



# Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

## A Study of the Messiah - The Perfect Priest -

Mankind has never been without a priesthood. In the first generation after Adam, Cain and Abel made sacrifices to God. The patriarchs—including Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—all made sacrifices. Moses’ father-in-law Jethro was a priest. The Law of Moses established the men of the tribe of Levi as priests for the entire nation of Israel.

Priests provide two basic needs for mankind. First, priests mediate between man and God. Man sinned and thus was cast away from God’s presence. A priest acts on the sinner’s behalf, to bring him back to God, since the sinner in his unclean state cannot speak for himself. It’s an interesting bit of trivia that the Latin word for priest, *pontifex*, actually means “bridge builder”; what a fitting image!

Second, priests provide atonement through the blood of animal sacrifices. The priest accepts the animal brought by the sinner, examines it for suitability, slays the animal, collects the blood, and sprinkles the blood on the altar before God, in order to signify for the satisfaction for sin. Sometimes this is called “propitiation.” Leviticus 17:11 says, “the

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life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls..." Hebrews 9:22 puts it even more plainly, "all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."

As we trace the Messianic promise throughout the Old Testament, we discover that God intended for the Christ to fulfill the role of priest as well. But, He would do so in a much greater and more perfect way than the Levitical priesthood ever did. In fact, we discover that the Old Testament priesthood was given only provisionally, as a foreshadowing of the greater priesthood of the Messiah.

As Hebrews 10:4 declares, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." That job would be given to the Messiah.

### **The Promise of a Priest Revealed**

Psalms 110 is one of the most important passages in the Bible. David wrote this psalm. In the first verse, God addresses the psalm to David's Lord, someone greater than David. We know this individual is Christ (see Luke 20:41-44).

The psalm continues in v. 4,

The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,  
"You are a priest forever,  
According to the order of Melchizedek."

This passage seems a little obscure, but Psalm 110 is actually quoted in the New Testament more often than any other Old Testament passage, indicating its great importance. Now, the full significance of this passage takes the Hebrew writers four long chapters to fully develop, but, in a nutshell, it reveals that the coming Messiah would be a priest of a higher and better order than the order of Levi.

This Melchizedek appeared briefly in Genesis 14. Melchizedek did not hold his priesthood by virtue of the Levitical genealogical tables, but because God Himself declared him a priest. Melchizedek did not have a recorded start time or end time to his term as a priest, which

does not suggest he was some mysterious immortal, but simply that his open-ended term is symbolic of Jesus' unending term as priest. Furthermore, Melchizedek was a priest to whom Abraham gave tithes, and since the Levites were descendants of Abraham, this implies that Melchizedek is superior to Levi.

To summarize, Psalm 110 teaches that the coming Christ was to be a priest, and a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not Levi. God Himself declared Him to be a priest (which, incidentally, also required a change of law, since the Old Testament only allows priests from the tribe of Levi, not Jesus' tribe, the tribe of Judah). The Christ was to hold his priesthood perpetually, and not be hindered by death from continuing to serve.

Hebrews shows in complete detail that Jesus fulfilled the requirements of Psalm 110, and is our perfect and superior high priest!

In fact, as we meditate further on how Jesus performs the functions of a high priest, we discover some amazing truths. Jesus was the only Being to share in the nature of both human and divine, making him the perfect bridge builder between man and God. He can fairly place His hands upon both parties and bring them together.

He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Heb. 2:17-18).

Since He is 100% human, He can fully sympathize with human temptation and weakness.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest taken from among men

is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness (Heb. 4:15–5:2).

And, since He is 100% divine, His blood actually takes away sin.

When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11–12).

Furthermore, Jesus doesn't need to offer sacrifices for His own sins (like the Levitical priests had to do; see Lev. 16) since He lived a perfect and sinless life (Heb. 7:26–28). And, by virtue of His resurrection, He was able to bring His blood not just into the brick-and-mortar holy place, but into the real heaven, the real throne room of God (Heb. 9:24). Really, it's amazing to trace all the Old Testament details of the kind of priest the Messiah would be, and realize that no human Levite would do—only a divine Son of God, descended from heaven itself, and made into the form of mankind. And this is Jesus!

Let me try to sum up the real power of this truth. God provided mankind priests in order to, in a limited and temporary way, bridge the gap that man had created by Adam's sin and his own personal sin. But God also let us know in Psalm 110 that the coming Messiah would *actually* provide this service, would really and truly provide atonement and redemption through the shedding of His own blood, and would lead man by the hand back to Paradise.

—John Guzzetta

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### Quote of the Week:

“It's not that I'm so smart. It's that I stay with the questions longer. Any fool can know. The point is to understand.” —Albert Einstein