

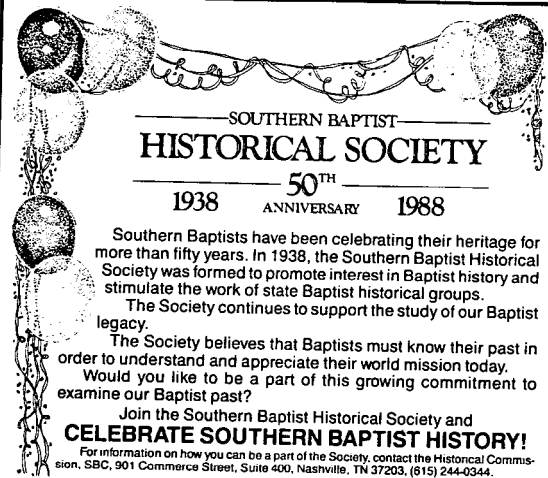
ical freedom, and religious liberty, rather than passivity and neutrality to government. For Baptists, Christianity was organic to the ideals of national life even though Baptists espoused toleration, pluralism, and the separation of church and state. Hence Baptists have never regarded themselves, or have wished to be regarded, as sectarian within American and Canadian society.

P. T. Forsyth, the British theologian of a generation ago, highlighted this truth: in the English-speaking lands, inwardness and subjectivity could not be all. Faith and discipleship meant more. Leavened by free grace, that inwardness became "the mother of public liberty in the modern world."²⁷ Like the twin strands of the genetic helix that is the foundation of life, universal priesthood and responsible citizenship are

interlocking elements, whether in the church or in the state.

Universal ministry means that Christians are salt in the world. They are to be Spirit-bearing men and women, prophetic signs of the kingdom, instances of the new man for the new age, dedicated privately to holiness and publicity to righteousness, goodness, and truth. At bottom, this priesthood is the priesthood of the cross, not the flaunting of ersatz joy or the apertunances of a comfortable life. It is ministry based not on assumptions of power, or assumptions of rights to personal well-being, but on priesthood which accepts suffering and absorbs it, "to fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for the body's sake" (Col. 1:24). It is the grace of Christ made public in the world.

²⁷P. T. Forsyth, *Faith, Freedom and the Future*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), p. 101.



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Thomas D. Lea

The Priesthood of All Christians According to the New Testament

On November 13, 1985, the eruption of volcano Nevada del Ruiz in Colombia triggered massive mudslides which wiped out entire villages in the interior of the country and killed over twenty thousand people. In an effort to offer assistance after the tragedy, Marie del Carmen de Alvarez, a neighborhood nurse and member of Bogota's Central Baptist Church, journeyed to the interior to help. Working beside Colombian soldiers and other rescue workers, she labored under stifling heat to bring relief to the injured and dying. Mrs. Alvarez is a mother of four with many domestic responsibilities. In describing her involvement in the relief work she said, "I didn't want to sit in front of the television and see the suffering. Rather, I wanted to come and be of service."¹

Mrs. Alvarez was exercising what the New Testament calls a priestly ministry in her service to others. Her story helps us to understand better what the New Testament has in mind when it discusses the priesthood of all Christians.

Our study of the New Testament teaching concerning the priesthood of all Christians will focus on three important issues of interpretation. First, what is the primary emphasis which we can derive from the priesthood of all Christians? T. W. Manson observes that by New Testament times priesthood was chiefly linked with the offering of sacrifice to God. "When, therefore, the terms of priesthood are applied to Christ and Christians, it is of sacrifices offered to God that we are to think."² What are these sacrifices which Christians are to offer?

A second interpretative question is a derivative from the first. Does the priesthood of all Christians present a privilege to Christians, or does it add responsibility? Are there elements of truth in both emphases? Baptists have often emphasized that the priesthood of all Christians supports belief in the following practices:³

1. All Christians have the right to interpret Scripture for themselves.
2. Every member of a Baptist church possesses voting rights in the conduct of church business.
3. All Christians have the authority and obligation to develop personally their own religious beliefs.

Scarcely any Baptist would oppose these practices. However, one can observe that each of the above practices stresses a privilege for the Christian without demanding any responsibility. The Baptist application of the priesthood of all Christians has frequently emphasized the privileges given to each believer without stressing also the responsibilities which fall upon each believer. Jerry Chance speaks to this problem when he says, "The clamor for rights and privileges produces a hollow achievement unless privileges are supplemented with public duty and responsibility."⁴ A proper understanding of the priesthood of all Christians will stress the responsibility which the Christian has in addition to emphasizing the privileges which the doctrine can afford to the Christian.



Thomas D. Lea is Associate Professor of New Testament and has served at Southwestern since 1979. He is the co-author of the volume on 1 Corinthians in the Bible Study Commentary series.

A third interpretative issue derives from the previous two. Is the emphasis on the priesthood of all Christians primarily individualistic or collective in its application? One can easily notice that the previously mentioned practices are primarily individual and not collective in their application. The texts of the New Testament refer to "priesthood" or to "priests." There is no reference to "priest" in the singular to describe the priesthood of the Christian.⁵ This usage in the New Testament suggests that the apostles understood that the priesthood of all Christians had some corporate significance and was not merely personal and private.⁶

In approaching the biblical materials concerning the priesthood of all Christians, we will first survey briefly the Old Testament ideas of the people of God and the

¹Jerry M. Chance, "The Social Thrust of the Idea of the Priesthood of Believers," *The Theological Educator* 3 (June 1974):9.

²For evidence of this observe the reference in Rev. 5:10 to "kingdom and priests to serve our God" and in 1 Pet. 2:5 to "a holy priesthood." All Scripture references in this article are to the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

³Note the comments of Garrett concerning the fact that the emphasis of the New Testament is primarily corporate and not merely individual.

⁴Art Thalston, "She Chose Ministry over TV," *The Baptist Standard*, December 4, 1985, p. 4.

⁵T. W. Manson, *Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours* (London: Epworth Press, 1958), pp. 54-55.

⁶James Leo Garrett "The Priesthood of All Believers," *Baptist and Reflector*, January 9, 1964, p. 9.

priesthood by an investigation of relevant passages. We will then review the major passages of the New Testament in a more detailed exegesis. Finally, we will provide a brief summary of conclusions.

The Old Testament Roots of the Priesthood of All Christians

There is evidence in the Old Testament that God called the people of Israel to a special ministry of blessing other nations for his glory. The status of being called "the people of God" provided Israel more with a responsibility than a privilege. This responsibility was intended for the nation collectively. This duty demanded more than the formal duty of sacrifice. It demanded that type of sacrifice which included primarily obedience and humility (Ps. 51:17).

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *am* is used to refer to Israel as the chosen people of God (Judg. 5:11). The translators of the Septuagint (LXX) used the Greek word *laos* in most instances to refer to the Hebrew word *am* (cf. the LXX of Judg. 5:11). This Greek word was derived from the language of high style and ceremony. It was infrequently used in the Greek of their time. It thus seemed ideally suited for expressing the special relationship of Israel to Yahweh.⁷

Two passages from the Old Testament emphasize the responsibility which fell upon Israel as a result of being the people of God. The most important of these is Exod. 19:5-6. In this passage God had just brought the nation of Israel out of Egypt to meet him at the wilderness of Sinai. God spoke to Moses from the mountain and summoned him to propose to Israel the terms of a covenant. God emphasized the method by which the nation could become a "special treasure" to him.

In Exod. 19:5 God promised the people of Israel that national obedience would lead them to be treated like "costly or highly treasured property."⁸ Keil and Delitzsch indicate that the Hebrew *segulah* does not indicate property in general but "valuable property, that which is laid by, or put aside . . . , hence a treasure of silver and gold."⁹

In Exod. 19:6 God promised that an obedient Israel would be a kingdom of priests (Heb. *memleket kohanim*). This suggested that "Israel was to be a regal body of priests to Jehovah, and not merely a nation of priests governed by Jehovah."¹⁰ "Just as a priest was to be a mediator between God and man, so Israel was called to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the earth."¹¹

In Exod. 19:6 God also promised them that they would be a holy nation. "A *holy nation* means primarily a nation 'set apart' from the other nations to belong to God."¹² God would give to his covenant people the means to obtain forgiveness and righteousness so that he could train them to the practice of holiness in the spiritual life.

The special responsibility of the Israelites was to serve as God's representative to the other nations of the world. The privilege which they realized from this high calling was that they would be God's special people and a precious possession to him. These expectations were asked of the nation of Israel collectively.

It is important to understand clearly the role which God intended for the people of Israel in designating them as "priests." In the early history of the Hebrew people there was no special priestly class. During this time the head of the Hebrew household served as a priest. Each individual was responsible for conducting his domestic affairs in an "atmosphere of priestly sanctity."¹³ The chief demand was for holiness of character. As the institution of the priesthood developed in Israel, the essential function was to represent God before the people and the people before God. "The priest was interpreter of God to the people."¹⁴ It was a primary duty of the Old Testament priest to discern the will of God for the people.

In calling Israel a "kingdom of priests," God intended that the nation should represent his will and demands to the entire world. It is not merely that Israel's priests were to offer animal sacrifices. They were to propagate the will of God by holy behavior and active witness.

A second Old Testament passage which emphasizes the priestly function of Israel is Isa. 61:6. The context of this passage is eschatological.¹⁵ The time for the fulfillment of this promise is the Day of the Lord. Two ideas appear in this verse. First, Israelites are to be the priesthood of the world. In line with our earlier definition of priesthood, this signifies that they are to minister the knowledge of God to the world. Second, Israel will be able to live "off the wealth of the nations, and Israel shall be able to boast of the riches of the Gentiles as though they were their own."¹⁶

God's goal for the people of Israel was to make them into a nation which declared his will to the

⁷R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, Ill. InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 145.

⁸Minor Davidson, "Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers" (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1966), p. 19.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰Ernest Best, *1 Peter*, The New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Matthew Black and Ronald E. Clements (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), p. 276.

¹¹H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 324.

world. "Israel seems never to have achieved God's intention among the nations. But God never abandoned that intention."¹⁷ In the face of the failure of Israel to realize its priestly vocation, God raised up another community, a new Israel, to bear witness to him. It is to the discussion of this community in the New Testament that we shall now turn.

The New Testament Emphasis of the Priesthood of All Christians

The most important New Testament passages concerning the priesthood of all Christians appear in 1 Pet. 2:4-10; Rev. 1:5-6; and Rev. 5:9-10. In addition we will also examine the theme of spiritual sacrifices, particularly in the book of Hebrews.

1 Peter 2:4-10

In 1 Pet. 1:13-2:3 Peter has called his readers to the practice of holiness. In 2:4-10 he justifies this exhortation to holiness by providing a solid doctrinal foundation. Peter outlined the foundational role of Christ in the Christian life and the responsibilities which God has given to believers. The listing of responsibilities serves as an introduction to exhortations which appear in 2:11-3:16.

In verses 4-5 Peter reminds his readers that by coming to Christ they become living stones. The outcome of coming to Christ is that believers become "a spiritual house" and "a holy priesthood." They also offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

In verses 6-8 Peter justifies his statements in verses 4-5 about the primary importance of Christ. He uses a series of Old Testament quotations to encourage believers and to warn unbelievers. Believers, those who put their trust in Christ, will never come to grief. Unbelievers will find that their rejection of Christ is the cause of their stumbling.

In verses 9-10 Peter describes the corporate nature and function of believers.¹⁸ The responsibility of believers is to show forth the mercies of the God who has summoned them from darkness to light. The privilege of believers is that they are now God's people and have experienced his mercy.

Verse 4: The verb for "come" (Greek *proserchesthai*) expresses the idea of drawing near with the intention of staying and enjoying personal fellowship.¹⁹ The word for "stone" (Grk. *libos*) refers to a worked stone and is not a rock or loose stone lying on the roadside.²⁰ This stone, a clear reference to Christ, is "living" in that Christ is personal and able to enter into vital relationships with human beings. He is a life-giving stone.²¹

¹⁸Nolan P. Howington, *A Royal Priesthood* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), p. 32.

¹⁹Edmond Hiebert, *First Peter: An Expositional Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), p. 118.

²⁰Alan M. Sibbs, "Commentary," *The First Epistle General of Peter*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (London: Tyndale Press, 1959), p. 98.

²¹E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1947), p. 158.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 159.

Peter contrasts the response to Christ by human beings and by God. By men Christ has been disallowed or set aside. The Jews had rejected Jesus's claims to be the Messiah. Men who then heard the gospel and rejected its message were similarly rejecting Christ.

In contrast Christ is "chosen" and "precious" to God. God showed that Christ was chosen by exalting him in the resurrection and ascension. The proclamation of the exaltation of Christ was a central feature of Christian preaching (see Acts 2:23-24, 32-33).

Verse 5: Interpreters debate whether the verb "built" is to be taken as an indicative or an imperative. The Greek will allow for either translation, and only the context can assist in deciding. Bigg²² feels that the series of imperatives from 1:13 onward demands that we take this verb also as an imperative. Best²³ and Hiebert²⁴ feel that the content of the section, a description of the nature of the church, demands an indicative rather than an imperative. If we take the word as an indicative, Peter is stating that believers who come to Christ are built up "like living stones."

The building experience transforms the believers into a "spiritual house." This description shows the nature of the church. Selwyn sees that the description designates the church as "God's true temple."²⁵ These believers are the location in which God resides (cf. Eph. 2:21, 22).

Believers are also a "holy priesthood." Peter designates all believers as members of this priesthood. There is no limitation merely to a selected few. The specific function²⁶ of this priesthood is to offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." The sacrifices offered by these believers are no longer merely animal and ceremonial. They are to be spiritual and moral. "They are not sacrifices offered to make expiation for sins nor to procure personal merit before God."²⁷ Peter does not enlarge in this context upon the nature of these sacrifices. Verse 6: Here Peter justifies his statement about the foundational importance of Christ for the believer. In this passage Peter refers to Isa. 28:16. His quotation "shows that Christ's position as chief cornerstone was foreseen and foreordained by God."²⁸

In the Isaiah passage the Lord sounds a rebuke upon those who have made a secret alliance with foreign nations as a remedy for the evils which threaten them. In the Old Testament passage the stone is a reference to the divine king or kingdom of Israel founded in David and more completely fulfilled in the true seed of David, Jesus Christ.

²²Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. Charles Augustus Briggs, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Alfred Plummer, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), p. 128.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁴Hiebert, p. 122.

²⁵Selwyn, p. 291.

²⁶Hiebert, p. 123.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁸Lea, p. 106.

⁷Colin Brown, gen. ed. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1976 ed., s.v. "People, Nation, Gentiles, Crowd, City," by H. Blumenthal.

⁸Thomas D. Lea, "Peter's Use of the Old Testament" (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1967), p. 120.

⁹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., n.d.), 2:96.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹¹Lea, p. 120.

In the verse Christ is called "a chosen and precious cornerstone." The reference may be to a foundation stone which supports all that lies above it. Selwyn distinguishes a cornerstone from a foundation stone. He suggests that the chief features of the cornerstone are its visibility and its control of the design of the building.²⁹

This cornerstone is described as "chosen" in that God has both selected it and approved it.³⁰ It is "precious" in that it is "held in honour"³¹ by God in the carrying out of his plan.

The faith which allows a believer to experience God's benefits is a confident resting upon the stone, Jesus Christ. Further, this faith must be continuous. The present tense of the Greek verb for "trust" or "believe" emphasizes that "continuing faith is the one basic characteristic of the group."³²

This verse makes clear the benefits to the believer of trusting Jesus. The person who rests his confidence upon Jesus Christ will never experience disappointment or disgrace. In the hour of crisis the believer will remain unshaken.

Verse 7: In this and the following verse, Peter warns unbelievers of the consequence of their disbelief. The passage here is taken from Ps. 118:22, and the quotation follows the general text of the Septuagint.

In the Old Testament context the rejected stone is a reference to Israel, "despised by the nations but chosen by God for the accomplishment of His purpose."³³ Heathen nations would have viewed the nation of Israel as insignificant among the great powers of the world. God, however, had restored Israel to the highest place among the nations by designating the nation as his own people.

Verse 7 begins with a restatement that the stone is precious to the believer. The remainder of verse 7 and all of verse 8 outline the fearful consequences of rejecting this stone. Peter used the word "stone" as a full personal reference to Jesus Christ. He sees that Christ has been made the "capstone," or in the words of F. W. Beare, "the touchstone of all endeavor."³⁴ In addition to this image there is also the thought that for some, Christ resembles a loose block left lying around by builders. Unwary human beings will trip over this block. "For the believer Christ is the block built into the corner, but for the unbeliever Christ is a rock lying loose to be tripped over."³⁵

Verse 8: This verse uses an Old Testament description of the fate of unbelievers which appears in Isa. 8:14. Peter applies this description to those who reject

Christ. In Isaiah 8 the prophet was reproving the policy of a fleshly-minded Israel. Isaiah has warned the spiritually-minded segment of the nation that a conspiracy of enemies against God's people is not to be feared. Only Jehovah is to be feared. Those who fear him will find that he is a sanctuary of safety. Those who reject him will find him to be a stone of stumbling and a snare.

The word for "stone" in verse 8 is the same word which appeared in verse 4. "The stone has been prepared for a specific place in the building. But since it is not being utilized, the passerby, unmindful of it, collides with it and injures himself."³⁶ The "rock that makes them fall" refers to a "large embedded bolder [sic], a great rock cliff; it is a large rock that human opposition cannot dispose of."³⁷ This rock has a calamitous effect on those who stumble over it. Peter uses the descriptions from Isaiah to show that men who reject God's stone, Jesus Christ, bring about their own injury and ruin.

The statement concerning "what they were destined for" also leaves an element of uncertainty in the interpretation of the last words of the verse. Peter clearly wanted to suggest that what was happening was not outside the plan of God. Was Peter stating that God had ordained their disbelief, or was he suggesting that God had ordained their stumbling as a consequence of their disbelief?

The first option seems inconsistent with the statement in 2 Pet. 3:9 that God is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." The second option suggests "that those who willfully reject the message of God concerning Christ are destined to stumble as the just and inevitable consequence of their deliberate rejection."³⁸ God has not ordained their disobedience, but he has ordained that the result of their disobedience is that they stumble over Jesus Christ. The disobedience is the problem of the unbeliever. God only ordains that their disobedience will lead to a stumbling over the message of the gospel.

In verses 4-8 Peter has encouraged those who come to Christ to expect spiritual life through Jesus, and he prepares them to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. He warns the unbelievers of the crushing effects of their willful rejection of Jesus.

Verse 9: In this and the following verse, Peter describes for the believers their precious heritage. The language of verse 9 is patterned after the language of Exod. 19:6 although it is not a quotation of the Old Testament passage. There may also be a reference to Isa. 43:20, at least in the use of the phrase "chosen people."

To describe the readers as "a chosen people" stipulates that they have a common heritage and share a common life. The source of the unity is the new

birth, which Peter's readers shared (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23). To call them "chosen" reminds the readers "that their position is due to God's free choice."³⁹

In calling the readers "a royal priesthood" Peter uses a phrase which appears in the LXX. The word "royal" may be seen either as an adjective or as a noun, but in the preceding translation it is translated as an adjective. If we view the word as a noun, a better translation of the text would be "kingdom and priesthood." Most translations (cf. NIV, NASB, NKJV) view the phrase "royal priesthood" as more accurate. Kelly feels that the term "royal" should be a noun translated as "royal house,"⁴⁰ but Hiebert⁴¹ follows most other commentators in opting for the adjectival usage of "royal." If we take the word as an adjective, the best understanding is to see it explaining that "Christians are a priesthood serving Jehovah the king. Included in the meaning is the idea of the relation of service and that of belonging to and participating in the glory of the king founded on it."⁴²

As a "holy nation" Christians have become a "unique international nation having a common spiritual life from God and committed to His rule."⁴³ The term "holy" reminds the believers that they are "consecrated to God."⁴⁴

Christians are also "a people belonging to God." The noun *laos* particularly describes them as the "laity" or covenant people of God.⁴⁵ The fact that believers were God's own people gave them a special standing and significance belonging to no one else.

The final phrase of verse 9 indicates the responsibility which falls on Christians because of their high calling. The "praises" of God which believers are to demonstrate include "not merely the goodness of God, but His glory, His greatness, all His noble attributes, wisdom, justice, strength."⁴⁶ How do Christians show this greatness of God? Best responds by saying that "Christians declare God's wonderful deeds of redemption (his loving action once in Christ, now continued among them by his Spirit and seen in their new status) by their proclamation of his word (1:25; 3:15) and by the holiness of their lives (1:16; 2:11-3:7)."⁴⁷

Verse 10: This verse is not a direct quotation from the Old Testament, but Peter clothed his ideas in terms drawn from Hosea 1-2. He specifically seemed to have had Hos. 2:23 in mind. The words of the prophet show the rejection by Jehovah of apostate and disobedient Israel. They also provide an assurance of the future restoration of Israel to divine favor.

²⁹Selwyn, p. 163.

³⁰Hiebert, p. 126.

³¹Bigg, p. 130.

³²Hiebert, p. 127.

³³F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1954), p. 100.

³⁴F. W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), p. 99.

³⁵Lea, p. 112.

³⁶Hiebert, p. 129.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid., p. 131.

³⁹Lea, p. 118.

⁴⁰J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 82.

⁴¹Hiebert, p. 133.

⁴²Lea, p. 118.

⁴³Hiebert, p. 134.

⁴⁴Stibbs, p. 104.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Bigg, p. 135.

⁴⁷Best, p. 109.

Peter used three words to contrast the prior condition of his readers to their present position as believers. As unbelievers they were not "a people." Now they had become a people who were claimed and possessed by God. Peter doubtless felt that the gratitude of believers could be deepened by their recalling what they once had been. This change was an alteration in the external status of Peter's readers.

In the latter part of verse 10 Peter discussed the change in the inner experience of his readers. They previously existed as people who had no experience of mercy. A Greek perfect participle for "receiving mercy" indicates that the preconversion life of these readers lacked any experience of God's steadfast love. A Greek aorist participle which described when the readers "received mercy" implies that God acted at a definite time, either their conversion or Christ's death, to lavish his mercy on them.⁴⁸

Conclusion: This passage shows what believers can realize in and through Jesus Christ. As God's very own Son he shares his honors with his people. As the living stone he gives life to those who trust in him. Those who fail to respond to him will come to ruin and destruction, but those who believe in him will experience the status of God's unique people with a special mission to carry out. Any reader of this passage cannot help but observe that believers collectively have a marvelous privilege and standing before God. This standing, however, demands the response of obedience, commitment, and holy living.

Revelation 1:5-6

In bringing greetings from Jesus Christ in verse 5a, John mentions the person and offices of Christ as "the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." The thought of the majesty of Christ leads John to an outburst of praise. In the latter part of verse 5 John praised the savior for his continuing love.

John also focuses on the chief demonstration of Jesus' love, his atoning death. He stresses that Christ has "freed us from our sins" by his atoning death.

In verse 6 John focuses on the "induction of blood-freed sinners into Christ's 'kingdom' and priesthood."⁴⁹ The statement in verse 6 is a loose reference to Exod. 19:6. The reference does not resemble completely either the LXX or the Massoretic Text. A literal translation of the Massoretic Text for Exod. 19:6 would emphasize that the people of Israel are "a kingdom of priests." The LXX has the same expression which we have previously translated in 1 Pet. 2:9 as "a royal priesthood." The NIV has properly rendered the sense of the Greek of Rev. 1:6 with its translation that Jesus "has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. . ." What is the meaning of the translation?

⁴⁸Hiebert, p. 137.

⁴⁹Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," *Hebrews-Revelation*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981), 12:422.

G. R. Beasley-Murray has suggested that the meaning of this text in Revelation is "the same as that which the Septuagint wished to convey by its expression 'royal priesthood.'"⁵⁰ If Beasley-Murray were correct, then the emphasis in Rev. 1:6 would be that Christians are a priesthood in the service of Jehovah the king. George Eldon Ladd takes issue with this interpretation and says, "God's people are a kingdom not merely because they are the people over whom God reigns, but because they are to participate in the messianic reign of Christ."⁵¹ To support his view, he refers to Rev. 5:10 which emphasizes that God's people will reign on the earth." Ladd adds, "Believers are a kingdom because they will fill the role of kings along with the messianic King — Jesus."⁵² John Newport agrees that the reference of this passage (in v. 6) is to the reign of the saints in the millennial period.⁵³

Believers are a kingdom in both an eschatological and a present sense. Eschatologically believers will fulfill a kingly function in reigning with Christ in his messianic kingdom. At the present time believers already have a royal standing by virtue of their connection with the exalted Christ.

As priests, believers "perform the priestly functions of offering sacrifices of thanksgiving, worship, and praise to God."⁵⁴ The reference underscores the responsibility of believers. "The priesthood of all the redeemed lies in this, that they come immediately to God, offer to him their prayers, and further give themselves peculiarly to him in holy obedience and spiritual service."⁵⁵

This passage underscores the privilege of believers in that they share the opportunity of reigning with Christ in his final reign. It also underscores the responsibility of believers in that they are to serve as priests.

Revelation 5:9-10

In Revelation 5 the apostle John, the living creatures, and the twenty-four elders become observers of a heavenly drama. The lamb, who is identified with Jesus Christ, takes a scroll from the hand of God, who is seated on his heavenly throne. The act of taking the scroll leads the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders to burst into a psalm of praise in verses 9-10.

The basis of the praise is the work of Christ in redemption. The lamb is praised as worthy to open

the book or scroll for a threefold reason.⁵⁶ First, he was slain. This is a statement of a historical fact. Second, he purchased men unto God out of all the nations of the earth. This is the interpretation of the fact of Jesus's death. Third, he has constituted these believers a kingdom and priests. This is the result of the fact.

Ladd, in line with his earlier interpretation in 1:6, suggests that "the idea of a kingdom means that the redeemed will not merely be God's people over whom he reigns; they will actually be granted the privilege of sharing his reign."⁵⁷ The presence of the promise of reigning seems to suggest this interpretation.

Ladd also says that "the idea of priesthood means full and immediate access into the presence of God for the purpose of praise and worship."⁵⁸ There does not seem to be any difference between the reference to priests in 1:6 and in 5:10. Both verses picture the ministry of the believer-priest as a service for God.

Spiritual Sacrifices in the New Testament

Two passages in the New Testament emphasize the sacrificial ministry of New Testament believers more clearly than others. These are Rom. 12:1 and Heb. 13:15-16. We will now examine these passages for evidence concerning the nature of the sacrifices which New Testament believers are to offer to God.

Romans 12:1: In Rom. 12:1 Paul provides additional practical application for the teaching which he has given in Romans 1-11. He had already discussed the topic of sanctification in Romans 6-8, but his application in this section of Romans is more concrete.

Paul's approach to his readers is neither a command nor a plea, but it contains elements of both.⁵⁹ It carries an element of authority, but its tone is not peremptory. It is softened by including an element of appeal.

The basis of his appeal is the "mercy" which God has shown. Mercy "denotes that quality in God that moves him to deliver man from his state of sin and misery and therefore underlies his saving activity in Christ."⁶⁰

The individual is to present himself to God. Paul "views the body as the vehicle that implements the desires and choices of the redeemed spirit."⁶¹ Paul is not suggesting that the body is to be given to God as distinct from the inner man. It is with the body that the choice of obedience to God is made evident.

God views the presentation of the personality in this way as a "living sacrifice." The human body is living in contrast to the animal sacrifices of the Old

Testament which were not living once they were presented. "It is possible that the word 'living' also reflects on the permanence of this offering, that it must be a constant dedication."⁶²

This type of commitment is viewed by Paul as "spiritual worship." The term translated "spiritual" suggests that the sacrifice which we give to the Lord is "intelligent and deliberate."⁶³ This term may be used in contrast to those Jewish sacrifices in which the animals were involuntary participants in the act of sacrifice.

The term "worship" covers the entire range of activities of the believer and not merely worship in the strict sense of adoring God. It includes all that the Christian does and plans, and thus the translation "service" of the KJV is a proper term to use.

In a word the type of spiritual sacrifice which Paul calls for here is obedience. There is no priestly ministry by the individual believer on behalf of anyone else. The act of obedience is that priestly ministry.

Hebrews 13:15-16: The writer of Hebrews has come to his concluding chapter in which he gives his readers appeals which deal with various areas of the spiritual life. In 13:1-9 he appeals for proper practice in the social life of the Christian, the domestic life of the Christian, and in the life of the Christian within the church fellowship. In 13:10-16 he appeals to both the ministry of Christ (vv. 10-14) and the priestly function of believers (vv. 15-16).

In 13:15 the writer specifically identifies the sacrifice which he desires from believers as "praise." The believer is to offer this praise continually. This praise does include the verbal offering which comes from our lips, but it demands more completely the rendering of a life which is pleasing to God.⁶⁴

In addition to the offering of praise, the writer of Hebrews also calls for almsgiving or deeds of mercy and kindness in verse 16. The word for "doing good" is a general word "of which the sharing of material things is a particular expression."⁶⁵

When the writer suggests that "such sacrifices" are pleasing to God, he is including both the praise of verse 15 and the almsgiving and deeds of mercy of verse 16. The spiritual sacrifices which this writer demands consist of praise and kindness.

Conclusion

The primary emphasis of the New Testament is that the priesthood of all Christians demands the offering of the sacrifices of obedience (Rom. 12:1), praise (Heb. 13:15), and deeds of mercy (Heb. 13:16). As Jerry Chance has said,

An examination of scriptural references and allusions to the priestly traits and activities of the believer . . . strongly suggests that the idea of universal priesthood denotes primarily the Christian's ministry of love, service, and witness to the neighbor rather than the Christian's privilege of access to God.⁶⁶

In line with this emphasis on the nature of the priesthood of all Christians we can understand that this doctrine emphasizes responsibility rather than merely privilege. As a believer-priest the Christian does have the right of access to God and freedom of conscience before God. However, the extreme individualism of an "I'll do it my way" Christianity must give way to a quality of commitment which gladly assumes the ministry which God gives to each believer. Christians are not to live at ease in Zion but are to lose their lives in the sweatboxes of service for God to man.

We must understand also that there is a collective aspect to the priestly ministry of each Christian. The discussion of the priestly ministry of believers assumes that believers are not merely playing "lone wolf" and beginning individual ministries for which they seek credit. In Rom. 12:1 Paul uses the plural form of the Greek "you" when he addresses the Romans. His appeal may be properly translated with a Southern flair as "I urge *you all* by the mercies of God to present yourselves as a living sacrifice." It is much more pleasing to God when a body of individuals acts collectively rather than fiercely independently. It is much more impressive to the world to see an army moving forward in service for Christ than to catch glimpse of a few lone individuals striking out on their own. Individuals must respond to the appeal to serve the Lord, but these individuals must act together.

⁵⁰G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, The New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Matthew Black and Ronald E. Clements, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), p. 57.

⁵¹George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972), p. 27.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³John P. Newport, *The Lion and the Lamb* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), p. 131.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ladd, p. 27.

⁵⁶Friedrich Dürstiedick, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, trans. Henry E. Jacobs (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), p. 105.

⁵⁷Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 148.

⁵⁸Ladd, p. 92.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," *Romans-Galatians*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976), 10:127.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1968), 2:111.

⁶⁵Harrison, p. 127.

⁶⁶Phillip Edgumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 583.

⁶⁷Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), p. 276.

⁶⁸Chance, p. 7.