10–11)

Communicator of the divine will
(Num 27:21)

Blesses the people in the name of the Lord
(Num 6:22–27)

Does not take the office upon himself but is
chosen of God (Num 16:5; Heb 5:4)

A firstborn son (Ex 13:2; Num 3:12)

Was washed (Ex 29:4)

Clothed with garments
(Ex 29:5–6)

Anointed with holy oil
(Ex 29:7)

Sin offering to put away sin (Ex 29:36)

Burnt offering to indicate the full and
complete surrender to God (Lev 1:3)

Makes peace/consecration offering
(Lev 7:11–21)

Sabbath sacrifice
(Num 28:9–10)

Was a mediator between his people and God

Wore the breastplate of judgment

Crown of gold engraved with “Holiness to the
Lord” (Ex 28:36; 29:6)

Performs the service on the Day of Atonement
(Lev 16)

Lifetime office (Ex 29:9)

Enters Holy of Holies (Lev 16:17)

JESUS’ FULFILLMENT

A teacher of the law
(Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5–7;
the Sabbath law, Mt 12:1–12;
the great commandment, Mk 12:28–31)

“I seek not mine own will, but the will of the
Father which hath sent me” (Jn 5:31)

Christ prays for blessing on his disciples and
people (Jn 16 and 17)

“Called of God an High Priest”
(Heb 5:10)

God’s only begotten Son (Jn 3:16)
Mary’s firstborn son (Lk 2:7)

Baptized by John the Baptist (Mt 3:13–17)

Wears robes of the atonement
(Rev 1:13; 19:13)

“God hath anointed [Christ] with the oil of
gladness” (Heb 1:9)

Christ frees us from sin (Rom 6:11)

“Not my will, but thine, be done”
(Lk 22:42)

Prince of Peace
(Isa 9:6)

The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath
(Mt 12:8)

“One mediator between God and men, the
man Jesus Christ” (1Tm 2:5)

“The Father judgeth no man, but hath com-
mitted all judgment unto the Son” (Jn 5:22)

“I looked, and behold ... the Son of man,
having on his head a golden crown”
(Rev 14:14)

Performed the atonement for all mankind
(Jn 17–20; Heb 10:10)

“Thou art a priest forever” (Heb 7:21)

The saints enter the Holy of Holies by the
blood of Jesus (Heb 10:19–20)