

When did the priesthood of Jesus begin? Many think it began after His resurrection, beginning our post-cross era of grace, because of verses like this:

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. {**Heb. 2:17-18**}

What is the implication here? Jesus had to be born as a man, “made like unto His brethren,” to be able and qualified to be our high priest. He had to “suffer being tempted” before He is able to “succour them that are tempted.” In Hebrews chapter 5, we read that Jesus learned “obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him...” (**Heb. 5:8-9**).

The idea that Christ was only qualified as a priest by His incarnation seems to make sense according to the verses in Hebrews. But some questions come to mind.

- Was Jesus not perfect before He became a man?
- Before He died on the cross, was He unable to succour them that are tempted?
- How then were people succoured for the first 4,000 years of creation?
- Did Christ not truly understand men before He was born in Bethlehem?
- How then could He faithfully lead the Israelites?
- Was that nation potentially doomed to destruction because they never had a “merciful and faithful high priest?” Isn’t that unfair to those who lived prior to the cross?
- How could they be expected to be righteous without a High Priest to impute righteousness?
- How could they be expected to have victory against sin without a high priest able to succour them?

If there was no priest prior to Calvary, what was going on in the first 4,000 years? And how did Enoch, Moses, and Elijah make their way to Heaven if they were not made perfect through a perfect Mediator? Concerning the moment sin entered our world through Adam, Ellen White says this:

Adam and Eve were given a probation in which to return to their allegiance; and in this plan of benevolence all their posterity were embraced. **After the fall, Christ became Adam's instructor. He acted in God's stead toward humanity, saving the race from immediate death. He took upon Him the work of mediator between God and man.** In

the fulness of time He was to be revealed in human form. He was to take His position at the head of humanity by taking the nature but not the sinfulness of man. In heaven was heard the voice, “The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.” {**ST, May 29, 1901, par. 11**}

As Christ “took upon Him the work of mediator between God and man”, He “became Adam’s instructor.” But if Christ had never “suffered being tempted”, was He completely prepared to instruct Adam?

We often teach that the burnt offerings looked forward to the sufferings of Christ. But is He not “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8)?

Was not Christ a gift of God there before the world was? Then when He called on men from Adam unto all ... to offer those sacrifices, what was that but **teaching them that that was a token of their appreciation of the great sacrifice that God had already made for them**, and of which they were enjoying the benefit by having that gift in the heart which was Jesus Christ? Well, we need not go any farther. That is enough to illustrate it. Is it not plain, then, that **everything that God gave to them in that day was intended to teach them concerning the personal, living Saviour, personally present with them**, if they had only received Him? And all they needed to do to receive Him was to believe in Him. The gospel was preached unto them. Heb. 4:2. {**A.T. Jones General Conference Bulletin 1895, Sermon 25, p. 478, paras. 3,4**}

Just as the burnt offerings did not look forward to a time when grace and forgiveness would finally be given (after the cross), the sufferings of Christ on the cross were not only a 6-hour event on a Passover 2,000 years ago. Ellen White makes it clear that Christ’s sufferings began since the inception of sin:

Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but **that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God.** Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him. {**Ed, p.263**}

Therefore, even before Christ came as a man, He was already “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3).

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he

redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. {**Isa. 63:9**}

E.J. Waggoner taught that Christ took humanity upon Himself “eighteen hundred years ago” (2,000 now), “not that He might know men, but in order that man might know that He does know them.”

It is quite commonly assumed that the Word was made flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth eighteen hundred years ago, in order that He might learn man's condition and needs, and thus be able to sympathise with and help them.

That this is a mistaken idea can be seen by a moment's reflection, as well as by plain statements of Scripture. The Psalmist says, “He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.” Ps. 103:14. Again, “O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether.” Ps. 139: 1-4. It is He upon whom men must depend for a knowledge of themselves. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins.” Jer. 17: 9. “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Jer. 10: 23. **All this was as true eighteen hundred years before Christ as eighteen hundred years after. God knew men as well, and sympathised with them as much, four thousand years ago as He does to-day.** When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, “in all their affliction He was afflicted.” Isa. 63: 9. The prophet could say of a truth, seven hundred years before Christ, “Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Isa. 53: 4. God was in Christ, not that He might know men, but in order that man might know that He does know them. In Jesus we learn how kind and sympathising God has always been, and have an example of what He will do in any man who will fully yield to Him. {**E.J. Waggoner, Present Truth UK, December 19, 1895**}

Scripture tells us that the earthly sanctuary system was a “shadow of heavenly things” (**Heb 8:5**). Is it possible for a shadow to exist when the reality does not yet exist? Can the shadow of a tree be left on the ground when the tree itself does not yet exist? The sacrificial system given to Moses was a shadow of heavenly things, and if a shadow was being cast onto the earth, then the reality must have existed for that shadow to be cast.

Here's A.T. Jones on this point:

There too was a priesthood of the earthly temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. There was a priesthood of the sanctuary at Shiloh in the wilderness. That, it is true, represented the priesthood of Christ, **but did that represent any priesthood of Christ before A. D. 1?** Shall we say that that represented a priesthood of Christ that was afar off? No. **That priesthood in Jerusalem, in the sanctuary in the wilderness, represented a priesthood that was already in existence after the order of Melchizedek.** Thou shalt be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek? No, No. 'Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.' Was not Melchizedek a priest in the days of Abraham? and is not the priesthood of Christ forever after the order of Melchizedek? **Do you not see, then, that this whole system of services given to Israel was to teach them the presence of the Christ then and there for the present salvation of their souls and not for the salvation of their souls eighteen hundred years or two thousand years or four thousand years away?** Surely, surely, it is so. {A.T. Jones, General Conference Bulletin 1895, Sermon 25, p. 477, paras. 6,7}

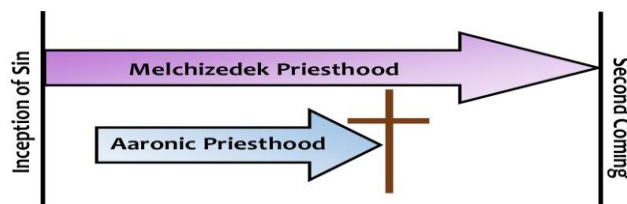
A.T. Jones speaks of the priesthood of Christ after the order of Melchizedek that existed in the days of the sanctuary in the wilderness in the context of the words "a priest forever." The Spirit of Prophecy is more explicit when it states:

The priesthood of Christ commenced as soon as man had sinned. He was made a priest after the order of Melchizedek. {Ms43b, July 4, 1891, par. 5}

Sinful man finds it hard to believe that Christ has always been our Great High Priest unless He "proves" that He could truly perform a sinless life and overcome the sufferings that we go through; even though He had already overcome in Enoch and Elijah. Christ did not suffer as a human in order to know what it's like to suffer and therefore could truly sympathize with us. Instead, **"In Jesus we learn how kind and sympathising God has always been, and have an example of what He will do in any man who will fully yield to Him."**

In all this, we see the love of the Father and Son condescending to meet us where we are at in order to lift us up to where They are at! That is why grace is more freely available after the cross— because we are more willing to believe it is there, even though it has always been there. Likewise, since Christ came and suffered, we are now more willing to believe He can be the perfect High Priest, even though He always has been!

By expressing the Old and New Covenants as mutually exclusive dispensations or periods of time that existed before and after the cross, men make the priesthoods of Christ and Aaron mutually exclusive. The Aaronic priesthood is presented from the time of Moses till the Cross, and the priesthood of Christ is presented from the time of the Cross forward. There are many glaring problems with this notion. Firstly, as perfection cannot come from the Levitical Priesthood, if this was the only priesthood that existed in "the old dispensation" there could be no perfection of character in this time period and we are troubled to explain how Elijah was taken to heaven. Secondly, there is no forgiveness of sins in the Levitical priesthood for the blood of bulls and goats cannot purge the conscience of sin, it can only symbolise forgiveness. How wonderful to know that our Saviour abounds in grace towards us; and that He is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, willing to dispense rich currents of grace equally to all peoples of all eras.



For more information read the book,

A Priest Forever

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