

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT PRIESTHOOD AND AUTHORITY?

While "priesthood authority" is a fundamental tenet in some religious circles, in the Bible priesthood and authority are not used interchangeably but are in fact two separate concepts.

By definition a priest is a person who represents someone before God. In the Old Testament only Aaron and his literal posterity held the Aaronic or Levitical priest-hood, representing the nation of Israel before God (Numbers 18:1-7). Precisely how they were called plus information on their duties, which included animal sacrifices and in-depth teaching of the Law, is detailed in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8 and 10:11. Any contemporary claims to the Aaronic priesthood must meet all of these qualifications in order to be valid by Biblical standards.

But the New Testament recounts a drastic change in the priesthood. The Aaronic system no longer exists. It has been replaced by the Melchizedek priesthood (Hebrews 7:12; 8:13). Levitical priests were mere mortals. Whenever they died they had to be replaced. However, Jesus Christ, ". . .because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood" (Hebrews 7:24). "Unchangeable" is the translation of a Greek word meaning "untransferable," indicating because He will never die, Jesus Christ is the ONLY Melchizedek priest needed. And the Bible bears out this point, nowhere recording the ordination of anyone else to this office. Jesus Christ is our only means of approach to the Father; He ALONE is our Melchizedek priest.

In addition, the Bible reveals the existence of the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). Every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ holds this priesthood. The Apostle Peter addressed his first epistle to Christians in general (1:1), new converts (2:2), and women (3:1) and refers to ALL of them as ". . .a royal priesthood" (2:9). Because this is true, even the most humble Christian may boldly approach God apart from going through some special class of religious elite.

Although not linking priesthood to authority, the Bible does contain clear teachings about authority. Matthew 28:18 records Christ as saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." "Power" is the translation of a Greek word meaning "authority." Our Savior was actually saying that all authority was His. Since it is all His, we cannot claim any. Instead, we find our joy in being subject to His authority, His Word, and His will.

Lloyd A. Larkin
Baptist Mid-Missions, Emeritus