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ARE THERE ANY PRIESTS TODAY?

This article has 16 sections. Those 16 sections are:

1) The Word for "Priest"

2) When God created Adam and Eve

3) What is "a Priest"?

4) The Mediator

5) Priests before the Levitical Priesthood

6) A Kingdom of Priests

7) The Moment the Levitical Priesthood Ended

8) The Consequences of the Veil's Removal

9) Why do we still need a Priesthood in Heaven?

10) What About Children?

11) In the Millennium

12) In Favor of a Millennial Levitical Priesthood

13) Against a Millennial Levitical Priesthood

14) The Role of the 144,000 Priests

15) Future Eternity after the Lake of Fire

16) In Conclusion

What is a priest? Why did God institute a priesthood during Old Testament times? When God created Adam and Eve, did God already at that time intend to create a priesthood? What purpose does a priesthood serve? Are ministers in God's Church also priests? What is the difference between a minister and a priest? When many of the religions of this world call some of their religious leaders or officials "priests", what does that tell us? And why are those in the first resurrection going to be priests, as well as kings (see Revelation 5:10)? What will they be doing to justify this identification as "priests"?

These are some of the questions we will look at in this article.

THE WORD FOR "PRIEST"

The Old Testament Hebrew word for "priest" is "**kohen**". This Hebrew noun "kohen" is derived from the verb "**kahan**" which is mostly translated as "priest's office".

Here is what the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (**TWOT**) has to say for this word "kohen":

"kohen. Chief ruler, priest. **The underlying verbal root** of kohen does not appear in the OT and **is of unknown etymology** (KB, p. 424). In light of its early secular usage, the idea of khn **might be** of 'serving as a minister'." (TWOT for "kohen", my emphasis)

When TWOT says that "the underlying verbal root is of unknown etymology", what they mean is: **we don't really know for sure** what this word "kohen" originally meant. And therefore they suggest that the meaning "might be" that of "serving as a minister". They have deduced **this guess** from "its early secular usage".

Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament (**Gesenius**) makes the following statement for the Hebrew verb "kahan":

"... prophets and **priests were alike supposed to intercede between the gods and men**." (Gesenius, my emphasis)

Another reference work, The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament" (**Word Study OT**) has the following for the Hebrew noun "kohen":

"The word is used to designate the various classes of priests in Israel. These people performed **the function of mediators between God and His people**." (Word Study OT)

Both Gesenius and Word Study OT tell us that priests were supposed to intercede and to mediate between God and His people. That is correct. But these reference works did not deduce this responsibility from the etymology of the words "kahan" or "kohen". They reached this understanding by correctly evaluating the activities enjoined on the priests. But the original meaning of the root is still unknown, as TWOT points out.

I believe that both Gesenius and Word Study OT are closer to the original meaning of the root word than TWOT. In other words, I believe that the original verbal root for "kohen" meant something like "**to mediate** between God and man" or "**to intercede** between God and man", rather than TWOT's guess of "serving as a minister".

Focusing on "serving as a minister" leads people away from a correct understanding of the role of a priest. Let's start at the beginning.

WHEN GOD CREATED ADAM AND EVE

There have always been two God Beings. We know Them as God the Father and as Jesus Christ. God the Father is the leader in Their relationship. Jesus Christ is willingly and joyfully in submission to the Father's leadership. These two God Beings **have never disagreed with One Another**. They are "one" in Their relationship.

When these two God Beings decided to create "the Family of God", with the ultimate goal of including

billions of "children", then Jesus Christ came to this planet Earth to start the process by creating two physical, mortal human beings. Everything that Jesus Christ did during that re-creation week in Genesis chapter 1 was an expression of the will of God the Father. This is important to grasp because it reveals **the origin for the concept of "a priest"**.

So when Jesus Christ had created Adam and Eve on the sixth day of that re-creation week, then Jesus Christ freely interacted with those two mortal human beings. But everything Jesus Christ did at that point represented the wishes and the desires of God the Father.

There was no intention whatsoever that God the Father Himself would ever come to this present planet Earth for the purpose of interacting with mortal human beings. Any interactions with human beings that God the Father might have engaged in, would be from a distance: God the Father would remain in heaven, but have the ability to convey from there thoughts directly to the minds of human beings on Earth, should God the Father desire to do so. Similarly, God the Father could, if He wanted to do so, divinely intervene in human affairs without actually coming to this Earth. And God also employs "messengers" (i.e. the angels) to convey instructions and information to human beings.

But the point is this: at the creation of Adam and Eve Jesus Christ was here on Earth to do the Father's will. And God the Father has an implicit trust that Jesus Christ will always faithfully execute His (the Father's) will. Whatever Jesus Christ would do here on Earth, it would be just as if God the Father had done it Himself.

So Jesus Christ was God the Father's representative to Adam and Eve.

This is the origin for the concept of "a priest".

In fact, Jesus Christ would be the only God Being who would deal directly with human beings until the plan the two God Beings had devised for creating the Family of God would be completed. Only upon the completion of that plan would all those human beings who had attained unto salvation be introduced to God the Father.

What this means is that all those who will die in the lake of fire will never have seen God the Father.

[Comment: That plan was modified by God in the years leading up to the flood. This is thoroughly explained in my 2011 90-page article "The Progressive Development of God's Plan of Salvation". With that modification in God's plan the 144,000 in the first resurrection will actually get to briefly see God the Father at the marriage supper, before the completion of the whole plan of salvation. We don't need to consider those modifications here in our context in this present article.]

A priest is a go-between for two different parties, where the priest seeks to present each party in the most favorable light to the other party. **The goal of a priest's activities is to enable the two distinct parties**, between whom the priest stands, **to ultimately become one**.

When Jesus Christ had created Adam and Eve, it was Christ's intention to lead human beings to the point where they would willingly "walk with Him". The intent was to lead those human beings who would do so to then become one with Christ, and thereby to ultimately also become one Family with God the Father. Walking with Jesus Christ was a prerequisite for in time coming into total harmony with God the Father.

So even before Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus Christ was already the One who dealt with them **on behalf of God the Father**, and who would convey the Father's instructions, if any, to mankind. Before human beings sinned, God the Father had already established a system of dealing with human beings, which

system hinged on Jesus Christ representing God the Father to human beings, while at the same time representing human beings to God the Father.

During His ministry Jesus Christ said:

I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because **I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father who has sent me**. (John 5:30)

And in Hebrews Paul wrote concerning Jesus Christ:

Then said I, Lo, **I come** (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) **to do Your will, O God**. (Hebrews 10:7)

These statements apply not only to Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. They apply equally much to when Jesus Christ was first here on Earth, at the time when He created Adam and Eve. Jesus Christ has always devoted Himself to doing the will of God the Father. And wherever He goes, Jesus Christ represents God the Father, to the point where if we know Jesus Christ, then we also know God the Father (see John 14:7), and if we have seen Jesus Christ, then we have also seen the Father (see John 14:9).

This "intermediary between two parties" function that Jesus Christ fulfilled already before Adam and Eve sinned became **the prototype for the concept of a priesthood**. Once human beings had sinned, then, from this particular perspective, Christ's role was modified somewhat, and it was then first presented in the form of "a Priest", and later in the form of "a priesthood".

Note! The role of a priest on the human level was later established by God to represent in a modified and adapted form the function that Jesus Christ had already been fulfilling since the day that Christ had created Adam and Eve.

WHAT IS A PRIEST?

When we understand this origin for the concept of "a priest", then it should also be easy to understand **why Jesus Christ is the very first One to ever be called "a priest"**. Jesus Christ is the One who functioned in Abraham's time as "the priest" Melchizedek. That's in Genesis 14:18. We'll look at that verse later.

Let's look again at the definition for a priest that I provided earlier.

A priest is a go-between for two different parties, where the priest seeks to present each party in the most favorable light to the other party, in the process as far as possible smoothing out any differences.

Now when one of the two parties carries some guilt before the other party (i.e. we human beings sin and are therefore guilty before God), then the priest has to do two things: explain to the guilty party how their guilt may be removed, if that is at all possible; and at the same time also interceding on behalf of the guilty party before the innocent party (on the condition that the guilty party has a repentant attitude). Those are the two aspects of a priest's job.

As long as there is any guilt, it will be impossible for the two parties to be reconciled. And it is the priest that prevents, in absolute terms, the guilt of the guilty party ever in any way reaching or affecting the innocent party. In other words, **it is the priest that prevents any human sins from ever in any way**

reaching God the Father.

Do you follow?

Under no circumstances must God the Father ever be exposed to the sins of human beings. But yet God the Father wants to be involved in an active role in the process of human beings attaining unto salvation. That "involvement" for God the Father goes right to the point of selecting those people who will be "called by God". God the Father, while remaining in heaven, is the One who "draws" people for being called into God's Church (see John 6:44). That "involvement" by God the Father then also extends to the point of accepting and responding to the prayers of those people whose sins have been removed by "the Priest" Jesus Christ. In this process God the Father is not exposed to any human sins.

An example of God the Father doing this selecting can be seen in Jesus Christ's prayer before He was crucified. Christ prayed:

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name: **those that You gave Me** I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:12)

It was God the Father who had been involved in selecting the 12 apostles from amongst the thousands of men who had followed Jesus Christ in His early ministry. Once God had "given" the 12 apostles to Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ was the One who worked with them. But the Father was involved in the process.

In the New Testament the man who had been born blind and who was healed by Jesus Christ said: "**we know that God hears not sinners**" (John 9:31). Exactly! It is the responsibility of the priest to only present the prayers of repentant people to God the Father. **No other prayers get through to the Father.** That's what Jesus Christ was saying at His last Passover observance.

Jesus said unto him, **I am the way**, the truth, and the life: **no man comes unto the Father, but by me**. (John 14:6)

Let me repeat what I have just said: no other prayers from anyone on earth get through to God the Father! **Jesus Christ is literally "the gate-keeper" who decides which prayers get through to God the Father, and which prayers don't get through.** That is a part of Christ's role as the High Priest in heaven. We need to be sure that we don't view that role as just something symbolical. When unrepentant people pray, then Jesus Christ is the One who stops those prayers from reaching God the Father.

Jesus Christ was the One who dealt with Israel in Old Testament times. After in Isaiah 1:14 expressing His hatred for the present Jewish calendar, Christ went on to say:

And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you: yes, **when you make many prayers, I will not hear**: your hands are full of blood. (Isaiah 1:15)

And later Isaiah wrote:

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and **your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear**. (Isaiah 59:2)

The prayers of unrepentant people never get past Jesus Christ. King David also understood this principle (see Psalm 66:18). What we need to understand is that **blocking unacceptable sacrifices and prayers** is a part of the job of the High Priest, who is Jesus Christ. The High Priest never permits anything

unacceptable ever coming into the presence of God the Father.

Had you understood this ... that the High Priest in heaven has the responsibility to block all prayers from unrepentant people?

As an aside: When bodies of unrepentant people in this world (e.g. a society or a congress or a parliament or a committee or a club, etc.) have the custom of opening their meetings with prayers, then **Jesus Christ will block those prayers from reaching God the Father**. And it would not be a good idea for a converted Christian to lead such prayers, or even to be involved in such prayers (i.e. to say "amen" to such prayers). God the Father "will not hear" the prayers of unrepentant people, irrespective of what the situation may be. Unrepentant people pray to the wrong "god", the "god of this present age" (see 2 Corinthians 4:4). And repentant Christians should not be involved with any such prayers.

It is one thing for a converted member of God's Church to pray **for** unrepentant people. But it is a different matter altogether to actually **lead the prayers of unrepentant people**. So if you are a converted member of God's Church, then don't ever accept the invitation to open a meeting for unrepentant people with prayer ... be it a local civic committee meeting, or a city mayor's breakfast meeting, or a session of Congress, or any other occasion where unrepentant people decide to pray. The prayers of unrepentant people are never directed towards the true God. (Here I'm obviously not speaking about praying in a Church of God context ... at services, Bible Studies, meals, weddings, funerals, etc.)

Don't lead the prayers of unrepentant people. When some group or committee of 20 people have a prayer where all 20 will theoretically say "amen", it is not as if the presence of one truly converted Christian will make the prayers of the other 19 unrepentant people acceptable to God. Unrepentant people cannot piggyback a prayer to God the Father on the shoulders of one converted Christian.

So the principle is this:

When dealing with unrepentant people, it is a matter of : **I will pray for you, but I will not pray with you**!

Anyway, to get back to the role of a priest: in heaven it is one of the High Priest's responsibilities to block all prayers, except those of truly repentant people, from ever reaching God the Father. That includes blocking all the prayers from pagan religions. The only people whose prayers Jesus Christ will let through to God the Father are those people whose sins have been blotted out by Jesus Christ's shed blood. No man comes unto God the Father but by Jesus Christ!

So as far as the meaning of the Hebrew word "kohen" is concerned: the scholars for TWOT reasoned out that the meaning "might be" that of "serving as a minister". But there is a flaw in that reasoning process. That flaw is that those scholars did not really understand the role of a priest correctly. They reasoned from the physical activities that were enjoined on the priests. But those activities only represent a secondary role.

And so the views expressed by Gesenius and Word Study OT are much closer to what must have been the original meaning of the root word in question.

It is much more logical to view the word "kohen" to in some way express **the most important function of a priest**. And that most important function of a priest is **to mediate between two parties**. A priest is first and foremost **a mediator**, as Gesenius and Word Study OT also indicate.

THE MEDIATOR

The Apostle Paul is the one who explained that Jesus Christ is at this present time our High Priest in heaven.

Seeing then that **we have a great High Priest**, who is passed into the heavens, **Jesus the Son of God**, let us hold fast *our* profession. (Hebrews 4:14)

And the Apostle Paul is also the only writer of any part of the New Testament that used the word "mediator". Paul understood that the position of **"a priest" really refers to "a mediator"**.

Paul explained the following to Timothy:

For *there is* one God, and **one mediator between God and men**, the man Christ Jesus; (1 Timothy 2:5)

The thing that qualifies Jesus Christ to be that Mediator is that He lives right now and has lived on both sides. He has lived as a God Being for past eternity. And he lives as a God Being right now. But Jesus Christ has also lived for 33 years as a human being. He has personal experience of what it is like to be God, and what it is like to be a human man. **He has experienced both sides.** That is Paul's point in Hebrews 4:15.

For we have not **a high priest who** cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but **was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet** without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus Christ faced death when He was a human being. And He prayed with "strong crying and tears" to God the Father for help (see Hebrews 5:7). Jesus Christ can personally identify with any trial we human beings might experience.

Let's also take note of the most important requirement for someone to become a mediator. To be a qualified mediator demands that the individual is **thoroughly acquainted with both parties**. Someone who is not thoroughly familiar with both parties cannot possibly be a good mediator.

This reveals why the Levitical priests could perform physical rituals, but they could never be real mediators. They were simply not familiar with God the Father. This also reveals why Jesus Christ is the only One who, prior to the millennium, can be a real Mediator. He is the only One who is thoroughly familiar with both God the Father and also sinful, mortal human beings.

Anyone who does not know God the Father cannot really be a priest.

Anyway, in talking to the Hebrews Paul identified Jesus Christ as "a High Priest"; and in talking to Timothy Paul identified Jesus Christ as "a Mediator". When we are talking about Jesus Christ, then these two terms are really interchangeable. When we talk about human beings seeking to have a relationship with God the Father, then there is only one "Mediator" between God and man, and that is **Jesus Christ**.

The original lost meaning of the Hebrew word "kohen" must have been something like "to mediate", rather than "to serve". To serve is noble, but to mediate is absolutely essential and indispensable. Serving people does not automatically involve any mediating. Yes, certainly, "to mediate" is also a major way of serving people. But focusing on serving detracts from the more important focus of mediating between God and man. That is the foremost responsibility of a priest, which Paul has spelled out to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:5. And this must have been expressed by the lost meaning of the word "kohen".

Let’s keep in mind that even before Adam sinned Jesus Christ was already the One who was the intermediary between God the Father and physical human beings. Right from the start of humanity Jesus Christ was already the Mediator, acting on behalf of God the Father. The concept of a mediator also "serving" only entered the picture after human beings had sinned.

So while I obviously cannot prove this, I suspect that Gesenius and Word Study OT are closer to the lost meaning of the root word for "kohen" (i.e. expressing the idea of "mediating" or "interceding" between two parties) than is TWOT, which only provides a generalized meaning like "serving".

Regarding the giving of God’s laws, Paul explained:

Wherefore then *serves* **the law**? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and* ***it was*** *ordained* by angels **in the hand of a mediator**. (Galatians 3:19)

Jesus Christ is the One who spoke the ten commandments from Mount Sinai, and He did so on behalf of God the Father. The law was ordained in the hands of Jesus Christ ... His hand wrote on the original tables of stone. Jesus Christ was that Mediator between God the Father and the people of Israel.

When reading Galatians 3:19 think of Paul in his own mind equating the concept of "mediator" with the concept of "high priest", as these concepts rightly should be equated. So Paul might as well have said that the law he is talking about was ordained "in the hand of a High Priest". And that "High Priest" was Jesus Christ.

While in this verse Paul is speaking about the sacrificial laws that were added to the spiritual law of the ten commandments, the principle involved holds good for both categories of laws. Jesus Christ was the Mediator (or High Priest) who represented God the Father. First Jesus Christ gave Israel the law of the ten commandments, and a short time later Jesus Christ also gave Israel the sacrificial and ceremonial laws that were then implemented by the Levitical priesthood.

The expression "till the seed should come" in this verse refers to the time of Jesus Christ’s ministry about 2000 years ago. The sacrificial laws were added to the ten commandments "**until the seed should come**". After Christ’s death and resurrection God phased out the sacrificial laws. That’s what the word "till" in the expression "till the seed should come" tells us.

This word "till" shows that the laws that deal with the sacrificial system were only "added" to the spiritual law of God for a limited period of time. **And that was already the plan on the day when Aaron was appointed to be the High Priest.** On the day when Aaron became High Priest it had already been determined that this human priesthood would cease to function after Jesus Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. That is what Galatians 3:19 tells us.

A CHANGE OF THE LAW

In Hebrews 7 Paul explained the priesthood of Melchizedek. In talking about the Levitical priesthood, Paul made the following statement:

If therefore perfection were by **the Levitical priesthood**, (for **under it the people received the law**,) what further need *was there* that **another priest should rise** after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron? (Hebrews 7:11)

"The law" Paul is speaking about in this chapter is not a reference to the ten commandments, absolutely not! It is not even a reference to all the laws that made up the Old Covenant. "**The law**" Paul is speaking about here is a reference to nothing other than **the sacrificial laws** and all the other laws that pertained to the Levitical priesthood, which laws are also known as **ceremonial or ritualistic laws**, and which laws were added at a later time.

Here is the proof!

God (i.e. Jesus Christ) gave the ten commandments in Exodus 20. The Old Covenant is discussed and entered into in the section from Exodus 19:17 right up to Exodus 24:3. Exodus 24:3 is the conclusion of the Old Covenant. This verse says:

And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and **all the people answered with one voice**, and said, **All the words which the LORD has said will we do**. (Exodus 24:3)

When the people of Israel said "yes" to everything God had told them, as presented to them by Moses, then that was the equivalent of our modern practice **of signing an agreement** after the last word in the agreement has been written. Exodus 24:3 concludes the Old Covenant.

But at that point in time **there was no Levitical priesthood**!

Therefore the people did not receive these particular laws under the Levitical priesthood. All these laws that make up the Old Covenant, were given around Pentecost in the first year of the exodus from Egypt. It was another nine months before that first year was concluded.

After the Old Covenant was concluded, Moses went up to the mountain for 40 days (Exodus 24:18). During those 40 days God revealed all the details for the whole religious system to Moses ... the tent, the ark of the covenant, the table for the shewbread, the altar for burnt offerings, etc. At that time God also revealed **His intention** to install Aaron and his sons "in the priest's office", with specific instructions for what was to happen when Aaron and his sons were dedicated (see Exodus chapters 28-29). But Aaron's priesthood did not start at that point in time; it only started nine months later.

After 40 days Moses came down from the mountain. By then Aaron had made the golden calf, which Moses ground to powder and then put the powder into the drinking water for the people (Exodus 32:20). Let's note that when Aaron made the golden calf, he was **not yet God's High Priest**. Had Aaron already been installed as God's High Priest, then making the golden calf would surely have been the end of his priesthood, because that would have been an extremely serious violation of his office as High Priest. But Aaron was not yet the High Priest when he made the golden calf.

At that time Moses had also in anger broken the two tables of stone. Then "about 3000 men" of the worst offenders were killed by the men of the tribe of Levi (Exodus 32:26-28). Then Moses made two new tables of stone and went up into the mountain for another 40 days (Exodus 34:28).

More time passed. Then in Exodus 40:2 we come to the first day of the first month of the second year. And so "in the first month in **the second year** ... the tabernacle was reared up" (see Exodus 40:17).

Then in the first seven chapters of Leviticus God gave **all the sacrificial laws** which would be performed by the priesthood of Aaron, the laws that were added. This was the lead-up to the establishment of the Levitical priesthood. **Only in Leviticus chapter 8 are Aaron and his sons actually ordained as priests.**

That was over nine months after God had made the Old Covenant with the people of Israel. From Leviticus 8 onwards the people of Israel had the Levitical priesthood.

So when Paul said that "**under the Levitical priesthood** the people received the law", then the reference must be to the laws that were given at the same time as the Levitical priesthood was established. It must be a reference to **the laws that were given in Leviticus chapters 1-7**, and other laws that followed.

But all the laws that constituted the Old Covenant, including the ten commandments, had been given over nine months before the Levitical priesthood came into existence. **The spiritual laws of God were most emphatically not given "under the Levitical priesthood"!**

The actual wording of Hebrews 7:11 should likewise make this point clear. It speaks about **two different priesthoods**, indicating that the laws pertaining to a priesthood are the focus of this statement, rather than the laws that spell out the spiritual law of God.

Let's continue with the next verse.

For the priesthood being changed, **there is made of necessity a change also of the law**. (Hebrews 7:12)

Here Paul presents his reasoning. He presents "**a change in the priesthood**" as **an established fact**. This fact is not debatable. With Jesus Christ's resurrection **the Levitical priesthood ceased being acceptable to God** for fulfilling priestly responsibilities! So at the time of Christ's resurrection those responsibilities were therefore taken away from the Levitical priesthood.

Now whether or not the Levitical priesthood will be re-established during the millennium does not affect our discussion here. And we can make a reasonably good case for either option. The immediately apparent indications certainly seem to be that the Levitical priesthood will be re-established during the millennium. See Scriptures like Jeremiah 33:18; Ezekiel chapter 42, etc. But that option also presents some rather challenging questions, which I don't want to get into right now. Later we'll look at some of these questions more closely.

At any rate, for this present age (i.e. from Christ's resurrection until Christ's second coming) the Levitical priesthood has been removed from all priestly responsibilities. There are no God-ordained Levitical priests today, even if some Jewish men could perhaps be able to trace one specific branch of their genealogical lines back to Aaron (which is a daunting task). Paul's statement "**the priesthood being changed**" tells us that God has not authorized any theoretical Levitical priests to function as priests since the time of Christ's resurrection.

In fact, when **the High Priest condemned Jesus Christ to death** (see Matthew 26:63-66), then that represented **the last recognized action by the Levitical priesthood** before it was terminated less than 24 hours later. It was a case of "the outgoing High Priest" condemning "the incoming High Priest" to death. Even Pontius Pilate recognized that "the chief priests" were motivated by **envy** in demanding the death of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 27:17-20).

[Comment: In practice it took another almost 40 years before Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Romans, and the priesthood ceased to function. But the Levitical priesthood was removed from office within 24 hours of demanding the death of Jesus Christ. And since then there has certainly not been any Levitical priest who has God's approval. More on this shortly.]

There cannot be any Levitical priests before Christ's second coming, whom God would recognize

as priests. For any man to attempt to fill the role of a Levitical priest today would fall into the identical category as Nadab and Abihu offering "strange fire before the Eternal" (see Leviticus 10:1-2). And we know what happened to Nadab and Abihu.

So since Christ's resurrection **the only priesthood that is recognized by God is the priesthood of Melchizedek**, which priesthood at this time belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ, who had been condemned to death by the Levitical High Priest.

Let's get back to the Apostle Paul's reasoning in Hebrews 7:12. From the established fact that there is a change in the priesthood, Paul then draws a conclusion. Paul presents an inevitable consequence for the change in priesthood. In Paul's words, "there is made of necessity **a change also of the law**".

What law is Paul talking about? What law had to be changed "**of necessity**"? Did this change in priesthood necessitate a change for any of the ten commandments? No, of course not. Well, did the change in priesthood necessitate a change for any of the other laws that constitute the Old Covenant? No, of course not. Irrespective of which priesthood is in office, God still requires us to obey all ten commandments, as well as all of God's other laws. None of those laws change simply because there is a change in priesthood.

So when the priesthood changed, what law had to also "of necessity" be changed? **The law that was changed is the law that establishes who may be a priest!** The law that had to be changed "of necessity" is the law that is recorded in Exodus chapters 28-29. Let's look at it.

And take you unto you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, **that he may minister unto me in the priest's office**, *even* Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. (Exodus 28:1)

And you shall put them upon Aaron your brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, **that they may minister unto me in the priest's office**. (Exodus 28:41)

And you shall gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and **the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute**: and you shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons. (Exodus 29:9)

This is the law that established Aaron and his sons as priests, and "the priest's office shall be theirs **for a perpetual statute**"! This is the law that established who may and who may not be a priest.

This law had to be changed!

Why?

As Paul states, it is obvious that **Jesus Christ could never become a priest as long as this specific law still existed**, because Jesus Christ came from the tribe of Judah (see Hebrews 7:13-14). Nobody from the tribe of Judah could ever become a priest. Therefore Jesus Christ likewise could never become a priest ... if the law of Exodus 29:9 was not abolished.

Paul's statement also shows that there cannot be two different priesthoods which are functioning at the same time. **Only one priesthood at a time is acceptable before God.**

Thus "the change of the law" Paul refers to was that **the law of Exodus 29:9 had to "of necessity" be abolished**, and it had to be replaced by a law that establishes the priesthood of Melchizedek. The

abolition of that specific law opened the way for Jesus Christ to again become a Priest before God the Father, as He had been a Priest before the Father at the time of Abraham.

One thing we should note here is this: **some laws can change**! That's what Paul tells us in Hebrews 7:12. In this specific case, laws pertaining to **the priesthood** and to **priestly duties** can change. Also laws that were added for very specific reasons at a later time, can change, or be phased out (see Galatians 3:19 again).

Such changes don't affect the laws that are "holy" and the commandments that are "holy and just and good" (see Romans 7:12). Such changes have nothing to do with the law that is "spiritual" (see Romans 7:14).

Clearly, the Bible speaks about **different categories of laws**, without always clearly identifying which category of laws is being discussed. We are expected to discern that ourselves from each respective context in which the word "law" is used. We are supposed to use our minds!

And we need to understand that in Hebrews 7 Paul was speaking about the law that establishes who may become a priest. That specific law had to be abolished, so that Jesus Christ could resume His role as High Priest in heaven, "after the order of Melchizedek". That is Paul's point.

Today there is no law in existence that would even permit any male descendant of Aaron to function in the role of a priest. So even if the Jews did build a Temple (hypothetically speaking), they wouldn't have anyone who is authorized to function as a priest. And if they did institute anyone as a priest, even a descendant of Aaron, then that would be no different from men assuming the role of priests in pagan religions. Today no descendant of Aaron has the right to function as a priest. **That law was rescinded.**

PRIESTS BEFORE THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

The very first time the word "priest" appears in the Old Testament is in Genesis 14:18, in the days of Abraham.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and **He *was* the priest** (Hebrew "kohen") **of the Most High God**. (Genesis 14:18)

This incident in Abraham's life took place more than 2000 years after the creation of Adam and Eve. Now Melchizedek, who was Jesus Christ, didn't just suddenly become "a priest" at that specific point in Abraham's life. While originally perhaps not known by the name Melchizedek, **Jesus Christ had been fulfilling the priestly role of Melchizedek since the day Adam and Eve sinned.**

Christ had been the Mediator for the entire 1656 years before the flood. And He had fulfilled the role of Melchizedek for the 400+ years since the flood, up to this meeting with Abraham. In practical terms Jesus Christ fulfilled the role of Melchizedek for over 2000 years before going out to meet Abraham. That role was one of being **a Mediator** between God the Father and mankind.

The only other verse in the Old Testament that mentions the name "Melchizedek" is Psalm 110:4.

The LORD has sworn, and will not repent, **You *are* a priest for ever** after the order of Melchizedek. (Psalm 110:4)

The Hebrew word here translated as "for ever" is "olam", and it only means "for a long duration". It could

be used to refer to "for ever", but it is also commonly used for long periods of time that eventually come to an end.

In Psalm 110:4, as well as in the 9 references to Melchizedek in the Book of Hebrews, **the correct meaning of this statement is not "for ever"**! The correct meaning is "for a long time"! **Jesus Christ's priesthood** "after the order of Melchizedek" **will come to an end** when the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem are created by God the Father (see Revelation 21-22). This I will explain later.

Let's continue with other priests before the Levitical priesthood.

The next time the word "kohen" is mentioned in the Old Testament is in references to Egypt. Pharaoh gave Joseph to wife the daughter of "the priest of On" (see Genesis 41:45, 50 and Genesis 46:20). The boys Manasseh and Ephraim were the grandsons of a pagan Egyptian priest. The account shows that by that time there was an established class of people in Egypt, identified as "**the priests**" (Genesis 47:22, 26).

These priests were supposed to be **intercessors between the pagan gods of Egypt and the Egyptian people**. These priests would (supposedly) convey instructions from the gods to the Egyptian people. And when the people faced specific problems, then they would approach the priests to intercede for them before the gods.

Now obviously, the only "gods" the Egyptians had were demons. But the role which these Egyptian "kohens" fulfilled was clearly that of intercessor or go-between for the people and their pagan gods. These priests were a privileged class in Egyptian society. Those priests were not "serving as a minister" at all, as implied in the definition for "kohen" provided by TWOT, which definition we looked at earlier. In Egypt they were a privileged class.

And that role for a "kohen" in Egyptian society was clearly understood.

It is interesting to note that when Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh at the incident where Aaron's rod became a serpent, that Pharaoh called in his best forces to replicate this miracle. See Exodus 7:8-12. Pharaoh called for "the wise men" (Hebrew "chakam") and for "the sorcerers" (Hebrew "kashaph") and for "the magicians" (Hebrew "chartom"). **But Pharaoh did not call for "the priests"** (Hebrew "kohen") to help in countering the God of Moses and Aaron. Perhaps the priests were in a different league?

Next, when Moses had fled from Egypt, he went to the land of Midian. The man named Midian had been the fourth of **Abraham's six sons** by Keturah (see Genesis 25:1-2). So Moses came to the land settled by the descendants of Abraham's son Midian. There Moses married the daughter of "**the priest** (kohen) **of Midian**" (see Exodus 2:16 and Exodus 3:1).

Jethro, a "kohen", likewise was not "serving as a minister". He was a go-between for the people of Midian and their god or gods. Later, we see Jethro fulfilling this specific role as a go-between when he gave advice to Moses. You know the account where Moses sat all day judging the cases that were brought to him.

Moses said to Jethro: "the people come unto me to enquire of God ... and I judge between one and another" (Exodus 18:15-16). This judging was based on explaining the correct applications of God's laws to the people.

Jethro then replied: "Listen now to my voice, I will give you counsel, **and God shall be with you** ..."

(Exodus 18:19). This was in keeping with Jethro's role as a priest for Midian, that he would offer godly advice to people. Earlier Jethro had already brought "a burnt offering" to God.

And **Jethro**, Moses' father in law, **took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God**: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God. (Exodus 18:12)

Moses and Aaron and all the elders of Israel accepted Jethro as a dignitary and they had a formal dinner where they all did "**eat bread**" with Jethro. Notice that Jethro had performed "a burnt offering". That was a part of the role of a priest. At that stage God had not yet established the Levitical priesthood, and so Jethro's actions did not in any way conflict with God's instructions.

At that stage it was acceptable for Jethro, who was obviously not a Levite, to perform such a sacrifice. Priests (i.e. intercessors) performed sacrifices with the idea that such sacrifices would allow them to draw close to God to then communicate with God. Sacrifices were an acknowledgment that humanity in general was cut off from access to God.

Regarding "the bread" which they ate: this would have been bread made from manna. In Exodus 16:4 God started providing manna for Israel. Moses then explained to the people "**this is the bread** which the Eternal has given you to eat" (Exodus 16:15). So "the bread" in Exodus 18:12, which Jethro and the elders of Israel ate, would have been prepared from manna.

Let's move on.

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

In Exodus 19 we have the start of the Old Covenant, the agreement God made with the people of Israel. The actual start of the Old Covenant events is with verse 17. The first 16 verses of Exodus 19 describe the lead-up to the Old Covenant. In that situation Jesus Christ was the One who was dealing with Moses and with all Israel.

Now we need to understand something!

At this point God was ready to make an agreement with the people of Israel. This was something God had never done before ... make an agreement with a specific group of people. At this point **Jesus Christ was very optimistic**! Jesus Christ had very high hopes that these descendants of His faithful servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would provide all of the people God still needed, to have exactly 144,000 individuals for the first resurrection.

Jesus Christ's optimism was linked to Christ's earlier statement to Abraham, where Christ had said: "for I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, **and they shall keep the way of the LORD** ..." (Genesis 18:19). Sadly, this didn't actually turn out to be correct. The descendants of Abraham did not really "keep the way of the LORD".

Jesus Christ desired to see that sufficient numbers of Israelites would willingly submit their lives to God, so that only physical Israelites would become "**God's firstborn son**" (see Exodus 4:22). "God's firstborn son" is a clear reference to the people who will be in **the first resurrection**. And this statement is an expression of God's desire.

Literally the expression "God's firstborn Son" refers to Jesus Christ. But when the term "God's firstborn" is used in a collective sense, applying to more than one individual, then it refers to the 144,000 who

make up the first resurrection. And in having Moses make this statement to Pharaoh in Exodus 4:22, **God was speaking about Israel in a collective sense**.

Now notice what God told Moses to tell the Israelites.

And **you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests**, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which you shall speak unto the children of Israel. (Exodus 19:6)

What did God mean? Did God mean that every single Israelite would become a priest? No, of course not! Even under the very best circumstances some Israelites would rebel against God, simply because all human beings have a free will. And such rebels would most assuredly not become "priests". So how are we supposed to understand this statement? What did God mean?

Keep in mind that at this point in Exodus 19 Aaron and his sons had not yet been appointed as priests ... that would only happen about nine months later. Also keep in mind that at this point it had not yet been decided that Israel would wander in the wilderness for 40 years. And God had not yet given Israel any of the sacrifices that are laid out in Leviticus 1-7.

If Israel had not constantly disobeyed God, then all these sacrificial and ritualistic laws might never have been "added"! All these laws were only added at a later date to the agreement God was about to make in Exodus 19 "**because of transgressions**" (see again Galatians 3:19).

Now if "a kingdom of priests" doesn't refer to performing sacrifices, and if it doesn't mean overseeing the application of ceremonial and ritualistic laws, then **what does "a kingdom of priests" actually refer to**?

To understand this statement correctly, we have to fast-forward to the millennium. In the millennium the 144,000 who make up "spiritual Israel" will be both kings and priests, under the leadership of Jesus Christ (see Revelation 5:10). To be precise, during the millennium **every single member** of the spiritual kingdom of Israel (which will consist of exactly 144,000 under Jesus Christ) **will then be "a priest"**.

God's statement in Exodus 19:6 ("a kingdom of priests") is a direct reference to the things that apply to every one of the 144,000 people in the first resurrection!

Understand that Exodus 19:6 was not an unconditional promise to the physical people of Israel! **It was a conditional statement!** Pronounced blessings are always conditional as long as the people to whom those blessings apply are alive. As God tells us through the Prophet Ezekiel:

When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, **all his righteousness shall not be remembered**; but for his iniquity that he has committed, he shall die for it. (Ezekiel 33:13)

But when the righteous turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, *and* does according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* does, shall he live? **All his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned**: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die. (Ezekiel 18:24)

Again, When a righteous *man* does turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because you have not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and **his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered**; but his blood will I require at your hand. (Ezekiel 3:20)

In plain language: the statement "a kingdom of priests" refers to God's **intention** at that point in time to seek all of the remaining people needed for the 144,000 from amongst the nations of Israel. **That** would have made Israel "a kingdom of priests"; and the nations of Israel would have been **the sole suppliers for the 144,000 "priests" in the first resurrection**. No people from any other nations would have provided any members for those 144,000 "priests".

God did not mean that He would make the nations of Israel physical priests, not at all! God was referring to Israel providing 144,000 spiritual priests for the millennium and for the 100-year period. And this was said before any physical sacrificial system had been established.

Now here is something that you may perhaps not have considered before:

Today the statement "a kingdom of priests" no longer applies to physical Israel!

That offer was forfeited when God "divorced" Israel (see Jeremiah 3:8 and Isaiah 50:1). Lots of things are forfeited in a divorce from God. Starting with the time of Jesus Christ's resurrection, Jesus Christ's instruction has been "to teach all nations" all the things He had commanded His disciples ... with the obvious intention of **finding "kings and priests" for the first resurrection from amongst all nations**!

And if there will indeed be "kings and priests" from all nations in the first resurrection, then the statement "a kingdom of priests" must "**of necessity**" **also be changed** (that's the principle of Hebrews 7:12 again). To adapt Paul's reasoning in Hebrews 7 to this situation: for it is evident that the statement "a kingdom of priests" makes no provision for any priests to come from any other nations. Therefore there must of necessity be a changed application for the statement in Exodus 19:6, because the first resurrection will indeed include very many people from non-Israelite nations.

So we should view Exodus 19:6 as an expression of God's intent for the nations of Israel, **which intent had to be modified because Israel constantly refused to obey God**. We human beings cannot disobey God, without such disobedience somehow having serious consequences. **Disobedience always leads to a loss of blessings.**

And when Israel embarked on a path of endless disobedience to God, then God eventually "divorced" Israel, and the offer to make Israel "a kingdom of priests" was withdrawn. In biblical terminology: "**they which were bidden were not worthy**" (Matthew 22:8), and so God started looking "for kings and priests" (i.e. for those who are invited to the marriage) in "the highways" and in other seemingly unlikely places (verses 9-10), meaning that **God started looking amongst non-Israelite nations**.

So when ministers today quote that Israel will be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation", if they then apply that statement to the physical nations of Israel, then they don't understand that this opportunity was forfeited because of transgressions. **This statement no longer applies to physical Israel.** If that statement was still valid today for physical Israel, then there could not be any non-Israelites in the first resurrection. We can't have it both ways. Today the statement in Exodus 19 applies to spiritual Israel.

The Apostle Peter understood this. That is why he applied this Scripture to the Church! Peter wrote to the members of **God's Church**:

You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, **a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)

But **you *are*** a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of **Him who has called you** out of darkness into his marvelous light: (1 Peter 2:9)

So the statement of intent that God made to the physical nations of Israel in Exodus 19:6 is by the Apostle Peter being applied to the Church of God, to those who have been called by God. According to Peter, it is now the Church of God that is "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and **a purchased people**".

[The Greek text in 1 Peter 2:9 translated as "a peculiar people" is "laos eis peripoiesin", and this literally means "a people who have been purchased".]

By applying Exodus 19:6 to the Church of God, to those who have been bought and paid for with the shed blood of Jesus Christ, it shows that this statement no longer applies to the physical nations of Israel. **There is "of necessity" a change involved here.**

Now the Church of God is **not "a royal priesthood" right now**! You might note that the verb "are" in the expression "you *are* a chosen generation" is in italics, because this word is not represented in the Greek text. This whole statement is an obvious reference to something that applies to the millennium. It applies to all those who will be in the first resurrection. And the original statement in Exodus 19 likewise referred to a millennial situation.

So today it is the Church, the people who have been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ, who are destined to become "a royal priesthood". Today this statement no longer applies to the physical nations of Israel.

THE MOMENT THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD ENDED

Let's consider again the definition for "a priest".

As I mentioned at the start: a priest is an intermediary between God the Father and mortal human beings. All of the priest's activities are focused on working towards eventually having those mortal human beings become one Family with God the Father. It is the priest's job to remove, as far as is possible, obstacles between God the Father and mortal man. It is the priest who approaches God the Father on behalf of mortal man. And it is the priest who conveys all of God the Father's instructions to mortal man.

The very existence of a priest presupposes that initially **there is no direct contact between God the Father and mortal man**, and therefore a priest is needed. Direct contact between God the Father and mortal man would eliminate the need for any priest.

So when Christ started His ministry, the priesthood of Aaron's line was still operating. Now let's take note of the very moment when the Levitical priesthood was removed from office for this present age. That moment is recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels.

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, **the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom**; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent. (Matthew 27:50-51)

And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. **And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom**. (Mark 15:37-38)

And the sun was darkened, and **the veil of the temple was rent in the midst**. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he

gave up the ghost. (Luke 23:45-46)

[Comment: Note that Luke, who was not around during any part of Christ's ministry, presents the correct information, but in the wrong sequence. Luke also omits some details. In my 2007 article entitled "Understanding The Gospel Of Luke" I examine over 70 different examples where the Gospel of Luke is at slight odds with the other gospel accounts regarding minor details. This present Scripture (Luke 23:45-46) is one more example that could be added to that list. And Luke's incorrect sequence here need not concern us.]

Here is the point:

Both Matthew and Mark show the following sequence of events:

1) Jesus Christ cried out with a loud voice.

2) At that point Jesus Christ then died.

3) And the moment Jesus Christ died, the veil of the Temple was torn down the middle, from the top to the bottom. This act was God's doing!

Now "the veil of the Temple" separated the Temple into two sections. As God had instructed Moses in Exodus 26:

And you shall hang up the veil under the clasps, that you may bring in there within the veil the ark of the testimony: and **the veil shall divide unto you between the holy *place* and the most holy**. (Exodus 26:33)

"The holy place", comprising two thirds of the Temple, was the area into which the priests entered daily. "The most holy" was the area behind the veil, and into this area the High Priest alone entered twice on one day in the year (on the Day of Atonement), after first bringing a very specific sacrifice for himself. That area, "the most holy", represented the seat of God, the throne of God.

[**Comment**: As an aside, I personally do not believe that the Jews will build a literal temple before Jesus Christ returns. However, if the Jews did actually build a temple, then **it would be a transgression against God for them to put a veil in that temple**! When God tore that veil down the middle, then **that veil has been permanently removed by God**. It is never again to be put up! And anyway, Jesus Christ is not returning to any physical temple! The only two physical places that are mentioned in regard to Christ's return are "the mount of Olives" (Acts 1:12) and "mount Zion" (Revelation 14:1). The "temple" to which Jesus Christ will return are the 144,000 who will make up the group in the first resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 6:16). But the matter of "a temple without a veil in it" is something most temple-advocates have not thought through.]

Now here is the point:

The very moment when God tore that veil from top to bottom, that very moment the Levitical priesthood was done away with for this present age.

When there is no veil in the Temple, then the Levitical priesthood must "of necessity" be removed. Without a veil in the Temple, the High Priest can no longer function; he can no longer do the job of a Levitical High Priest. Understand that Aaron's priesthood was established on the premise that there is a veil between "the holy place" and "the most holy". It was Aaron's job to provide the link between those two holy places.

When that veil is removed, **then Aaron's job disappears**.

So the split-second when Jesus Christ died, that split-second the Levitical priesthood was removed from office, and three days later the priesthood "after the order of Melchizedek" was reinstated in the person of the resurrected Jesus Christ. **For the three days that Jesus Christ was dead, there was no valid priesthood anywhere.** There was no intercessor between God the Father and mankind available. For those three days the only Intercessor was dead.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE VEIL'S REMOVAL

We need to keep in mind that the walls of the Temple were still standing. The building was still standing. Only the veil had been removed. What this means is that **only priests could enter the Temple itself**. All the other people could not see any differences with the veil removed, because all other people were never allowed to enter even "the holy place". **For all non-priests nothing had changed** when the veil was removed.

However, all the men who were priests could now daily have exactly the same access to "the most holy" as up until then had been available only to the High Priest on one day in the year. **With the veil removed, every priest in effect had access to "the most holy" on every day of the year** ... because priests went into "the holy place" on a daily basis.

So which people on earth today have access to God the Father? Not all people! Only those who have been selected by God to become "priests". **Only "priests in the making" can enter "the holy place"**, with then automatic access to "the most holy", because there is no veil of separation.

It is only the prayers of "priests in the making" that Jesus Christ allows through to God the Father. The prayers of people who are not "priests in the making" will not get through to God the Father. We've already looked at the relevant Scriptures in this regard.

Put another way:

The removal of the veil didn't change anything for non-priests. Likewise, **the removal of the veil has not changed anything for any unrepentant person anywhere in the world**. The removal of the veil only gave direct access to "the most holy" to those people who were already priests. Likewise, the removal of the veil has only given access to God the Father to those people who are "priests in the making", those people who are heading for the first resurrection, those people who already have access to "the holy place".

Let's understand that the status of priest **implies** access to God that is not available to common people. **A priest who does not have access to God isn't really "a priest" at all.** A true priest has access to God, access that is not available to other people. The priest's office is needed precisely because other people don't have the access that is available to the priest.

In simple terms: the removal of the veil has only changed things for the people who are called and chosen by God, for those who are "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). **For the rest of humanity nothing changed** when the veil was removed. They still do not have access to either "the holy place" or to "the most holy".

WHY DO WE STILL NEED A PRIEST IN HEAVEN?

The removal of the veil raises a question. And that question is this:

If the removal of the veil has given converted members of God's Church direct access to God the Father, then why do we still have the need for Jesus Christ to at this time be our High Priest in heaven?

Didn't the removal of the veil do away with the need for a High Priest for converted members of God's Church?

The answer here is: yes, **here on earth** the removal of the veil did do away with the need for any type of priesthood. **But in heaven** the need for a High Priest will remain until there are no more mortal human beings in existence. (During the millennium the High Priest in heaven (Jesus Christ) will once again be on earth, together with 144,000 assistant priests.)

Jesus Christ is currently needed as High priest in heaven for **two groups** of people:

1) **Those people in this world who are still unrepentant**, but who in response to a calling from God, start to take the first steps towards repenting and towards submitting their lives to God. Their sins have not yet been forgiven by God, but they have started on the road towards a real repentance. God has "drawn" them (John 6:44), and Jesus Christ is now working with them. They need a High Priest to intercede for them, so they can proceed towards having their guilty past forgiven. Once they have repented, and received God's holy spirit, then they move on and become a part of the next group.

2) The second group of people who need a High Priest in heaven are **all of the converted members of God's Church**. This goes as follows:

With the removal of the veil between the holy place and the most holy, God's people have received direct access to God the Father. **But there is a catch!**

That direct access to God the Father is only available to us if we approach God the Father "**in the name of Jesus Christ**"! If we would (theoretically) try to approach God the Father without any appeal to coming "in the name of Jesus Christ", **then all access would be denied**!

And whatsoever you shall ask **in my name**, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask any thing **in my name**, I will do *it*. (John 14:13-14)

You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father **in my name**, he may give it you. (John 15:16)

And in that day you shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever you shall ask the Father **in my name**, he will give *it* you. (John 16:23)

Hitherto have you asked nothing **in my name**: ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:24)

It is also clear that repentant Christians do still at times sin. We still at times fall short. Or in the words of the Apostle John, "if we (converted Christians) say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (see 1 John 1:8).

So all true Christians will still have many occasions where we need to have some deeds or words we

have spoken forgiven. We still need to have Jesus Christ intercede for us on many occasions.

But that raises another question:

If it is a foregone conclusion that all converted members of God's Church will at times sin, then **why have we already received access to God the Father** now? Why wasn't that access to God the Father withheld until it was guaranteed that we would never sin again?

In theory access to God the Father is not available to any being (man or angel) who is still potentially capable of sinning. Sin must never come into the presence of God the Father. This means that **access to God the Father is not supposed to be available under any conditions to physical mortal human beings**. That's the starting point reality.

Now remember that earlier I said that **Jesus Christ is the gate-keeper** who decides which prayers get through to God the Father, and which prayers don't get through. In theory Jesus Christ should not let any prayers from any human being get through to God the Father. Consider another gate-keeper Scripture:

All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; **neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him***. (Matthew 11:27)

People can't really pray to someone they don't know. It doesn't really work to pray "to the unknown God". But the important point to note in Christ's statement is that **for some people Jesus Christ will make a concession**!

Here is how this works.

When we repent, receive God's spirit and submit our lives to God, then Jesus Christ "gets to know us". All other human beings are in the "I know you not" category (see Matthew 25:12). So when Jesus Christ "gets to know us" because we have repented and have had our sins forgiven by His shed blood, **then Jesus Christ also "reveals the Father to us"**.

By "revealing the Father to us" Jesus Christ is saying that He gives us access to God the Father. So to be clear: "revealing the Father" refers to "**access to God the Father**". And "not revealing the Father to other people" refers to "**no access to the Father for those other people**".

Receiving access to God the Father is an enormous privilege! It is on a par with Jesus Christ saying to Moses "you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name" (see Exodus 33:17). It is a concession to us, somewhat like Jesus Christ saying to Moses "**you shall see My back parts**" (Exodus 33:23).

For humanity as a whole access to God the Father is blocked by a thick, impenetrable steel door. But for those who repent and submit their lives unconditionally to God, Jesus Christ opens **a tiny loophole on one side**, just big enough for us to wiggle through so that we can present our prayers to God the Father.

That "tiny loophole" is only opened by a secret formula, which secret formula is "**in the name of Jesus Christ**"! And it is not enough for us to know that "secret formula". Before that tiny loophole gate will open in response to us using that "secret formula", we first also have to pass "the fingerprint test". (I hope you understand that this is only an analogy.)

In other words, Jesus Christ already knows the identity of every single person, for whom this formula "in

the name of Jesus Christ" will open that tiny loophole. And **for all other people that same formula "in the name of Jesus Christ" will do nothing** ... because they can't pass the fingerprint test.

Let's consider an example. Here is what Jesus Christ said:

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied **in Your name**? and **in Your name** have cast out devils? and **in Your name** done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you**: depart from me, you that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:22-23)

There will be "many people" who tried to use the secret formula, and it didn't work for them, because **they couldn't pass the fingerprint test**. It is not just that Jesus Christ "does not know them". It is really a case that Jesus Christ **never** knew them. This means that none of the prayers of the people in that group ever got through that impenetrable steel door to God the Father. And so they are "unknown" to the Father and to Jesus Christ.

Another example of people failing the fingerprint test happened during the ministry of the Apostle Paul. There were certain "**vagabond Jews**, exorcists", **who tried to cast out demons by using the name of Jesus Christ**. Their formula for casting out demons was: "we adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches" (see Acts 19:13). If you read the story in Acts 19, that didn't turn out too well for the seven sons of a Jew named Sceva.

The secret formula never works for people who don't pass the fingerprint test.

We furthermore need to recognize that even for those people who are known to Jesus Christ that tiny loophole gate is closed, unless and until they use that "secret formula".

Access to that secret formula and permission to use it is **an enormous privilege**, much like Jesus Christ allowing Moses to see His back. Just because you can use that tiny loophole gate daily, don't for one minute take that access for granted! Be fully aware of what you are actually saying, when you end your prayers to God the Father with the words "I ask these things in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ".

The reason Jesus Christ gives converted Christians access to the Father through this tiny loophole gate is because **Christ has first sanitized us**, so that we don't carry any sins with us when we do approach God the Father. In Jesus Christ's own words ...

Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. (John 15:3)

Those people who are "not clean" (i.e. all the people who do not have God's spirit) will never receive access to God the Father, until they "become clean". And those people who do have God's spirit need to be "cleaned" whenever we sin, before we can utilize that access to God the Father.

WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN?

Children are not yet capable of repenting. Real repentance is something that requires the maturity and the commitment of an adult. So does this mean that children are also totally cut off from God? That doesn't seem to be fair, does it?

So what about this?

As far as access to God the Father is concerned, that access is restricted to repentant minds. And there

are **no exceptions** to this rule. So children don't really have access to God the Father, because they are not yet repentant. But that does not mean that all children are necessarily cut off from contact with God. Thus, if they can have access to Jesus Christ, then they do not need to have access to God the Father.

As the Apostle Paul explained, **the children of true Christians** are "holy" and "sanctified" (see 1 Corinthians 7:14). This means that such children form a separate category of people before God. These children in effect form a third category. The three categories of people before God are:

Category #1 = all truly repentant Christians, who have access to God the Father when they use "the secret formula".

Category #2 = the rest of humanity (except for those in Category #3), who are all cut off from any access to God the Father.

Category #3 = the obedient children of the true Christians in Category #1, who form a group between the other two groups. They don't yet have access to God the Father, but neither are they cut off from all access to God, because they can have access to Jesus Christ, the second Member of the God Family.

Being "holy" and "sanctified", the children of converted Christians are certainly not a part of the group which is cut off from all contact with God.

Now during His ministry Jesus Christ clearly said: "suffer (i.e. allow) little children, and **forbid them not to come unto Me**" (see Matthew 19:14). All the obedient children of true Christians are invited by Jesus Christ "to come to Him". This represents access to God. We might think of this in terms of God the Father having delegated to Jesus Christ the responsibility of dealing with **obedient and responsive children**, until they reach maturity, at which point they will be capable of and responsible for making binding decisions for their own lives.

Let's keep in mind that Satan is the spirit that works in the minds of **all disobedient children** (see Ephesians 2:2), and all disobedient children form a part of Category #2, those who are cut off from access to God. This includes the disobedient children of true Christians, because their disobedience is evidence that Satan is indeed working in them.

But for all practical purposes obedient children have exactly the same access to God for divine help in their lives, as have their converted parents. In a parallel situation think of access to God by Jesus Christ's apostles during His ministry.

During His ministry **they asked Christ for help** whenever they needed help. Then Jesus Christ told them: once you have received the holy spirit ... "**in that day** you shall ask Me nothing" (see John 16:23), because then you will direct all your requests directly to God the Father. So there was going to be a switch from asking Jesus Christ Himself for a certain period of time (i.e. before receiving the holy spirit), to asking God the Father directly after receiving the holy spirit.

The main difference between these two forms of access to God is one of degree. Children will not have a need for major overt interventions by God, like asking God to move a mountain "hence to yonder place", with the result that "**nothing shall be impossible unto you**" (see Matthew 17:20). That is really the type of intervention that is intended for converted Christians, who will have very specific reasons for requesting such major overt interventions by God. Access to Jesus Christ is perfectly adequate for obedient children who have not yet reached the level of being capable of real repentance. It is the same access that the apostles had during Christ's ministry.

At any rate, obedient children are assuredly not cut off from all contact with God.

Let's now look at the millennium.

IN THE MILLENNIUM

It is clear that all those in the first resurrection will be "unto our God kings and priests". So during the millennium there will be Jesus Christ, the High Priest, plus 144,000 additional priests. Jesus Christ will represent the Melchizedek priesthood. So which priesthood will the 144,000 priests represent?

They will obviously not be any kind of "Levitical priesthood", because they will not have come from the tribe of Levi, let alone from the line of Aaron.

What priesthood will they represent? **They will be a part of the Melchizedek priesthood.** In other words, during the millennium the Melchizedek priesthood will have one High Priest (Jesus Christ) and 144,000 additional priests as helpers.

Before we consider the role of the 144,000 priests during the millennium, let's now consider the question of a human Levitical priesthood during the millennium.

Will the Levitical priesthood be reinstated in the millennium? It seems to imply that they will be reinstated. However, there are also serious questions we can raise. Now before I present some things we might consider, I want to make the following quite clear.

I personally am not absolutely convinced of one side or the other on this question, though I tend to lean strongly towards one side. But **I don't know with absolute certainty what the correct answer is**, and I will explain why I feel this way. I do not have any personal preferences as such, and I am in fact quite comfortable with either answer. With this particular question I do not have an iron in the fire.

If Jesus Christ will have physical Levites as priests during the millennium, I am in full agreement. And if during the millennium Jesus Christ does not install a priesthood composed of physical Levites, I am also in full agreement. I just desire to understand what is actually God's will in this particular matter, without me personally desiring to see the one specific answer or the other.

So I will present some points for both sides of this discussion.

IN FAVOR OF A MILLENNIAL LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

This represents the traditional understanding of God's Church in this present age. To support the idea of a physical Levitical priesthood during the millennium, all we have to do is look at various Scriptures, and accept them at face value. Here are some such verses.

But **you shall be named the priests of the LORD**: *men* shall call you the Ministers of our God: you shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall you boast yourselves. (Isaiah 61:6)

This was said roughly around **750 B.C.**

And **I will also take of them for priests *and* for Levites**, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 66:21)

Likewise, this was said roughly around **750 B.C.**

Neither shall **the priests the Levites** want a man (i.e. fail to have a man) before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually. (Jeremiah 33:18)

This was said roughly around **600 B.C.**, or about 150 years after the statements in Isaiah.

Then said he unto me, The north chambers *and* the south chambers, which *are* before the separate place, they *be* holy chambers, **where the priests that approach unto the LORD shall eat** the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place *is* holy. **When the priests enter therein**, then shall they not go out of the holy *place* into the utter court, but there they shall lay their garments wherein they minister; for they *are* holy; and shall put on other garments, and shall approach to *those things* which *are* for the people. (Ezekiel 42:13-14)

This was said roughly around **590 - 560 B.C.**, very likely within a few decades of what Jeremiah had said.

We could perhaps find a few more Scriptures that talk about priests during the millennium, but this is a reasonable representation. Taking all of these Scriptures **at face value** makes a pretty strong case for physical Levitical priests during the millennium. Please make a note of the approximate dates I have given you for these statements, because they may have a significant impact.

Anyway, how can anybody possibly argue against these Scriptures about a Levitical priesthood during the millennium? Okay, let's look at the other side of this question.

AGAINST A MILLENNIAL LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

To oppose the idea of a physical Levitical priesthood during the millennium, people cannot overlook or ignore all the Scriptures that have been presented in favor of a Levitical priesthood. Those Scriptures obviously have to be confronted and dealt with, if such opposition is to be viewed with any degree of credibility.

It doesn't work to simply present some other Scriptures that supposedly contradict the idea of a Levitical priesthood during the millennium. No, the Scriptures that are used to support a Levitical priesthood during the millennium must be squarely faced and dealt with.

However, we should also keep in mind Paul's statement that **the priesthood was changed** from Levi to Melchizedek. And this change must surely have some ramifications.

So let's examine those Scriptures.

But first let's consider **a parallel case**, to understand God's dealings with us human beings.

During His ministry Jesus Christ very emphatically stated: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of **the house of Israel**" (Matthew 15:24). That was Christ's focus throughout His ministry. After His resurrection Jesus Christ changed this focus and He said: "go you therefore and teach **all nations** ..." (Matthew 28:19). That instruction represents a clear change in focus. The point is that, if God chooses to do so, God can change the focus or the application for any statement God may have made in the past.

So let's look at the Old Testament.

Before making the Old Covenant Jesus Christ had already said **about Israel**: "and you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). This was said about the physical nations of Israel. But, as we have already seen, in the New Testament the Apostle Peter **applied this statement not to physical Israel, but to the Church** (see 1 Peter 2:5-9), showing that this statement no longer applied to the physical nations of Israel. What had happened? After endless rebellions **God had divorced Israel**.

Let's understand that **a divorce has major serious consequences**. Let's also understand that, if after a divorce the two parties do get together again, **things will never again be the same as they were before the divorce**. Some things will have changed. That is because the things that led to the divorce in the first place can be forgiven and even put behind us; but **some consequences can never be undone**. Some consequences will have left their mark.

[**Comment**: I don't mean for this to apply to the unique cases where some happily married couples were told before 1974 by the Church to separate, because the Church did not understand the Scriptures correctly, and which couples then got together again after 1974, once the Church had corrected its erroneous understanding on this matter.]

Now we don't really like that! In that type of situation we wish we could undo whatever problems led to the divorce. We really want to start over with a clean slate, without any baggage from what went before. But **that is not really possible**. We need to understand the truism of the following statement:

Irrespective of forgiveness for transgressions, **nobody ever gets a second chance at having a happy first marriage**.

I am not saying that a second marriage will not be happy, not at all. Second marriages can assuredly turn out to be very happy marriages. But they just will not be "happy **first** marriages".

I believe that this is also true for God!

Jesus Christ's first marriage to Israel did not turn out to be "a happy marriage", because the people of Israel never stayed faithful to God for very long. And so eventually God "divorced" Israel. And I fully believe that Jesus Christ's "second marriage to Israel" will indeed turn out to be a very happy marriage.

But it is also clear that **Jesus Christ's "second marriage to Israel" will not reproduce the same conditions and situations that existed during His "first marriage to Israel"**. Some things will of necessity be different.

Where Jesus Christ had been willing to "marry" the physical, carnal, unrepentant nations of Israel in the days of Moses, Jesus Christ's "second marriage to Israel" will be to 144,000 repentant and converted "spiritual Israelites".

With the first marriage, Jesus Christ hopefully anticipated that those physical Israelites would at some point during the marriage surely come to repentance, and then willingly submit their lives to God (i.e. enough of them to fill the missing quota for the 144,000). In other words: get married first, and then hope that "the bride" will repent. With this approach Jesus Christ was obviously taking a risk.

With the second marriage, Jesus Christ requires "the bride" to repent first, and only then does Jesus Christ "marry" that repentant "bride". With this approach the risk has been eliminated.

During the millennium Jesus Christ will not "marry" the physical nations of Israel, i.e. Christ will not again "marry" the people to whom He had been "married" in Old Testament times. He will bless them, and

nurture them, and work with them; but He will not "marry" them.

Christ will work with them as His children, and they will accept Christ as their God. Christ will say to "the wife" He had divorced in Old Testament times "you are My people", and they will say to Jesus Christ "You are our God" (see Hosea 2:23). But they will not become "His wife"; that position will by then already be filled by the 144,000 in the first resurrection.

I mention these things because we need to understand that during the millennium for Jesus Christ and physical Israelites **some things are going to be different** from the relationship that had existed during the Old Testament "marriage".

Now let's look at the Scriptures we considered earlier.

1) Jesus Christ "married" Israel in the days of Moses. That was very approximately around 1500 B.C.

2) Almost immediately Israel started to disobey God. God then worked with Israel through a number of Judges. But God was still their "King" during that period of time.

3) In the days of Samuel the people of Israel rejected God as their King, and demanded a human king instead. So God told Samuel "they have rejected Me that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8:7). Later Samuel told Israel "**you have this day rejected your God**" (1 Samuel 10:19).

4) So by then Christ's "marriage" to Israel was **on shaky ground**, and it wasn't a happy marriage. But Jesus Christ kept trying and trying and trying to work with the people of Israel, always trying to salvage **the deteriorating relationship**. Christ kept showing Israel what would be the rewards for them, if only they would willingly submit to God. That approach included making frequent references to the utopian conditions Christ will establish during the millennium.

5) So around 750 B.C. God told Israel through the Prophet Isaiah that during the millennium "**you shall be named the priests of the Eternal**" (Isaiah 61:6). That is a very interesting statement. Look at Isaiah 61.

Is Jesus Christ here talking about Levites? No! The "you" in this statement is addressed to all the Israelites in general, those who are physical mortal human beings. Levites are not mentioned anywhere in this context. This statement is **not** speaking about a **Levitical** priesthood at all. It is speaking about "a national priesthood", along the lines of "**the kingdom of priests**" that God had referred to in Exodus 19:6.

So here is what this tells us:

About 750 years after making the Old Covenant, Jesus Christ still intended to fulfill through the physical nations of Israel the statement He had made about "the kingdom of priests". In spite of going through countless "rocky patches", Christ was still determined to go with that particular plan.

In the closing verses of the Book of Isaiah Jesus Christ reiterated this point. He said:

And **I will also take of them for priests *and* for Levites**, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 66:21)

Now the "them" in this statement refers to physical Israelites during the millennium. Note that once again, God is speaking about all Israel, and not just about one specific tribe.

The expression "for priests and for Levites" refers to having people who carry out **the duties associated**

with the Levitical priesthood. The implication of this statement is that God would take some men from amongst all the tribes of Israel, and give them the responsibilities that were to be carried out by the priests and by the Levites. **Whether or not those people would actually be literal descendants of Aaron and of Levi is not a consideration in this statement.** As long as the candidates are "of them" (i.e. of Israel), that seems to be sufficient. This is fully in line with the earlier statement to all Israel that "you shall be named the priests of the Eternal".

So Isaiah 66:21 may refer to descendants of Aaron; but it may also refer to descendants from some of the other nations of Israel.

However, the important thing to keep in mind here is that **these two statements (Isaiah 61:6 and Isaiah 66:21) were made by Jesus Christ before He divorced all of Israel**!

At that point the northern ten tribes were already facing the prospect of national captivity. And so Jesus Christ said through Isaiah:

Thus says the LORD, **Where *is* the bill of your mother's divorcement**, whom I have put away? ... and **for your transgressions is your mother (going to be) put away**. (Isaiah 50:1)

[**Comment:** In Hebrew the verb here translated as "put away" is in the perfect tense, which is typically used to express the past tense. However, "sometimes in Hebrew, *future events are conceived so vividly and so realistically that they are regarded as having virtually taken place and are described by the perfect*" (quoted from the Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon, for the explanation there provided for the Hebrew perfect tense). That is the case here for the, at that time, imminent national captivity for the northern ten tribes, which is described by the perfect tense. They went into national captivity around 721 - 718 B.C.]

So even when the "divorce" was imminent for the northern ten tribes, Jesus Christ was still seeking to make things work out for Israel to provide all the priests during the millennium. That's somewhat like Jesus Christ working with "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" until the day that He was crucified, but then immediately after His resurrection expanding that instruction to include "all nations". Likewise, before the divorce actually took place, Christ was still focused on making this work out as intended back in the days of Moses. But after the "divorce" some things changed.

Let's now look at the next Scripture. Approximately 150 years after Isaiah's time, at around 600 B.C., God said through the Prophet Jeremiah:

Neither shall **the priests the Levites** want a man (i.e. fail to have a man) before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually. (Jeremiah 33:18)

During those intervening 150 years God had "divorced" the Northern Kingdom of Israel, consisting of ten tribes, and sent them into Assyrian captivity. But God was still working with the Southern Kingdom of Judah, **which included the Levites**, though national captivity for them was also starting to loom on the horizon. In other words, the Southern Kingdom was at that point also approaching a divorce from God.

At that point Jesus Christ was still trying to fulfill the "kingdom of priests" intention through the remaining part of the people of Israel, i.e. through the Levites in the Southern Kingdom. Christ's perspective of the situation is revealed vividly in Ezekiel 23.

Now much of the Book of Ezekiel was another 20-40 years after the time of Jeremiah. In Ezekiel 23 God describes how He "divorced" both kingdoms. This is the parable about the two sisters **Aholah** (the Northern Kingdom) and **Aholibah** (the Southern Kingdom).

Let’s notice some key statements from God.

And **Aholah played the harlot when she was mine**; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians *her* neighbors, (Ezekiel 23:5)

The people of the Northern Kingdom were the first ones to sin very severely. So God divorced them and sent them away into a national captivity to Assyria.

Wherefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted. (Ezekiel 23:9)

The Southern Kingdom was acutely aware of the Northern Kingdom being carried off into Assyrian captivity. That should have been a sobering warning for them. But, if anything, the Southern Kingdom became even more debased than "her sister" who had gone into Assyrian captivity.

And when her sister Aholibah saw *this*, **she was more corrupt** in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more **than her sister** in *her* whoredoms. (Ezekiel 23:11)

The result was that God’s mind was "**alienated**" from all of the tribes of Israel.

So she discovered her whoredoms, and discovered her nakedness: **then my mind was alienated from her, like as my mind was alienated from her sister**. (Ezekiel 23:18)

We might note that there are two different Hebrew verbs in this verse, which are both translated as "alienated". The first word for "alienated" is "yaqa", and it literally means: **to hang**, **to execute slowly**! The second word for "alienated" is "naqa", and it is used only here and nowhere else in the Old Testament. According to Gesenius it means: **to be torn from**, metaphorically **to be alienated from**.

These are pretty strong meanings!

At the time of this prophecy (Ezekiel 23) the Southern Kingdom of Judah was also **already in national captivity**, in their case in Babylon. So at this time God had already "divorced" this remaining part of the nations of Israel. God’s "divorce" from both parts of the people of Israel was now complete.

God had originally given the land to the tribes of Israel, though the land belonged to God. In Deuteronomy 24:1 the procedure for divorcing a woman is laid out. The husband was required to do two things: "write her a bill of divorcement", and then to "**send her out of his house**". Sending her out of his house finalized the divorce.

And that is precisely what God did with the two national captivities (the Northern Kingdom to Assyria, and the Southern Kingdom to Babylon): **God was sending Israel "out of His house"**.

The divorce is now final. And at that very stage God has chosen to describe His own mind’s state regarding the people of Israel with words that mean "**to be torn away, to hang, to execute slowly**" (i.e. verse 18). These are the words God chose to express His feelings towards Israel in response to their endless rebellions against God. These are very strong words.

Regarding sending them away into national captivities God said:

I will do these *things* unto you, because **you have gone a whoring after the nations**, *and* because you are polluted with their idols. (Ezekiel 23:30)

At that stage the "divorce from God" was complete! So now we need to ask ourselves the question:

Are the statements God made **before divorcing Israel**, about a priesthood for Israel during the millennium, **still valid after God has divorced Israel**? Or has the divorce changed some things?

A divorce always changes some things. A divorce also of necessity leads to the loss of some blessings or privileges. We know that God will take away promised blessings when the righteous commit iniquity. For example:

When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, **all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered**; but for his iniquity that he has committed, he shall die for it. (Ezekiel 33:13)

So the question about a Levitical priesthood during the millennium has now taken on **a completely different perspective**. Now the situation is as follows:

1) **God intended** to find all the remaining people still needed for the 144,000 from amongst the people of Israel.

2) **God also apparently intended** to have a priesthood made up of Levites during the millennium.

3) **God repeatedly referred to both** of these intentions from the time of Moses right down to the national captivities of all the tribes of Israel.

4) So it is not a question of denying the statements about a Levitical priesthood in a millennial setting. But those statements were all made **before God finalized His "divorce"** from both kingdoms of the people of Israel.

5) Now the people of the Southern Kingdom did return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. And they are the ones Jesus Christ worked with during His ministry, which ministry was focused on "the lost sheep of the house of Israel". But upon Jesus Christ's resurrection that focus was changed by the instruction to "**teach all nations**".

6) One consequence "of necessity" of that particular instruction was that the promise of becoming "a kingdom of priests" was taken away from the physical nations of Israel and given to the Church, given to "spiritual Israel".

7) It is self-evident that all the people who make up the 144,000 in the first resurrection will be "priests" (Revelation 5:10). So there will assuredly be a priesthood made up of spirit-born sons of God during the millennium.

So the question that remains is:

When as a result of the divorce the promise of being "a kingdom of priests" was taken away from the physical nations of Israel, was the promise of a physical Levitical priesthood during the millennium also taken away from the physical tribe of Levi at the same time? Or was that promise left in place?

In other words, was only one promise taken away, while the other promise was left in place unchanged? Or were both promises taken away at the same time?

Does it make a difference whether God made certain statements about Israel before or after God

divorced Israel? Or is that time-context immaterial?

Next:

Whether or not there will be a physical Levitical priesthood during the millennium, without contradiction **the real priesthood during the millennium will be Jesus Christ and the 144,000 priests with Him**! Jesus Christ and the 144,000 will be doing the real work of priests, which is to function as mediators and as go-betweens.

There is no way that during the millennium any physical human beings will fill the role of "mediator" between God and human beings. Mediating is the real reason why the role of a priest was created in the first place. And during the millennium the 144,000 will be "the mediators assisting Jesus Christ".

So if there will be a Levitical priesthood during the millennium, then the only responsibilities they could possibly have would be certain physical activities. But let's understand that during the millennium **no human being will ever approach God** the Father or Jesus Christ or one of the 144,000 **on behalf of another human being**! During the millennium no human being could possibly perform a sacrifice on behalf of some other human being. **That is not going to happen** when there will be 144,000 "priests" dealing with human beings, priests who themselves will be spirit beings.

So **for whom** would mortal Levitical priests during the millennium perform sacrifices? During the millennium mortal Levitical priests will simply not be qualified to deal with any aspects of sins committed by other mortal humans. The point is that the existence of 144,000 "priests" will make any physical human priesthood completely redundant.

Let's understand that an animal sacrifice is meaningless if it does not have some spiritual significance attached to it. But "spiritual significance" will be the responsibility of the spirit being "priests".

Okay, so some people may believe in a physical Levitical priesthood during the millennium, and other people may reject that idea. But **a rejection of a Levitical priesthood during the millennium is not based on rejecting or denying any Scriptures**. It is based on seeing those Scriptures from a different perspective. That different perspective in turn is based on recognizing that **"a divorce" has serious consequences**, some of which are irreversible. So you go ahead and make up your own mind on this question.

Let's move on.

THE ROLE OF THE 144,000 PRIESTS

Notice again Revelation 5:10.

And **have made us unto our God kings and priests**: and we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:10)

God will give the 144,000 positions as "kings" because the 144,000 will rule over mortal human beings. They will enforce the laws of God amongst all people during the millennium. But why does God also make all of the 144,000 "priests"?

This is where we need to focus on the main responsibility for any priest. That main responsibility is to act as a go-between, to act as a mediator between God the Father and man.

The 144,000 will be spirit-born sons of God. They will at that point have a perfect understanding of all of God's laws. They will have briefly met God the Father at the wedding supper. They will understand what each law is intended to achieve. They will know that all laws can be led back to "love God above all else" and to "love your neighbor as you love yourself". And they will all have a mindset of always seeking to please God the Father.

The human beings they will rule over will be fallible. Those human beings will make mistakes. And they will at times give in to selfish motivations. They will at times fall short. They may get into bad attitudes. They may be tempted or provoked into doing, or intending to do, things that are wrong. And therefore, if and when necessary, the 144,000 will rule "with a rod of iron" (see Revelation 2:27).

When those mortal human beings fall short, the spirit being who is their immediate ruler may remain invisible in their presence, but will say to them: "**this is the way, walk you in it**", when the people are tempted to turn to the right hand or to the left (see Isaiah 30:21).

The spirit being who tells them "this is the way, walk you in it" will also be the one who will represent them before God the Father, and who will intercede for them when the people involved have repentant attitudes.

The presence of 144,000 spirit being "priests" during the millennium is an acknowledgment that many mortal human beings during the millennium will still fall short, and will at times need a mediator to intervene for them. God is prepared for human beings still sinning during the millennium. And there will be priests (intercessors) available to help people in those situations. Those priests will be God the Father's representatives to the people at that time.

So why will the 144,000 also be priests? Because human beings during the millennium will still sin, and then they will need someone to tell them what they must do, how to make the situation right again. The priests will explain real repentance to the people.

Jesus Christ will be the High Priest "Melchizedek" during the millennium and also during the 100-year period for people in the second resurrection. He will be the One to approach God the Father on behalf of repentant human beings. The 144,000 will be priests in the Melchizedek order.

And then the 100 year-period comes to an end. What happens then to the Melchizedek priesthood?

FUTURE ETERNITY AFTER THE LAKE OF FIRE

When the 100-year period for those in the second resurrection comes to an end, then this present universe will be consumed by fire. All those from the millennium and the 100-year period who had repented and accepted God's way of using their minds will have been changed into immortal spirit beings.

After that lake of fire God the Father then creates a new heaven and a new earth, one that will be vastly larger than this present earth. Then God the Father will bring the New Jerusalem out of heaven down to the new earth. The New Jerusalem will become the home for God the Father and for Jesus Christ and for all of the 144,000 in the first resurrection. All of the rest of the Family of God, those from the millennium and from the 100-year period, will then reside in all the other cities that will be established for them on the new earth.

The entire Family of God will then inhabit the new earth. Specifically, all in the Family of God will live on the same "planet" as God the Father, though they will not all live permanently in the same city with the Father.

Now notice some of the details.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, **the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them**, and they shall be His people, and **God Himself shall be with them**, *and be* their God. (Revelation 21:3)

All the members of the Family of God will freely interact with God the Father. They will have direct contact with the Father. Notice how God the Father will interact with His Family.

And **God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes**; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

God the Father will deal personally with every member of His Family. And the gates of the New Jerusalem will never be shut.

And **the gates of it shall not be shut at all** by day: for there shall be no night there. (Revelation 21:25)

Open gates further represent free access to God the Father for all those who live outside of the New Jerusalem.

Also, in the New Jerusalem there will not be a Temple.

And **I saw no temple therein**: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Revelation 21:22)

Once the New Jerusalem has been established, then there will never again be any priest or priesthood. **The priesthood of Melchizedek ends with the universe-consuming lake of fire.**

When all sin has been eradicated, when Satan has been permanently banished to "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 1:13), and when everyone in existence at that point has ready access to God the Father Himself, then there is no need for any priest to intercede before God the Father on behalf of anyone else. The concept of a priesthood will have become obsolete and extinct. When there will never again be any sins, then the need for a priesthood has disappeared.

So yes, even the priesthood of Melchizedek will come to an end.

IN CONCLUSION

Now let’s consider the questions I asked at the start.

1) **What is a priest?** A priest is first and foremost a mediator, who intercedes between God the Father and sinful human beings.

2) **Why did God institute a priesthood during Old Testament times?** God the Father established the concept of a priesthood to show that sinful human beings cannot have automatic contact with God the Father. A mediator between God the Father and sinful man makes it possible for man’s sins to be forgiven, so that direct contact with God the Father may be established. A priest paves the way for God and man to eventually become one Family, by establishing a process whereby all sins can be permanently removed.

3) **When God created Adam and Eve, did God already at that time intend to create a priesthood?** In a manner of speaking, yes. While not called "a priest" when He created Adam and Eve, Jesus Christ did already fill the role of a mediator between God the Father and human beings. And it was Jesus Christ's intention at that time to be available as a Mediator for as long as there would be mortal human beings. So for all practical purposes Jesus Christ was already "a priest" the moment He had created Adam. Right from the start Jesus Christ represented God the Father to the human beings He had created.

4) **What purpose does a priesthood serve?** The most important purpose for a priesthood is to be a mediator between God the Father and sinful humanity, and to facilitate the permanent removal of all sins.

5) **Are ministers in God's Church also priests?** Most emphatically: **no!** Ministers in the Church of God have never had a go-between role, a mediating role. In the New Testament age the role of a Mediator has been reserved exclusively for Jesus Christ. No minister ever stands between God the Father and any member of God's Church. Instead, the role of a minister is that of a teacher and a helper. The Apostle Paul stated it the best way:

Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are **helpers of your joy**: for by faith you stand. (2 Corinthians 1:24)

The role of a minister is to stand **with** the members of God's Church, **not between** them and God.

6) **What is the difference between a minister and a priest?** As long as there is a need on earth for a priest, so long human beings cannot possibly have unrestricted direct access to God the Father. Once direct access to God the Father has been established for mortal human beings, then the need for priests on earth has been eliminated.

Ministers have never been, and were never intended to be mediators between God and man. Ministers are first and foremost teachers, but **without any mediating responsibilities**. Having a ministry instead of a priesthood is an acknowledgment of the fact that for those who have God's spirit direct access to God the Father has become available, providing that certain requirements are met.

7) **When many of the religions of this world call some of their religious leaders or officials "priests", what does that tell us?** It tells us that all of those religions have a barrier between "their gods" and "their human membership". None of those religions allow their followers to have direct access to their "gods". They insist on people approaching their "god" or "gods" through the priests. This includes all those religions that call themselves "Christians" but who have a priesthood.

8) **Why are those in the first resurrection going to be priests, as well as kings? What will they be doing to justify this identification as "priests"?** During the millennium mortal human beings will still be very capable of sinning. They will also be able to pray directly to God the Father, who will still be in heaven. But when they sin, then they will need "mediators" between themselves and God the Father.

But those "mediators" cannot be fellow mortal human beings. Those "mediators" will be members of the God Family, i.e. Jesus Christ and the 144,000. Jesus Christ and those in the first resurrection will be "mediators" for people in the millennium, in the same way that in this present age Jesus Christ alone is "the Mediator" for truly converted Christians. During the millennium the resurrected 144,000 will then be "assistant priests" to "the High Priest Jesus Christ".

At that time the 144,000 will be working with mortal human beings on a daily basis, "walking with them", directly interacting with those human beings. And when those human beings "slip up" in some way, and

are then motivated to rectify the situation (i.e. motivated to repent), then the "sons of God", members of the 144,000, will be their "mediators" before God the Father. In a manner of speaking, the 144,000 will be handling some of Jesus Christ's workload, which Jesus Christ has delegated to them to handle for Him.

Consider the following scenario.

At the start of the millennium Jesus Christ will personally have successfully worked with exactly 144,000 people over a period of 6000 years, having personally led all of them to salvation. And Jesus Christ is the Pioneer, the One who sets the example.

What if in the course of the 1,000 years of the millennium plus the 100 years for the second resurrection every single member of the 144,000 "kings and priests" follows Jesus Christ's example? What if every one of those 144,000 priests would in turn also personally lead and guide 144,000 mortal human beings to salvation? That would swell the Family of God to 144,000 times 144,000 members by the time of the new heaven and the new earth. In very round numbers that would be **20 billion "sons of God"**.

I suspect that this is too optimistic a number. But the point is: over a period of 1,100 years might the 144,000 priests each become the mediators for anywhere from 10,000 to 100,000 people who submit their lives to God? The 144,000 would have worked with a lot more people than that, but some of the people they worked with will end up in the rebellious multitude that is destroyed by fire from heaven (see Revelation 20:7-9). Not all the human beings they will teach and lead will submit their lives to God.

If each one leads from 10,000 to 100,000 human beings to salvation, that would be less than what Jesus Christ achieved. But it would still result in the Family of God growing to anywhere from 1.4 billion to 14 billion members.

Please do not attach any significance to these numbers, because I present them only for illustration purposes. The point I want to make is: **there will be a lot of work awaiting the 144,000 priests** in the millennium. They will be doing a lot of mediating.

They will form a part of the Melchizedek priesthood during the millennium. They can be "mediators", amongst other reasons, because then **all of them will have already briefly met God the Father at "the marriage supper"**. So all of them will already personally know God the Father, before whom they will be mediating for the human beings in their particular areas of responsibility. And they will all also have experienced a human life. So they can identify with both sides.

All our initial questions have now been answered.

Frank W Nelte