

A Family of Royal Priests: Why the Priesthood of Believers Must Be “In Christ”

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In his recent book on the priesthood, *God’s Mediators: A Biblical Theology of the Priesthood*,¹ Andrew Malone argues the priesthood of believers is not derivative from Christ’s priesthood. Rather, the corporate priesthood is an entity unto itself that carries over from the corporate priesthood of the Old Testament. Though contributing many exegetical insights to a biblical theology of the priesthood, his proposal inadequately considers how Jesus’ high priesthood creates the priesthood of believers by means of the new covenant.

In response to Malone, I will argue the priesthood of believers *is* derived from Christ’s priesthood, and I will attempt to show how Christ’s priesthood generates a priestly class of new covenant believers through the doctrine of union with Christ. Specifically, I will argue how all the spiritual blessings in Christ must include the priesthood. It is not enough to affirm that Christ is our great high priest and that Christians are a royal priesthood, as Malone does. We must go further, as I believe Scripture does, to see how the latter is dependent upon and derived from the former.

This paper, therefore, will proceed in four steps. First, I will examine Malone’s argument that there is no exegetical case for uniting Christ’s priesthood to that of new covenant priests. Second, I will highlight the doctrine of union in Christ, showing how this theological axiom should inform any biblical theology of priesthood. Conversely, the priestly imagery of Scripture provides an additional biblical-theological metaphor to understand union with Christ.

Third, I will make an exegetical case for the union of priest and people. This exegetical argument will consist of three parts: (1) it will consider exodus typology of priest-making in both testaments; (2) it will demonstrate how key Old Testament passages on the priesthood are applied to Christ *and the church*; and (3) it show how the New Testament identifies the believers as priests because of Christ’s priestly service. Fourth and last, I will summarize my findings with a brief covenantal argument that shows why Malone’s approach misses both theologically and exegetically. From these four arguments I hope to show why the corporate priesthood of the church must find its origin, blessing, life, and ministry in union with Christ.

Malone’s Bifurcated Priesthood: An Appreciative But Serious Critique

Providing the impetus for this paper is the recent work by Andrew S. Malone, Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Dean of Ridley Online at Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia. His NSBT volume, *God’s Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*, is the only full-length, evangelical biblical theology on the topic of the priesthood that I know.² As my *Themelios* review of *God’s*

¹ Andrew S. Malone, *God’s Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 43 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017).

² D.A. Carson concurs, observing in the preface of *God’s Mediators*: “There is, as far as I know, no previous book-length canonical study of priesthood” (ibid., ix).

Mediator's highlights, I have great appreciation for Malone's work.³ His book puts in one place nearly all the pertinent biblical passages on the priesthood and provides many careful expositions on key texts. That said, I have great concern for the bifurcation Malone makes between Jesus's priesthood and the priesthood of believers.

This paper aims, therefore, to identify the deficiency of Malone's argument and to show why Christians, as new covenant priests, should understand their priesthood as deriving from their great high priest, Jesus Christ. This is the exact point that Malone denies, and one we must understand from Malone's perspective before making a positive case for new covenant priesthood. Therefore, what follows in this section is a brief introduction to his book and his view of the priesthood.

First, Malone organizes his book into two parts. The first half explains *individual priesthood* from Aaron (ch. 2) to Adam (ch. 3) to the rest of the Old Testament (ch. 4) and finally to Jesus (ch. 5). Then, the second half of the book explores *corporate priesthood*, first in Israel (ch. 6), then in the church (ch. 7). This two-pronged approach is not errant in itself—in fact, it shows how priests and orders of priests are extant in Scripture—but Malone's structural division enlarges his material divide. Instead of relating various expressions of priesthood as they rise and fall in Scripture, his two laps through the canon unnaturally separate what Scripture holds together—namely covenant mediators who stand before God on behalf of men (Heb. 5:1–2). Accordingly, he downplays (or overlooks) the filial nature of priesthood and the fraternal relationship of priests one to another (cf. Ps. 133).

Malone will partially recover this problem priest/priesthood divide when he affirms a “connection between the old-covenant priestly images” found in Exodus 19 and 28.⁴ But as soon as he acknowledges a relationship between individual and corporate priesthoods, he questions the order of dependence. In general, he affirms some interdependence between the order of Aaron and the kingdom of priests, as stated in Exodus 19:6, but he plainly denies any certainty between Christ and the priesthood of believers. Rejecting the views of many who have seen a priestly connection between Christ and the church,⁵ he argues,

The uncertainty with this priestly connection is that the Scriptures themselves do not forge such a derivation with any transparency. We have seen that the New Testament

³ David Schrock, “Review of *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology Priesthood*,” *Themelios* 43.1 (April 2018): 100–02.

⁴ *God's Mediators*, 183.

⁵ Some of the names he mentions include Roger Beckwith, “The Relation Between Christ's Sacrifice and Priesthood and Those of the Church: An Attempt at a Summary Statement” *Churchman* 103.3 (1989): 231–39; John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, JSNTSup 49 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); André Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975); J. Chryssavgis, “The Royal Priesthood (Peter 2.9)” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32.4 (1987): 373–77; Gerald O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). More could be added too, e.g., Cyril Eastwood, *The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful: An Investigation of the Doctrine from Biblical Times to the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963); Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest: According to the New Testament*, trans. J. Bernard Orchard (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's, 1986); and Hank Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Missio Dei: A Canonical, Catholic, and Contextual Perspective*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

teaches unambiguously about Jesus as a vocational priest and his followers as a corporate priesthood; it is the dependence or one upon the other that I query.⁶

Visualizing this uncertainty, he draws Figure 8.2:

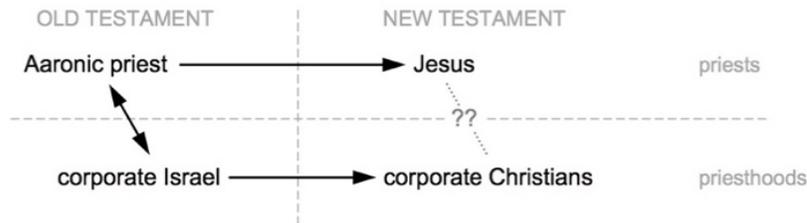


Figure 8.2

He writes to explain this parallelogram,

The assumed vertical arrow between the rightmost, New Testament elements is far less assured. I have already asserted that I do not find such a link transparently forged. We have seen that attempts at a link in Hebrews have not proved convincing.⁷ And much the same reasoning found for Hebrews obtains for our Scripture-wide parallelogram. Even as the Bible unfolds and the diagram transitions from the left to the right, the discontinuous transformation of individual priests is not the same as the continuous transfer of corporate priesthood. . . .

In short, the asymmetrical transformation along the horizontal axis does *not* make the assured vertical connection in the Old Testament an equally assured connection in the New Testament.⁸

This paper seeks to engage Malone’s “query” and attempt to make more transparent what Malone believes is not evident in Scripture—namely the dependence of new covenant priests on their corporate head Jesus Christ.

Second, and closely related to his concern with transparency, Malone denies any explicit argument in Scripture which unites the priesthood of believers to Christ’s priesthood. This is evident in his parallelogram, but even more when he explicates his view of Christ’s priesthood and the Church, he goes beyond questioning to denying:

Certainly Jesus’ individual priesthood and Christians’ corporate priesthood are derived from closely related Old Testament antecedents, but they are not derived in the same fashion. There is thus little confidence that we should link the two rightmost priesthoods.

⁶ *God Mediators*, 183.

⁷ See Malone’s discussion of Scholer, *Proleptic Priests (God’s Mediators*, 163–72).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

For all the ways in which the New Testament celebrates the similarities between Jesus and his sisters and brothers (e.g. Heb. 2:10–18; Rom. 8:1–4), and notwithstanding the expectation that Christians will be conformed to his likeness even in this life (e.g. Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:17–21; 1 Pet. 2:21–25; 1 John 2:3–6), there is little reason to see similarities between his priesthood and ours. As with distant cousins in a family tree there is some shared history but no real present connection.⁹

This denial of priestly derivation is the fundamental problem I have with Malone’s approach. While appreciating his exegetical cautiousness, I believe Malone divides what Scripture conjoins—namely, the priestly endowment Christ gives to his priestly people by means of his new covenant.

It is not without exegetical reasoning that Malone makes his argument. Chapter 7 (“The Church’s Priestly Commission”) considers priesthood in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the chapter is that Christian priesthood *is not derivative from Christ*. In a chapter that stresses the non-connection of Christ and his priestly people, Malone finds no convincing argument for seeing the priesthood of believers as deriving from Christ’s priesthood. In the places where corporate priesthood is clearly assigned to the Church (1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), Christ is not declared a priest.¹⁰ Concurrently, in the book where Christ is most clearly presented as a high priest (Hebrews), Malone takes great effort to deny any priestly status to the people. He spends ten pages denying John Scholer’s argument that the access in Hebrews indicates priestly status for Christ’s people.¹¹ Malone makes the same point with Paul and the rest of the New Testament.¹² As a result, he is left to make this conclusion: The new covenant people of God are a corporate priesthood; however, there is no evidence that their priesthood comes from that of Christ’s priesthood.¹³ He concludes his chapter with these words,

The New Testament *continues and extends* God’s commissions and expectations, calling his new-covenant people to the same goal and the same general means. The new-covenant people of God are to *be* and to *behave* in such a holy—God-worthy—fashion that the wider nations are brought to join the worship of the universe’s creator.¹⁴

Oddly, Malone concludes the new covenant, which Christ brings into being with his *priestly* sacrifice (see Hebrews 8–10), does not create the new covenant priesthood. Rather, in some more indirect, impersonal, and non-descript way the promise of Exodus 19:6 is now applied to the church by means of Christ, because of his priesthood.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 117–18.

¹¹ Ibid., 163–72. Cf. John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*.

¹² Ibid., 172–77.

¹³ Ibid., 178.

¹⁴Ibid. Emphasis his.

The burden of this paper is to prove theologically and exegetically that the priesthood of believers is not merely a continuation of corporate priesthood, but it is in fact a creation of Jesus Christ and his new covenant. In other words, what Christ has ratified in his priesthood is not a restoration of the Levitical priesthood *qua* the Levitical priesthood.¹⁵ Rather, in Christ's priesthood the Levitical priesthood is fulfilled as Christ creates a new Israel, who are a new kingdom of priests. In other words, continuity is *not* the primary way corporate priesthood under the Old Testament is related to the New. Rather, the new covenant priesthood of Christ creates a new order of "Levitical priests," who are qualified to serve in the house of God not because of their family affiliation, but because of the Spirit they share with Christ (or that Christ shares with them).

And this leads to the third distinctive to highlight. As Malone concludes his research on the priesthood, he argues that the primary relationship between Aaron and Jesus is one of dissimilarity. Malone writes, "While there remain substantial continuities, the discontinuities are to the fore, especially in the pastoral rhetoric of Hebrews."¹⁶ By contrast, he believes the corporate priesthood develops in the opposite fashion.

The status and function of corporate Israel, however, are not effectively altered but are extended just as the identity of God's covenant people is extended. While recognizing some discontinuities, the continuities are to the fore, especially in the pastoral assurances of 1 Peter and Revelation.¹⁷

Remarkably, the pattern of fulfillment found in the individual priesthood is replaced by an "asymmetrical" pattern of priestly continuity in the corporate priesthood. Once more, I believe this approach misfires.¹⁸ Instead of grounding his argument in the structures of new covenant (i.e., the promises and stipulations of the covenant Christ mediates), it seems Malone makes the promise-fulfillment structure of the old and new covenant run in opposite directions. But this, in my estimation, is the problem: How can Christ's priesthood discontinue Aaron's priesthood, but the priesthood of the believer continue closely akin to the Levitical priesthood? Is this really how 1 Peter and Revelation present the corporate priesthood? I do not believe so, and in what follows I will make a threefold argument to the contrary.

¹⁵ Nicholas Haydock, *Theology of the Levitical Priesthood: Assisting God's People in Their Mission to the Nations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) makes a similar point, even arguing with respect to the new covenant that "God's covenant with the Levites is unbreakable and permanent" (64), thus running parallel with the new covenant. Malone doesn't make this explicit argument, but neither does his unmediated transfer of priestly roles from Old Testament to New Testament priests demonstrate discontinuity between corporate priesthood under the old and new covenants. See note 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ On the nature of continuity and discontinuity that follows the "covenantal topography" of Scripture, see my "From Beelines to Plotlines: Typology That Follows the Covenantal Topography of Scripture," *SBJT* 21.1 (Spring 2017): 35–56.

The Theological Argument: New Covenant Priesthood Must Be “In Christ”

Union with Christ (a theological concept) and “in Christ” (an exegetical term found in Paul and other New Testament authors) have received a great deal of attention in recent years. From the theological works of Robert Letham and J. Todd Billings to the more exegetical investigations of Constantine Campbell, Grant McCaskill, and many others, the importance of this concept for understanding a host of biblical and theological questions is manifold.¹⁹ As Kevin Vanhoozer has observed, the prepositional language of “in Christ” is both “precocious and capacious”; yet, there remains a need to consider this subject “not only grammatically but also canonically and systematically (i.e., doctrinally).”²⁰ What follows is an attempt to do just that, as we cross the streams of theology and canonical exegesis to see if we can reverse the argument made by Andrew Malone.

In discussion of union with Christ, all manner of metaphors have been considered to establish a union between Christ and his people. For instance, in surveying the landscape of “union in Christ” studies, Vanhoozer lists four various biblical-theological metaphors (e.g., body, temple, marriage, adoption).²¹ Grant Macaskill engages many of these same images, even addressing the priestly connections between Christ and his people in the book of Hebrews.²² Yet, for all the attention “union in Christ” has received, focus on the priesthood has been strangely lacking.²³

This may explain why Andrew Malone does not see the theological problem with asserting that our priestly connection to Christ is like that of “distant cousins.”²⁴ Yet, in keeping with the doctrine of union with Christ, one that asserts that everything true of Christ is shared with his covenantal family, it is best to understand the priestly identity of the church as deriving

¹⁹ Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011); J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Constantine Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (New York: OUP, 2013); “*In Christ*” in Paul: *Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation*, ed. Michael J. Thate, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Constantine R. Campbell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

²⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “From ‘Blessed in Christ’ to ‘Being in Christ,’” in “*In Christ*” in Paul, 9, 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19–21.

²² Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, 178–87

²³ One counter-example to this theme is Hank Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 46, who writes, “The foundation of the royal priesthood is its familial union with the eschatological Priest-king, Jesus the Anointed One.” Later, he says again, “By virtue of union with Christ, as part of God’s temple-people, each believer has a priestly ministry, a place to serve in God’s house” (*ibid.*, 202). Similarly, G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 669–79, includes “Christians a Kingdom of Priests” in his treatment of “The New Testament Latter-Day Fulfillment of New Israel.” The images he considers complement the biblical-theological metaphors of Vanhoozer and Macaskill, but Beale doesn’t (in this place, as he is discussing something else) make the theological jump to union with Christ.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

from union with Christ. In fact, there may not be a more fitting image in the Old Testament than priesthood for gathering information on union in Christ.²⁵

For instance, the priestly garments bore the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:6–14, 15–30). In this context, Aaron brought the nation of Israel into the Lord’s remembrance (vv. 12–13, 29), just as he conveyed the blessing of God to the people (cf. Num. 6:24–26). Likewise, as he brought the offering of the people to the altar, the priest bore the sin of the people (28:36–38). Conversely, when clothed in his priestly garments, he brought the glory of God into the people’s sight. In short, as his holy attire matched the tabernacle, he was a son of God. But as a man chosen from Israel, he was simultaneously a son of Israel. In this way, he was the personal means by which God atoned for his people’s sin, such that the people received God’s blessing. In other words, as the appointed mediator of the covenant, he was a man in union with the nation and with God. Typological possibilities related to union with Christ abound from a close study of Israel’s priesthood.

Similarly, in Israel’s history the condition of the priest determined the condition of the people. While the nation prospered under faithful priests, more often the nation suffered because of errant priests.²⁶ For example, when the Prophets brought judgment against the people’s idolatry, they often blamed the priest for failing to teach the people (Mal. 2:1–9). As Hosea 6:6 states,

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
I reject you from being a priest to me.
And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.

You could add many examples where the people suffered because of their dependence on the priest.²⁷

All in all, the covenantal union between Christ and his church finds a precursor in the relationship between priest and people in the Old Testament. Indeed, as Psalm 133 graphically displays the relationship of priest to people; the blessings of God which fall on the priest’s head are the ones that descend on the robes of Aaron, symbolically depicting the way blessings move

²⁵ To engage further with Vanhoozer (“From ‘Blessed in Christ,’ 28–30), if Michael Thate makes an important contribution to union in Christ studies with his examination on space and place in Philippians (“Paul, *Phronēsis*, and Participation: The Shape of Space and the Reconfiguration of Place in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians,” in *In Christ in Paul*, 281–330), might not union in Christ with respect to priesthood develop this idea further? In Israel, the priests were the “eutopic actors” of Israel, placed in various temple strata to communicate God’s presence to the people of Israel. Accordingly, their spatial roles, not to mention their personal mediation, form an important metaphor for understanding God’s holiness and the relationship between Christ and his people. Cf. Philip P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1992).

²⁶ Compare the presence of priests in Joshua to their absence or unfaithfulness in Judges.

²⁷ It seems that the covenant of Levi (Mal. 2:1–9) was intended to establish a priestly people to protect, promote, and preserve the Sinai covenant (Deut. 33:8–11). When the priests failed their duty, therefore, the nation suffered disastrously.

from priest to people. Moreover, the high priest (symbolized by Aaron in Ps. 133:2) is depicted as mediator of blessing for his brothers, the ones unified around him (v. 1).²⁸

With this in mind, it is my contention that no covenantal blessing is conferred to any member of the covenant people apart from their union with the covenant mediator. In Israel, the priest mediated that blessing. Thus, in the new covenant, all blessings came through Christ, the priestly mediator of the new covenant (see Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).²⁹ As Ephesians 1:3 puts, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*” It is “in Christ” that we receive every good gift from the Father, including our priesthood. While this paper aims to prove exegetically that new covenant priesthood is derivative from Christ’s priesthood, the whole notion of blessing without Christ’s mediation is untenable if we take seriously the doctrine of union with Christ.

Thus, I believe a thorough understanding of union with Christ, one that takes seriously the Old Testament background of the priesthood, leaves us to question how one could deny a link between the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of his people. Still, because Malone’s objection is exegetical, I will restrict myself now to the exegetical question: Does the New Testament make an explicit, exegetical case for the priesthood of the believer deriving its existence from the priesthood of Christ? I believe that the doctrine of union with Christ raises serious suspicion to Malone’s denial of an exegetical connection, but it is to the text we must turn.

The Exegetical Argument(s): Typology and Old Testament Texts Applied and Fulfilled

In *God’s Mediators*, he lists multiple implicit arguments that *may* suggest Christ-derived priesthood, but none that *must* require the connection. Yet, what I will now argue is that (1) there is a biblical typology of the priesthood which requires the unification of (individual) priest and (corporate) priesthood, (2) there are numerous Old Testament passages which indicate a link between priest and priesthood, and (3) there are many other New Testament passages which identify believers as priests because of Christ’s priesthood. In what follows we will consider each of these exegetical arguments, giving a sample of exegetical texts—e.g., Psalm 110; Isaiah 61:6 and 66:21; Jeremiah 33:14–26; 1 Peter 2:4–10; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; and Hebrews.

Typology

Typology, defined in various ways (along with its various academic sparring partners—analogy, allegory, figural reading, etc.), is not an undisputed method of interpretation.³⁰

²⁸ On the priestly context of Psalm 133, see O. Palmer Robertson’s discussion of the Songs of Ascent. *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015).

²⁹ Importantly, in each use of the word “mediator” (*mēsites*), the context is priestly. In other words, Hebrews portrays Jesus as a priestly mediator who inaugurates a new covenant (see esp. Heb. 7:11).

³⁰ For a definition of typology most closely aligned with my own, see Aubrey Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, “Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology,” *SBJT* 21.1 (Spring 2017): 11–34. For my own definition of typology, see ““What Designates a Valid Type? A Christotelic, Covenantal Proposal.” *Southeastern*

Therefore, I must define my use of the term: I am not using typology as a “method of interpretation,” as much as shorthand for the observing textual patterns (i.e., types) in Scripture. Biblical types have been inspired by God and woven into the progressive-yet-unified revelation which culminates in Christ. In typology, the sovereign Author of Scripture, through the instrumentality of human authors, prepares the way for his Son by means of historical persons, events, places, covenants, and institutions (i.e., types), which over time escalate and anticipate the coming of Christ. With this definition, I am not approaching typology as a creative, after-the-fact production of the reader; my approach is to recognize how Scripture is written. Typology, in this sense, is grammatical-historical exegesis at the canonical level.

With that caveat in place, here’s my argument from typology: If God made Israel a “kingdom of priests” in Exodus 19:6 by means of everything in that transpired in Exodus 1–18, then why is it any less certain that he made his new covenant people a corporate priesthood by means of Christ’s new exodus? Studies are legion which show the “echoes of Exodus” in Scripture.³¹ And passages like Luke 9:31 make it undeniable that Jesus understood his death and resurrection as a new exodus.³² Therefore, if the first exodus created a priestly people by means of priestly savior (Moses), then surely the antitype would follow the same pattern. Here’s the parallel:

Fig. 1: The Priest-making Pattern of Exodus
Exodus: Priestly Savior → Baptism in the Red Sea → Kingdom of Priests
New Exodus: Priestly Savior → Baptism in the Spirit → New Covenant Priesthood

To argue this priest-making pattern, I will first look at the micro-context of Exodus 19:4–6 and then the component parts of the Exodus.

First, we know the exodus caused the priestly status of Israel in verse 6—and was not just corollary occurrence—because verses 5–6 stand in dependence upon verse 4.

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. *Now therefore*, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the

Theological Review 5.1 (Summer 2014): 3–26. Cf. idem., “SBJT Forum: What are Strengths and Weaknesses of Current Evangelical Approaches to Typology?” *SBJT* 21.1 (Spring 2017): 152–66.

³¹ Most recently, two books have been published under this banner. Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2018); Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). Previously others works in the New Testament have developed the theme of (New) Exodus: Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

³² “And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure (*exodon*), which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

Though the word “therefore” (v. 5) is supplied by ESV (cf. NRSV, RSV) and is not in the original, the translation captures the logical relationship between the events of Exodus and the covenant now being made at Sinai.³³ Moreover, the word “now” (*attâ*) captures the change of status produced by the events of Exodus 1–18, encapsulated in verse 4.³⁴ *Now* that God has redeemed his people Israel from serving Pharaoh and his gods, he confers on them the status of royal priesthood.³⁵ Close attention to the movements of Exodus teaches us how God creates his priests, which makes us ask: What happened in Exodus 1–18 to make Israel a kingdom of priests?

The answer can be given in one word—baptism! Baptism is what happened in Exodus 1–18 to make Israel a priestly people. Admittedly, the word *baptism* is not used in Exodus, nor anywhere in the LXX. But when Paul looks back at the events of Exodus, he calls it a baptism. As 1 Corinthians 10:2 puts it, the people of Israel were “baptized into Moses” (*ebaptisanto eis ton Mōusēn*) when he brought them through the sea. Paul, who will speak of the believers baptism in Christ other contexts (see Rom. 6:3–6; Col. 2:11–12; cf. 1 Cor 12:12–13) understands the covenantal significance of this word and for him there formed in the exodus a covenantal bond between Moses and the people of Israel as God saved Israel through Moses.³⁶

It is the covenantal union created by the shared experience of the exodus which leads to the priestly status of Israel in Exodus 19:6. And looking back from Sinai’s vantage point, we can see three ways the exodus made Israel a priestly people and conjoined Moses as a priest (cf. Ps. 99:6) to Israel as a kingdom of priests.

First, God saved Israel through a priestly mediator. Moses’s priestly status is unmistakable his identification and actions in Exodus. For instance, his introduction marks out his Levitical heritage from mother and father (2:1). Likewise, the insertion of his genealogy in Exodus 6:14–26 spotlights his priestly pedigree. Moreover, Moses lived to intercede for Israel (Exodus 17:8–16; 32:11–13; 32:31–32; 33:12–18; 34:9; Num. 12:13; 14:5; 16:4). God also appointed Moses to lead Israel, which included priestly actions with the Passover (Exod. 12:1–51), at Sinai (Exod. 24:1–11), and later in the Wilderness all served to make Israel a royal

³³ “The three instances of divine action in verse 4 are a deliberate summary of Exodus 6–19.” J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus* (BST; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 197.

³⁴ “This entire scene at the mountain and the subsequent laws are predicated on verse 4, what *God has done*. . . . The law he now gives is the subsequent stage in Israel’s developing relationship with God.” Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 387.

³⁵ In the book of Exodus, there is strong contrast between Israel serving Pharaoh at the beginning of the book (1:14; cf. 2:23; 6:9) and Israel serving Yahweh at the end (39:32, 42). The exodus is what changed Israel’s status from slaves of Pharaoh to servants of God, and hence a kingdom of priests. Arie C. Leder, *Waiting for the Land: The Story Line of the Pentateuch* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R 2010), 54.

³⁶ “Baptism was understood to be the act that initiates the person into the new covenantal relationship, . . . Just as Christ is identified as the founder of the new covenant established through his death and resurrection, Moses was understood to be the (human) founder of the covenant established at the time of the great exodus redemption.” Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2010, 448).

priesthood. In other words, Moses is more than a priest, he is a priest-maker.³⁷ Thus, if Jesus is a New Moses, then the best evidence supports that Jesus is also a priest-maker—his new covenant creates a new Israel as a new priesthood.

Second, through the baptism of Moses in the Red Sea, God made a priestly people. While previously Israel defiled themselves by worshiping idols in Egypt, in the Passover (Exodus 12) and through the Red Sea (Exodus 14) God set his people apart and destroyed the powers that once enslaved them. In other words, the Passover effectively made Israel a nation of priests and the Red Sea served as a purification rite.³⁸ Just as the priests in Israel were washed at the hands of another (see Exod. 29:4; 40:12; Lev. 8:6), so Israel experienced their own priestly purification (a baptism) at the Red Sea.³⁹ In the flow of Exodus, after coming out of the waters, Israel was brought to God's holy hill, and declared a royal priesthood.

Third, the title “royal priesthood” is conferred upon Israel with two others—“treasured possession” and “holy nation.” While this paper cannot engage these terms, it is important to see the connection between *segullah* and sonship, and how it informs our understanding of priesthood.⁴⁰ “Treasured possession” is only used eight times in the Old Testament, mostly in reference to Israel (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4; Mal. 3:17). Twice it refers to a physical treasure, albeit in one instance (maybe both) it is temple treasure (1 Chron. 29:3; Ecc. 2:8). But most importantly, in Malachi 3:17 it is used in parallel to “son.”⁴¹ Commenting on that passage, Peter Gentry notes, “When Yahweh calls Israel to be his personal treasure, he is speaking of the kind devoted service given by a son.”⁴²

Thus, if we read the three titles—“treasured possession” (*segullah*), “kingdom of priests” (*mamleket kohanim*), and “holy nation” (*goy qadosh*)—as mutually interpreting, we are helped to see that the return to God's mountain, reassigns the status of holy sonship to the people of Israel. In other words, what does it mean to be a royal priesthood? It means that God's people are now God's devoted son, commissioned to serve as priests in his kingdom.

³⁷ Jo Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 127. On Moses as a priest, see Wells, *God's Holy People*, 107, 111–12; John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19:6* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 106; Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest*, 106–07.

³⁸ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 77–85.

³⁹ Peter J. Leithart, *The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 91–96.

⁴⁰ For a taxonomy of the priestly terminology, John Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 69. My purposes are not to define here the nature of *mamleket kohanim*. Although not unrelated, my goal is to determine what the relationship is between high priest and the supporting layers of priesthood.

⁴¹ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 51–55.

⁴² Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 318. In fuller context, Gentry notes how *segullah* as sonship fits the Akkadian and Ugaritic parallels, but more significantly, it takes us back to Adam: “We are back, here, to the divine image in Genesis 1:26–28. Israel has inherited an Adamic role, giving the devoted service of a son and honoured king in covenant relationship” (ibid.).

Israel, therefore, is best seen as “corporate Adam.”⁴³ Earlier in Exodus, God told Moses he would save his firstborn son and bring him to the mountain to worship (3:12). This would require the redemption of this son and the destruction of Pharaoh and his firstborn sons, but nevertheless sonship—especially firstborn sonship—plays a significant role in Exodus. And when we consider how firstborn sons during the patriarchs served as priests for their families, it completes the picture.⁴⁴ *The exodus, with a priestly leader Moses and the priestly baptism at the Red Sea made God’s firstborn son a kingdom of holy priests.* This the pattern (see Fig. 1 again) we find in Exodus and it is the typology we need to keep in mind as we turn upfield.

In the New Testament, God again saves his people with a priestly leader. Though debates continue over Jesus’s priestly standing on the earth, we will not venture into that debate here.⁴⁵ Instead, we will simply point to Hebrews as a definitive argument for Christ’s high priesthood. In his exaltation Jesus has received the title high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and as the book of Hebrews explains this priestly glory is conferred upon Jesus because in his earthly life he proved to be a true Son of God (5:8; cf. 3:6; 4:14; 5:5; 7:3, 28). At the same time, as other books of the New Testament do affirm, Jesus in his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation led an exodus whereby he brought his people into the presence of God.

To this point, Andrew Malone concurs. Jesus does make a way for God’s people; he is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and the people of the new covenant are called priests. What he doesn’t affirm is the correlation of all of these, whereby new covenant priesthood is derived from Christ’s priesthood.⁴⁶ Already, I have raised concerns about the theology of this reading of the New Testament, now I am raising a second question: Does this fit the pattern presented in the Old Testament, one that is repeatedly fulfilled in Christ? In other words, if the New Testament presents Jesus as saving his people by means of a new and greater exodus; and if the Old Testament type includes a sacrificial lamb, a baptism, a defeat of God’s enemies, a new covenant, and the construction of God’s dwelling place—to name a few parts of the exodus pattern; then why not a priest like Moses who creates a priestly people? Why not a priest greater Aaron who sits at God’s right hand interceding for God’s kingdom, a people made in his image—the image of a royal priest?

⁴³ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 120–21. Cf. David Schrock, “Restoring the Image of God: A Corporate-Filial Approach to the “Royal Priesthood” in Exodus 19:6” *SBJT* 22.2 (2018): 25–60.

⁴⁴ On firstborn sons as family priests, see Scott Hahn, Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 136–42. Cf. Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 9.

⁴⁵ For a defense of Jesus as priest in the Gospels, see Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Priest* (London: SPCK, 2018). This title is being released in the United States by Baker Academic in 2019. For a short summary of those who argue that the Gospels present Jesus as a priest, see Nicholas Piotrowski and David Schrock, Nicholas G. Piotrowski and David S. Schrock, ““You Can Make Me Clean”: The Matthean Jesus as Priest and the Biblical-Theological Results,” *Criswell Theological Review* 14.1 (Fall 2016): 3–14.

⁴⁶ In responding to Scholer’s argument that access into the heavenly places indicates that the people of Hebrews are priests, Malone responds: “In Hebrews, it is not especially certain that they [the terms of access] refer to approaching God in a priestly fashion. Perhaps they are sufficiently general that all God’s worshippers might be considered to be priests—a point I am broadly keen to support. At the same time such words are so general and metaphorical that I am hesitant to place much weight on them” (*God’s Mediators*, 169).

From a careful, exegetical reading of Exodus's typology combined with overwhelming evidence for its intentional re-use by New Testament authors, it would necessitate that if God made Israel a kingdom of priests through the ministry of a man like Moses, then when Jesus comes as a greater Moses (Heb. 3:1–6) leading a greater exodus (Luke 9:31), then it must follow that Christ has also created a greater priesthood and that he himself is the glorious high priest who receives the blessings of God to share with his friends (cp. Zech. 3:8 and John 15:14).

In fact, as we turn from typology to specific texts, I will argue this is exactly how numerous Old Testament passages are applied to the New (e.g., Psalm 110; Isa. 66:20; Jer. 33:14), and how multiple New Testament passages apply Exodus 19:6 to the people of God (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; Hebrews 1–13). Unlike Malone who argues that Exodus 19:6 is restored because of Christ's work but not directly because of his priesthood, I will make the exegetical case that a reading of many key priestly texts which pays attention to the promise-fulfillment structure of the new covenant cannot divide Christ's priesthood from his people's priesthood.

Old Testament Texts Applied

Psalm 110. There is no more important priestly passage in all of Scripture than Psalm 110. In Hebrews, this is *the* text which the author frames his argument, the one he centers his explanation of Christ's priesthood. Thus, it is undeniably a passage pertaining to Jesus Christ and his royal priesthood. Yet, the language of Psalm 110 is not simply applied to Jesus in the New Testament, it is also applied to his people. In Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1–2; and Colossians 3:1, we find four instances where the blessings of Psalm 110 are applied to Christ's people. For sake of space, we will focus on Romans and Ephesians.

First, in Romans 8:34 Paul writes, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." As many have observed, this verse fulfills what Psalm 110 promised and identifies Jesus as "priestly king" of that Psalm.⁴⁷ In context too, Romans 8 aims to comfort the one who is "in Christ" (see vv. 1, 39). Thus, in keeping with the theme of union in Christ, Adolph Schlatter notes, "As the one now exalted in the presence of God and acting in the manner of God, he is also united with his community and represents them before God."⁴⁸

Though Schlatter does not identify Christ as a priest in this role of representation, the back drop of Psalm 110 does. And in the wider scope of Romans 8, we see how Christ's priesthood is shared with his people, when we read Romans 8 in light of the filial nature of the priesthood. As verses 28–30 promises the saints who are predestined will be called, justified, and glorified, Paul says the purpose is that the saints might be "conformed to the image of his Son." Why is this? So that Jesus, as God's Son, might be "the firstborn among many brothers" (v. 29).

From the text, we can see that those for whom the Son intercedes (v. 34) are his brothers (v. 29), who will one day share his glory (v. 30), and are currently united to his Father's love in

⁴⁷ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 493; Mark Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 635.

⁴⁸ Adolph Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, trans. Siegfried Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 197.

him (v. 39). From the background of the Old Testament, to be a brother of the priest is to be a priest. This was true with the nation as a whole, and specifically in the house of Levi and the house of Aaron. Malone denies this connection, but I do not believe he has considered the filial relationship of the priests, nor the way firstborn sons served their families as priests.⁴⁹

In Genesis, there is strong evidence for the covenant people of God having sons serve as priests. And here in Romans, as a new Adam (Rom. 5:12–21) is bringing in a new covenant that confers justification and participation in the Lord, there is an evident kinship relationship that stands between Christ and his new covenant people.⁵⁰ The ones for whom he died (8:1–3), and will be raised (6:3–6) and to whom he has given his Spirit (8:9, 11) are now called sons of God and heirs with him (8:12–17). Even more these fellow heirs, in union with Christ, are being conformed into his image. Unless Christ's image is devoid of priestly identity, it seems unlikely that the brothers to whom he is in covenant union, for whom he prays, and to whom he gives his Spirit could be anything but family of royal priests.

Second, Ephesians 2:5 also applies the language of Christ's session to the church. While Paul speaks of Christ's exalted status as one seated at God's right hand in heavenly places in Ephesians 1:20, just a few verses later he identifies the believer as possessing the same status (2:5). With three verbs in parallel,⁵¹ he states, "God . . . *made us alive together with Christ* . . . and *raised us up with him* and *seated us with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Clearly, the language is not spatial; it is covenantal—in Christ, God has conferred on his believers the status of Christ—access into the heavenly places and session at God's right hand.⁵² Significantly, this session which Christians have been given is a spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3) which finds its origin in Psalm 110.⁵³

Just as Psalm 110 itself images a union of the priest-king with his people, so Ephesians 2 rightly assigns the covenantal blessing of life and rest to the people who are in Christ. Moreover, if we continue to read Ephesians 2, we find that Paul moves from mention of "heavenly places" (v. 6) to the place where heaven touches earth—the temple (vv. 19–22). In a context that describes the new covenant and its unifying effect on Jews and Gentiles (vv. 11–18), Paul goes

⁴⁹ *God's Mediators*, 170. Nicholas Perrin also points to "Abba, Father" in Romans 8 and other passages as an indication of priesthood in his book, *Jesus the Priest*.

⁵⁰ On this balance of justification and participation (i.e., union in Christ), see Richard Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 45–46.

⁵¹ All are aorist, active, indicative and all have the prefix *syn*—*synezōpoiēsen*, *synēgeiren*, *synekathisen*.

⁵² The same could be said of the believers who are in union with Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 and Colossians 3:1–4. As Christ has been raised from the dead to the royal priest of Psalm 110, he has not been raised alone. Rather, he is present with his people. By resurrection to life and proximity to the throne of God, this suggests that his people should be seen as possessing a royal priestly status. Joshua W. Jipp ("Sharing the Heavenly Rule of Christ the King: Paul's Royal Participatory Language in Ephesians," in *"In Christ" in Paul*, 251–79) develops the kingly aspect of this participation, but leaves aside the priestly status. Yet, this seems to only consider half of what Psalm 110 says.

⁵³ One could respond that heavenly session is the promise of Psalm 110:1 and not verse 4, but such an atomistic reading of Psalm 110 denies the unity of Psalm 110 and the way New Testament authors read and employed texts of Scripture. See C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 126–27. Such division of verses 1 and 4 also bifurcates the unified office of king and priest.

on to describe the church as a temple composed of Spirit-filled saints. Mixing architectural and arboreal imagery, Paul paints an Edenic picture of the church, one where the members of God's household are servants together in the household of faith (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4–10).

Again, if we attend to the typology here, we are in position to see how God gives to the new covenant saints priestly duties to worship in God's house and serve one another. In fact, as the rest of Ephesians unfolds, there is reason to believe that the temple theme continues at least through Ephesians 4, where members of Christ's body (4:1–16) are given to the church as gifts. And importantly, Ephesians 4:8 cites Psalm 68:18, a passage that has strong priestly connections with Numbers 8:9 and 18:6—two passages that speak of Levites being given as gifts to the high priest.⁵⁴ Accordingly, it seems that even as Ephesians unpacks a temple theology, there are many reasons to see a priestly theology—one that sees the saints (i.e. the holy ones of God) as joining the Son at his throne and serving as priests in the house he is building.⁵⁵ All in all, from a thick reading of Ephesians, we can see how the priestly identity of Christ from Psalm 110 is applied to the church, as the church of Jesus Christ carries out on earth the priestly work of Christ in heaven.⁵⁶

Isaiah 61:6 and 66:21. Next, as we observed from Ephesians 4:8, the mention of captives given to the church harkens back to Numbers and the gift of the Levites to service in the temple. Similarly, there is a promise in Isaiah 66:21 of priests and Levites coming from the nations and being given to the service of God and his people. Likewise, in Isaiah 61:6, the people whom the Lord redeems are also called priests. The question is: How did they receive this title? And what is the relationship between the Servant of Isaiah 53 and the servants who are called priests? To answer that question we must look not simply at a collection of verses, but how Isaiah 40–66 is structured.

In the flow of Isaiah, Isaiah 61:6 and 66:21 stand together in the final cycle of the book, one that runs from Isaiah 56–66.⁵⁷ In this seventh cycle, Isaiah 56–66 records four Spirit songs (59:15–60:22; 61:1–9; 61:10–62:12; 63:1–5), which correspond with the four Servant songs in Isaiah 40–55 (42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). Likewise, as we will observe, the blessing

⁵⁴ “The Levites were taken or received from among the sons of Israel as captives for his service, (Numbers 8:6, 16, 18) and are even referred to as “gifts” in Numbers 8:19a: “And I *have given* the Levites as *gifts* to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel.” The Levites are referred to as gifts taken and given in Numbers 18:6, “And behold, I have *taken* your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel; to you they *are given* as a *gift* for the Lord, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.” The captives are the gifts. Captives are taken and gifts given, but both the captives and the gifts are the Levites.” Gary V. Smith, “Paul’s Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8,” *JETS* 18.3 (Summer 1975): 187.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hank Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 46.

⁵⁶ Additionally, the imagery of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 may strengthen this priestly reading of Ephesians, if the divine warrior of Isaiah 59 is seen to be clad in priestly apparel.

⁵⁷ On the seven-part structure of Isaiah, see Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996).

of people in Isaiah 56–66 is directly related to the suffering of the Servant in Isaiah 53.⁵⁸ And of greatest import, we will see how the corporate priesthood described in Isaiah 61 and 66 comes from the work of the servant, a priest in his own right.⁵⁹

To begin, we should observe how servanthood was the standard calling of the priest (Pss. 134:1; 135:1).⁶⁰ Peter Leithart defines the priest as a temple servant, an “attendant in the household of God,”⁶¹ while many of the “servants of the Lord” take on priestly duties (e.g., Moses and David).⁶² Accordingly, the Servant in Isaiah is also portrayed as a priest.⁶³ As Hank Voss argues, following the work of Richard Schultz, “the priestly function is emphasized” in Isaiah’s Servant.⁶⁴

In Isa 52:15, the Servant ‘sprinkles’ many nations. He offers himself as a sacrificial lamb, and his life as a guilt offering (Isa 53:10). The LXX translates guilt offering as ‘given for sin,’ and this is most likely why Paul can say that Christ’s death for our sins was ‘according to Scripture’ [1 Cor. 15:3–4]. His death will make ‘many’ righteous, which underlies Jesus’ words at the Last Supper: ‘this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Perhaps most significantly, the final line of the poem [53:12] testifies that the Servant continues to engage in priestly work, since ‘he makes intercession for the transgressors.’”⁶⁵

⁵⁸ On the structure of this passage, see J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 489–90.

⁵⁹ Malone (*God’s Mediators*, 140–44) does a good job considering the structures of Isaiah 56–66, but he does not see the connection between the servant (individual) in Isaiah 40–55, which in turn creates the servants of Isaiah 56–66. Moreover, he doesn’t see how the priestly sacrifice of the servant creates the priesthood identified in Isaiah 61:6 and 66:21.

⁶⁰ Peter Gentry (*Kingdom through Covenant*, 318n33) observes, “Priests are given the honourific epithet ‘servants of Yahweh’ in Psalm 134:1 and 135:1. Similarly, the participial form in the *piel* of *šrt* (i.e., ‘servant’) is also used to describe priests as the servants of Yahweh (Jer. 33:21; Ezek 45:4; Joel 1:9; 1:13; 2:17; Neh. 10:37 [EV 10:36]; 2 Chron. 13:10).

⁶¹ Peter Leithart, “Attendants of Yahweh’s House: Priesthood in the Old Testament,” *JSOT* 85 (1999): 3–24.

⁶² “We may be able to acknowledge that both Moses and David serve as royal-priestly types for the ‘*ebed Yahweh*. Both are priestly, having a special intercessory relationship with Yahweh; both play central roles in the formation of covenants between God and his people; both are instrumental in establishing new places and practices for worship of Yahweh (tabernacle, temple); and both are in some sense ‘royal.’ Hank Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 57.

⁶³ Oscar Cullmann, *Christology of the New Testament*, trans. S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 83, 91–92. Cited by Hank Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 56n32.

⁶⁴ Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 57. Much of this section depends on the outstanding work of Hank Voss on Isaiah 40–66 (see *ibid.*, 51–71).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 57–58

From these textual clues, the priestly identity of the Servant explains how and why multiple “servants” emerge in the rest of Isaiah (see 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13–15; 66:14). Indeed, through the new covenant which the Servant establishes with his blood, Isaiah’s Suffering Servant is the one who creates priestly people through his once-for-all sacrifice for sin and on-going intercession. Therefore, from a unified reading of Isaiah, one that understands how the covenantal blessings are secured by the Servant and passed on to God’s his servants, we can see how the priests mentioned in Isaiah 61:6 and 66:21 (cf. 61:10–11) come into being. By means of the new covenant, the priestly Servant has purified a people for his own possession, servants who will serve the Lord as priests.

In fact, if we follow another fruitful metaphor in Isaiah, we can see how the vine that was cut down in Isaiah 53:1–2 has grown up to become a forest of righteous oaks (61:3).⁶⁶ Or to put it back in the imagery of priesthood—the individual priest has made a priestly people (61:6) by means of his priestly sacrifice and intercession (53:10–12). As Hank Voss has powerfully demonstrated, the priesthood of believers in Isaiah 54–66 is directly dependent on the work of the Servant. Thus he writes of the eunuch in Isaiah 54:11–17,

The new priestly privileges of the eschatological *‘ebedîm* can be seen in the Gentile eunuch, who formerly disqualified from entering the *ekklēsia kuriou* (Deut 22:2 LXX), could now minister in God’s house and joyfully offer sacrifices because of the Servant’s self-sacrifice.⁶⁷

Likewise, Voss notes that Isaiah 61 is the central focus of Isaiah 56–66, and that this chapter is fundamentally priestly.⁶⁸ Picking up many themes which correspond to the Exodus typology outlined above, Voss observes, “Isaiah 61 emphasizes the priestly status and ministry of the eschatological seed.”⁶⁹ He then lists five observations linking Isaiah 61 to Exodus 19:6 and concludes that Isaiah 61 gives the “clearest statement of the priestly status of the *‘ebedim*.”⁷⁰

From this thick reading of Isaiah, we can see how the priestly work of Servant, which comes to fulfillment in Christ, creates a new covenant priesthood. This understanding of Isaiah should be sufficient to make the point that the priesthood of the believers derives from Christ’s priestly service. And because Isaiah’s Servant undergirds so much of the New Testament’s presentation of Christ, it stands to reason that Isaiah’s priestly Servant, like the priest-making pattern of Exodus, has multiple applications to the priesthood of believers. For sake of space, we will consider two.

First, 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 speaks of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ on the cross and our evangelistic ministry of reconciliation. In this passage, he make mention of Christ’s death (vv. 15, 21), the new creation (v. 17), and the work of reconciliation (vv. 18–19). Significantly, this correlation of Christ’s sacrifice, the new creation, and the proclamation of the

⁶⁶ On the covenantal details of Isaiah, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 433–49.

⁶⁷ Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 60.

⁶⁸ Voss (*ibid.*, 62) follows the chiasmic structure of Isaiah 56–66, as presented by Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, NAC (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009), 520–22. Cf. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 489–90.

⁶⁹ Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 66.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

gospel (a ministry of reconciliation), conjoins the themes we find in Isaiah 40–66. While not meeting the exegetical standards imposed by Malone,⁷¹ when we read 2 Corinthians 5:11–21 in light of Isaiah, the connection between Christ’s priesthood and the priestly ministry of reconciliation becomes clear.⁷²

Moreover, the plausibility of this intra-biblical connection is strengthened when we see how priesthood in Isaiah 61:6 and 66:21 are described in the context of the new creation. For instance, the second Spirit song (61:1–9) combines new creation promises with the presence of a new priesthood. Hence, we discover that when the work of the Servant (Isaiah 53) brings forth a new covenant (Isaiah 54–55), this new covenant brings a Spirit which revives creation and purifies a people to serve in God’s presence (Isaiah 56–66). This new creation / new priesthood idea is echoed in Isaiah 66:21, which says that from all the nations, God will establish a new priesthood, one composed of Gentile priests.⁷³ Hence, we have reason for seeing in 2 Corinthians 5 a fulfillment of Isaiah 40–66.

Second, in Romans 15:16 Paul speaks of his evangelistic ministry to the Gentiles as a priestly ministry. In the only place where Paul uses the language of priest, he describes himself as a “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Once again, this combination of ministry to the Gentiles and priestly service finds support in Isaiah 61:6 and 66:20. Because Isaiah 66 envisions a day when the priests and Levites will be brought from the nations to serve in God’s new creation, it is fitting that as the message of the gospel (a message of new creation via Christ’s resurrection) is seen as a priestly ministry of the church (cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9–10). While Malone observes these priestly traits in Romans 15:16, he dismisses them for want of exegetical certitude. Yet, I would propose that what is lacking is a canonical reading of the text that understands Paul’s vision of ministry in light of Isaiah, which harkens back to Exodus 19:6. A passage we will consider below.

Jeremiah 33:18. Third, in Jeremiah 33:14–26 we find the peculiar promise that “the Levitical priests shall never lack a man to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever” (v. 18). Acknowledging that this passage needs to be read in its historical and literary context, I am going to focus on the canonical context of this verse.

Already from Isaiah we have seen how the work of the Servant resulted in a new covenant which brought in priests and Levites from the nations. By comparison, Jeremiah 30–33 is the place where the new covenant is promised (see esp. 31:31–34). And like Isaiah, this new covenant is also procured by a priestly figure. In Jeremiah 30:21, the prophet writes, “Their prince shall be one of themselves; their ruler shall come out from their midst; I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me, for who would dare of himself to approach me? declares

⁷¹ See Malone, *God’s Mediators*, 176–77.

⁷² Peter Balla, “2 Corinthians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 765–66. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 528–38, demonstrates the Isaianic origins of the “reconciliation” and “new creation” themes in 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 (see esp., 538). While he doesn’t mention Isaiah 66:21 in this context, it is not hard to imagine how this verse fits into Paul’s argument.

⁷³Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 665–69.

the Lord.” In the covenantal context of this passage,⁷⁴ the invitation of a (Davidic) ruler to approach God’s throne indicates a royal servant securing the new covenant by means of priestly service.⁷⁵

This restoration of David (v. 17) and Levi (v. 18), therefore, could be understood in a similar light. I don’t take these words to promise a restoration of the Levitical priesthood as merely a repriming of the Levitical priesthood.⁷⁶ Nor do I think the Levites are unimportant for a biblical theology of the priesthood, as Malone does.⁷⁷ Rather, putting the Levites in the storyline of Scripture, we can learn a few things to help us understand this challenging passage.

First, “Levitical priesthood” (or Levitical priests) as a technical term is one that first arises in Deuteronomy (17:9, 18; 18:1; 24:8; 27:9; cf. 21:5; 31:9). Prior to Deuteronomy (and afterward) priests and Levites are always divided. While Wellhausen and his children have trained scholarship to see this divide as the product of a post-exilic competition, there is good reason for maintaining this distinction in whole Bible (see Num. 3:1–10; 8:19–22; 18:1–7). Chiefly, we learn that priests are the ones who serve the altar; Levites are the ones who serve the house. Thus, Leviticus focuses on the priestly duty of Aaron’s sons, while Numbers adds the Levites to their ranks for protection of God’s holy dwelling. Finally, Deuteronomy brings the priests and the Levites together to speak of the whole system of mediation. Thus, from this background it seems best to understand the Levitical priesthood here as a reference to the resurrection of the whole system of priestly mediation.

Second, because the Levites were added to priesthood, perhaps even as a replacement of the firstborn sons of Israel (see Num. 3:40–51; cf. Exod. 32:26–29), we ought not to forget that priesthood and sonship correspond, and that sonship is a greater qualifier for priesthood than legal decree. As mentioned earlier, this was something present in the Patriarchs—Abraham and his sons served at God’s altar (e.g., Gen 12:7–9; 13:18; cf. Exod 19:22, 26). Likewise, at Sinai God’s declared that his firstborn son was a royal priesthood. Moreover, there is some argument for seeing Aaron and the priests as God’s adopted sons.⁷⁸ Indeed, even in Hebrews the priesthood of Christ is because of his perfect obedience as God’s son (see Heb. 4:14; 7:28). Therefore, in context I believe sonship is a greater standing for priesthood than being from the lineage of Levi.

Therefore, third, if Christ comes to establish a new covenant, whereby members of the new covenant become sons of God in covenant God, heirs of the kingdom, and servants to the Lord, then it is unlikely that they would not also be priests who receive their priestly status from their covenant relationship with God through Christ. In this way, Jeremiah 33:14–26 would be

⁷⁴ The next verse (31:22) supplies the covenantal tagline: “And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” Likewise, this covenantal phrase is used again in the middle of the new covenant promise in Jeremiah 31:33.

⁷⁵ For those who see the priestly role of this king, see J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 562; John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 280; and Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 514.

⁷⁶ Contra Nicholas Haydock, *Theology of the Levitical Priesthood*.

⁷⁷ See Timothy R. Ashley, “Excursus on the Priests and Levites,” in *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 86–92.

⁷⁸ Leithart, *The Priesthood of the Plebs*, 77, 82.

fulfilled not in a restoration of Levi's house according to the flesh, but rather because the Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, where all members of the covenant community would be priests to one another. In fact, this is exactly what the new covenant promises—a new priesthood based upon an interior righteousness and covenantal knowledge.

After the covenant with Levi is established in Numbers 25, the primary teachers and promoters of covenantal knowledge were the Levitical priests (see Mal. 2:6). Yet, because of their weakness they often failed to bring blessing to Israel because of their sin. Accordingly, for God's people to enjoy God's blessing and to be a kingdom of priests, they needed a new priest who would transfer to them a true knowledge of the covenant. Amazingly, this is what Jeremiah 31:33–34 promises:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Indeed, the new covenant confers a priestly status upon God's people, such that those who are in Christ can instruct one another with the law written on their heart (cf. Mal. 3:1–4). Strikingly, this is an idea picked up in Romans 15:14, where Paul says, "I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and *able to instruct one another*." Interestingly, this verse comes right before Paul's mention of his priestly ministry (15:16) and in a context with other temple imagery (15:20).⁷⁹ Falling in line with Paul's temple theology, this passage is suggestive of the Levitical identity that is promised to God's people when the new covenant comes. Therefore, in reading Jeremiah 33 in conjunction with the New Testament, we have good reason to see how Paul presenting the members of the church as priests who are to instruct one another with the gospel.⁸⁰

Altogether, if this reading of Jeremiah is remotely correct, it means the New Testament does not just have a few passages about the priesthood, but that the whole New Testament envisions the church as new covenant priests.⁸¹ Indeed, the book of Hebrews is not the only place where priesthood is central in the New Testament. Rather, it is fundamental to our understanding of Jesus as Messiah; it is definitional for who the church is; and as I have sought to argue here—the priestly identity of the church is derivative of the new covenant work of Jesus Christ.

Old Testament Texts Fulfilled

Moving from Old Testament to New, we can also see that in the places where the saints are called priests, it is not simply because the new covenant impersonally enables the church to enjoy the fulfillment of Exodus 19:6. Instead, the covenant title of "royal priesthood" is applied

⁷⁹Cf. Mark Seifrid, "Romans," 691.

⁸⁰Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 230–31. In another insightful section of his work (ibid., 43–45), Voss argues Romans 12:1–8 can also be understood as instructions to new covenant priests.

⁸¹This is the burden of Voss's argument. See esp. Voss, *The Priesthood of Believers*, 27–50.

to the church, because the Jews and Gentiles are united to Christ as one new covenant people (cf. Eph. 2:11–22). Thus, Christ’s priesthood is what personally enables their priesthood. While this idea is questioned by Malone, here are three passages where we can see the relationship between Christ’s priesthood and the church’s priesthood.

1 Peter 2:9–10. Applying the words of Exodus 19:6 to the church Peter says in 1 Peter 2:5, 9:

You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

These verses are striking for the way they apply old covenant nomenclature to a multi-ethnic church (1 Pet. 1:1). Clearly, the Law forbid old covenant priests from touch anything impure. And under the old covenant, Gentiles were considered impure. Ezekiel even condemned the priests for letting foreigners enter the sanctuary (44:6–7). Yet, now under the new covenant, the house of God is composed of men and women united to the cornerstone by purifying faith (1 Pet. 1:22). The only answer to how this is possible is that the old covenant has ended, the new covenant has come, and that Christ has inaugurated a new priesthood with a new temple.

In fact, this appears to be Peter’s argument. After describing the redeeming blood of Christ in 1 Peter 1:18, he states that the people’s faith purified their hearts (v. 22). Thus, now with pure hearts, he calls them to love one another (v. 23). Next, he urges their holiness (2:1–3), before reminding the elect exiles of their status as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood (v. 5), a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (v. 9). Incredibly, he assigns to people born again by the power of God (1:23) a priestly status (2:4–10).

From all of these textual clues, I take Peter to be saying, because of Christ—his sacrifice (1:18–20), his resurrection which brings the new birth (1:5, 23), and his new covenant purification of the sinner’s heart (1:23)—the church is a new covenant priesthood and spiritual temple. Again someone might respond that Jesus is not called a priest in these texts, and therefore, this is no priestly connection between Jesus and his people, but such a reading fails to consider how his sacrifice, his purifying work, and his new covenant are all priestly achievements. In fact, from a wider reading of the canon, we can see a number of ways that Peter’s application of Exodus 19:6 requires the mediating work of Christ.

First, Malone’s reading is unpersuasive because of its myopic focus on the priesthood. Speaking of eschatological fulfillment of all the old covenant promises in Christ and his church, Beale argues forcefully for the way “resurrection, new creation, temple, and kingship are inextricably linked and are facets of one another.”⁸² Indeed, priesthood is of a piece with all these covenantal realities, and thus if Christ is the agent and/or instrument of the new covenant, it must include all aspects of the eschaton—which again stresses the centrality of union with Christ.

⁸² Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 741–42. Importantly, it is in the context of the royal priesthood in 1 Peter 2:9–10, that Beale makes this statement.

Second, in Exodus the priesthood of Aaron is created and saved by Moses. Though Moses is never called a priest in any of his five books, his priestly ministry is undeniable.⁸³ As a son of Levi, he leads the nation to offer the Passover. At Sinai, he oversees the covenant sacrifice. He is the mediator who stands between God and man, and he is the one who makes Aaron a priest. Moreover, he—not Aaron—is the one who intercedes for Israel when Aaron fails in his priestly duties and the covenant is in peril. In all these ways, Moses is a greater priest than Aaron. And so is Jesus. Even when the title priest is not applied to him, his entire ministry is filled with priestly duties, and more than that—his priestly identity is confirmed in the saints who bear his mark.

In other words, if Peter describes the church as a royal priesthood, it is because the glory of Christ's priesthood now reflects in the sons and daughters who bear his image. Indeed, in passages like Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6 which apply Exodus 19:6 to the church, it is because the church bears the royal priestly imprint of their Lord. To put it negatively, the priesthood of the believer is not because the duties of Levi have somehow continued into the present. Jesus did not come to rehabilitate the house of Levi; he came to make all things new, including a new Levitical priesthood. Therefore, the application of royal priesthood to the new covenant church is a direct result of Christ's priesthood.

Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6. The book of Revelation also applies the language of Exodus 19:6 to the church, and in each case it comes by way of Christ. For instance, to select one passage from the three, Revelation 5:9–10 explains that the blood of Christ is what created a kingdom of priests (“you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God”). This passage does not call Christ a priest, but as many have observed, there are multiple reasons for seeing Christ as a priest in Revelation.⁸⁴ Even Malone concedes the high priestly presentation of Christ in Revelation, but he quickly adds “this high-priestly motif” is present in Revelation but without any “overt development or application.”⁸⁵

In contrast to Malone's denial of application, however, I believe Revelation 5:9–10 makes a strong application. It teaches us how the sacrifice of Christ created (and is now creating) a kingdom of priests, and, in the context of worship, the development of the high priesthood of Christ is found in the way priests in God's kingdom praise the lamb who was slain and join him in service to God. Just as the Lord tends the lampstands in the house of the Lord, so now the royal priests join him in temple service.⁸⁶

Hebrews. The final place to consider the union between Christ's priesthood and believer's priesthood is Hebrews. In *God's Mediators* Andrew Malone spends ten pages explaining why this priestly epistle *does not* teach the priesthood of believers. Engaging with John Scholer, he makes the case that the cultic language of the book is not determinative for the identification of the audience as a priestly people. Investing great meaning in the words “draw

⁸³ It is also textually supported by Psalm 99:6: “Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the LORD, and he answered them. In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them; they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them.”

⁸⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 89.

⁸⁵ Malone, *God's Mediators*, 117.

⁸⁶ See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 208–09.

near” (*proserchesthai*) and “enter” (*eiserchesthai*), Scholer argues that the book presents two kinds of priesthood—those on earth are encouraged to “draw near,” while those in heaven have already “entered” into the presence of God.⁸⁷ From his reading of these terms he concludes, “the readers are characterized as ‘priests,’ as indicated by the cultic verbs describing their priestly access to God and by the sacral activity still attributed to them: sacrifices of praise and acceptable worship (Heb. 12:28; 13:15).”⁸⁸

I agree with Malone’s assessment that such a reading, one which depends entirely on the definitions of technical terms, is tenuous for making a theological interpretation. That said, there are numerous other reasons for understanding Hebrews as conjoining Christ’s high priesthood to that of his priestly people.⁸⁹ Unlike Malone who believes that the invitation to draw near is equally plausible for worshipers, and not just priests, I believe there are multiple reasons in the text of Hebrews for deciding that the people in Hebrews are indeed portrayed as new covenant priests because of their union with Christ, who in Hebrews is unmistakably a high priest.

First, the book begins with an introduction to the Son as being greater than the Prophets. Significantly, Hebrews 1:1 also identifies the audience as “sons” when it speaks of “our fathers.” Through the book, this emphasis on sonship continues. Christ is regularly called the Son (1:1, 5, 13; 4:14; 5:5; 6:6; 7:3, 28) and his followers are given various familial names (see 2:10–18), which culminate in Hebrews 12:3–18 with instruction for understanding discipline as God’s love for his sons.

The primacy of sonship is important for priesthood because of the way sonship informed priesthood prior to the giving of the Law (and after the law as well). As noted previously in the typology from Sinai, the firstborn son Israel (Exod. 4:22–23) was called a kingdom of priests (19:6) when God entered into covenant with Israel. This conjoining of priesthood and sonship was not new to Israel, as previously in Israel’s history the firstborn sons of Abraham served as priests. For instance, in Genesis it was firstborn sons who served at the altar (12:7–9; 13:18), and as many scholars have observed priesthood was given to sons in the period before Sinai.⁹⁰ Accordingly, as Hebrews presents a new covenant that is going to both supersede Sinai and restore Eden, where Adam was a priest-son-king, it is fitting that Hebrews dwells heavily on sonship. Moreover, when those in union with Christ are called “sons,” “brothers,” and even “holy brothers” (3:1), there is strong evidence to see them as priests also.

Second, Christ and his people have “one source” (*ek henos*, 2:11). In other words, participation in Christ means participation in his priesthood. While Scholer makes the case for priesthood based on the verbs “draw near” and “enter,” the stronger argument for priesthood comes in the people’s union with Christ and his priesthood. For instance,

⁸⁷ Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 204–05.

⁸⁹ Others who see priesthood of the believers in Hebrews include Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 39; and Richard D. Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 150–53.

⁹⁰ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 136–42; Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 9; David Schrock, “Restoring the Image of God,” esp. 39–41.

- Hebrews 2:11 speaks of Christ and his family members (e.g., sons, children, brothers) sharing the same source (“from one,” *ek henos*).
- Hebrews 2:14 explains the reason why the Son took on flesh and blood: it was to become like his brothers; so they could become like him (2:10).
- Hebrews 3:1 speaks of the church as “holy brothers.” Few descriptors would be better associated with the sons of Aaron and Levi than the term “holy brothers.”
- Hebrews 3:6 speaks of Christ being over the house, and the house is the people who are in Christ. Once again, the participatory language unites Christ to his temple-people.
- Hebrews 3:14 speaks again of the “share” that Christ’s people have with him. The theme of participation runs through Hebrews (see 1:9; 3:14; 6:4; 12:8), and culminates in a command to imitate Christ (Heb. 12:1–2) by means of the faith which believers share with Christ.⁹¹

From these examples, the idea of covenant union and participation in Christ is unmistakable. Malone wants to argue that such participation only implies common worship and access, but not priesthood.⁹² However, this misses two crucial pieces.

First, in Israel location determines priesthood. On Sinai, the priests were given access to come up the mountain and enjoy a covenant meal. Likewise, in the Law Aaron and his sons were brought near (Exod. 28:1), permitted to serve in the holy place, and given the holy bread to eat. Accordingly, the layers of holiness built into the temple defined one’s identity. The high priest could enter the holy of holies (once a year); the priests could serve at the altar of incense (Exod. 31:1–10); the Levites were invited to assist their brothers in guarding the house (Num. 3:6–10; 18:1–7), but could not approach the altar (as Korah learned). Going one step further away from the house of God, the nation could approach the courtyard to offer sacrifices, but not without a priest. To anyone familiar with the sacred space of the temple, the call to draw near with boldness (4:15) and enter the holy places with confidence (10:21) requires that they understand priesthood has been granted to them.⁹³

Second, in Israel the priest was never alone. On his vestments, he bore the names of his people, and in his ministry he was surrounded by his Levitical brothers (Num. 18:2, 4).⁹⁴ In other words, to paraphrase John Maxwell’s leadership cliché: “A leader is someone who has followers.” And in the case of the priest, he too has followers. In fact, it is definitional for a priest to have a covenant people (see Heb. 5:1), and the first followers are the ones who are his

⁹¹ Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, 182–87, notes the significance participation (*metoxoi*) in Hebrews and how even the call to imitate Christ is an outworking of participation and union with Christ—the faith we exercise in God comes from the high priest in whom we are united (187).

⁹² Malone, *God’s Mediators*, 169, 172.

⁹³ On the “graded” holiness of the temple personnel, see Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 119–35.

⁹⁴ Perhaps one of the reasons Malone doesn’t capture the relationship between high priests and his brothers correctly is due to his dismissal of the Levites (see Malone, *God’s Mediators*, 44n33): “The Levites are not particularly crucial to our study.” In contradistinction from Malone, a proper understanding of high priest and Levites is necessary for understanding the system of mediation under the old covenant. Likewise, under the new covenant when the Levitical priesthood is given to the church (see Isa. 66:21; Jer. 33:14–26) a proper understanding of priest and Levite is necessary.

fellow priests. Because Christ is presented as high priest in Hebrews (2:17; 3:1; 4:14; etc.), it demands (if the patterns of the Old Testament mean anything) that he has a family of priests serving with him. There is plenty of evidence for this in Hebrews, including the specific language of leadership. So, in combination with the ideas of sonship and participation in Hebrews, the presentation of Jesus as the founder of salvation (2:10), the high priest and ruler over his house (3:6); a forerunner behind the veil (6:20); and the author and perfecter of faith (12:2) all argue that Christ is bringing his people into the holy of holies as fellow priests.

In all of these passages, Christ is never alone (cf. 5:1; 7:20), rather he is with his brothers, who are the children of God, and he is leading them into God's presence by means of his own priestly ministry (10:19–24). In short, the very nature of his ministry is one that is conferring his sonship, his kingdom, and his priesthood on his people.

If one still objects that this conclusion is implicit in Hebrews and not explicit, I would close with this observation: the book of Hebrews begins with Christ presented as a son-priest-king in Hebrews 1:1–4 and it closes by applying those same three identifications to the followers of Christ. Because of all Christ has done in his priestly service, he has made his people sons (12:3–18), heirs of the kingdom (12:19–29), and priests worshiping in the presence of God (13:1–19).⁹⁵ In other words, the same identity Jesus is given throughout Hebrews is now passed on to those who are *in Christ*.

If we take seriously the doctrine of union in Christ, this should not surprise us. We should expect it! Yet, it is easy to miss this transfer of covenantal identity and blessing if we are restricting our focus to key words or limiting our exegesis to propositions that ignore the canonical encyclopedia of priestly images, duties, and distinctions. Conversely, if we read Hebrews in its entirety and let the final closing exhortations have its full say, we find that the closing imperatives are addressed to a family of royal priests, who have been given access to the throne of grace because of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In this way, we can see how the commands to imitate him are a call not to abstract faithfulness and endurance, because of his priestly ministry. Rather, in keeping with the priestly focus of this book, the author is calling us to be a family of royal priests who in union with Christ are worshiping at God's throne, serving in God's house, walking in God's holiness, and witnessing to the glories of his grace. In this way, the new covenant has done more than restore the Levitical priesthood of the old covenant, it has created a new people who are priests in the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

A Covenantal Conclusion: Christ's New Covenant Creates a New Priesthood

From all we have seen, it is impossible to think of a high priest without a people. As Cyril Eastwood put it in his magisterial study on the priesthood of believers, "As the Body of which Christ was [and is] the Head, the Church naturally share[s] in the priestly character of Christ."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Evidences of priesthood in Hebrews 13 include eating from the altar (v. 10), bearing scorn with Christ (vv. 12–13), offering a sacrifice of praise (v. 15), doing good which is a sacrifice pleasing to God (v. 16), and praying for one another (v. 18). The language of v. 15, "the fruit of lips (*cheileōn*) that acknowledge his name" may also harken back to Malachi 2:6–7 (LXX), which also employs lip-language to describe the priests duties of confessing truth.

⁹⁶Cyril Eastwood, *The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful*, 32.

And thus when we think in terms of covenantal realities, it is vital to understand how Jesus Christ brought forward this priestly blessing through his own priestly mediation of the new covenant.

Indeed, under the Law, God formed a corporate priesthood at many levels—God’s kingdom of priests included the house of Aaron, the house of Levi, and the house of Israel. Yet, this corporate priesthood always came into being through the work of a high priest. Now, in the new covenant, Christ has made a priestly people in a similar but far greater way. And while the old covenant suffered all kinds of divisions (just think of the various regions of the tabernacle), now the priest is one with his people, and he has conferred upon us the status of sonship, heirs, and priests. In fact, there is no longer any division between Levites and people, for in Christ, all have access to God’s throne and thus all his people are new covenant Levites.

In Christ, there is no longer any divide between those who worship and serve in God’s house and the ones who make up the house. Under the old covenant, the priests could defile the house and be removed from the house. But now the priests *are* the house and the house *is* the priesthood. Created by Christ’s priestly sacrifice and the gift of the Holy Spirit, when Christ sat down at God’s right hand, he now shares with us the status of royal priests in his family of faith.

Andrew Malone has noted many of these pieces in his book, and he has helpfully brought them to our attention. Yet, a significant covenantal divide remains in his presentation between high priest and priesthood of believers, one that the new covenant has gloriously eradicated. Accordingly, Malone does not center the work of Christ in his formation of a new kingdom of priests, and thus he misses the way in which new covenant blessings are mediated to the church through and by and *in Christ*.

In Christ we have been given every spiritual blessing, and this includes the gift of the priesthood. Therefore, we should see in Hebrews and the rest of Scripture how Christ’s priestly work created a family of royal priests who find their life and ministry in him. Theologically, exegetically, and covenantally, this is the conclusion I believe Scripture leads us to and therefore we should not hold asunder what Christ has joined together. For as it goes with the priest, so it goes with his priestly people.