



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

GOD'S EXIT PLAN • JESUS AS OUR HIGH PRIEST •

EXODUS 28:1-5 / HEBREWS 7:23-28 / 1 PETER 2:4-10 • 5/4/2025

MAIN POINT

God has called all Christ followers to join Jesus in His priestly ministry, ridding themselves of those attitudes and behaviors that splinter unity and exercising their priesthood through unified community.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What comes to mind when you hear or think of a priest or priesthood? Is it positive or negative? Why?

What is the role or function of the priesthood?

Is the role of the priest still valid today? Explain.

Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the grave satisfied once and for all the Old Testament sacrificial system and put an end to the need for a priesthood to carry out the rituals associated with that system. However, Jesus' death and resurrection did not relegate the priesthood to the trash heap, but instead revitalized it along a different path. The Book of Hebrews repeatedly refers to Jesus as our priest or high priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5-6,10; 7:16-17, 21,26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21). The apostle Paul identified himself as a priest (Rom. 15:15-16) and Peter proclaimed that all believers serve as a priesthood of God (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ EXODUS 28:1-5

How do the garments reflect the divine glory and splendor intended for Aaron and his sons?

What is the symbolic significance of the twelve stones on the breastpiece?

How does the craftsmanship involved in creating the garments speak to the value and respect given to the priestly office?

What can this passage teach us about the seriousness with which we should approach our service to God?

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ HEBREWS 7:23-28.

How does Jesus compare with Levitical priests? Why is this significant?

How would you describe the limits faced by a Jewish priest? How does each limit point to the need for a better priest?

Levitical priests interceded with God on behalf of people. They were human, so they died and were replaced by another human priest. Sometimes the successor priests were not qualified. Unlike the Levitical priests, Jesus' priesthood is eternal. Even death did not interrupt Jesus' priesthood. He continues to live forever after His resurrection.

How does culture's impermanence shape our understanding of Jesus' permanent priesthood?

What does it mean to you that in Christ you can draw near to God at any time and any place? In practical terms, what are some ways that a believer can come into God's presence?

When you depend on someone to help you, what qualities do you want that person to have? How does this passage speak to those qualifications that we find in Jesus?

Qualifications and a proven track record of reliability are essential. You depend on someone who not only has the necessary skill set, but who can be counted on when needed. Jesus is qualified to save people because of His relationship with God the Father. In addition to being able to save, Jesus is reliable. Since He is eternal, He continues to have the ability to save those who express faith in Him.

Jesus is “holy, innocent, undefiled” (v. 26). These words apply to Jesus’ personal traits. Jesus is “separated from sinners” and “exalted above the heavens” (v. 26). These phrases describe how He is set apart from humans.

According to this passage, what makes Jesus the only perfect Priest? How does this help you have confidence in Him?

How does knowing that Jesus is interceding for you right now encourage you to endure in your faith, love, and worship of Him?

Because Christ was sinless, He did not need to offer a sacrifice for Himself. This contrasts with earthly priests, who offered animal sacrifices for themselves as well as the people. Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus is uniquely qualified as High Priest because He lived on earth yet remained sinless. He did not first become perfect and then become High Priest. He was perfect from the beginning.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 PETER 2:4-10.

Look at Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16. Why do you think Peter drew so heavily from the Old Testament at this point?

What do these Old Testament passages tell us about our calling as priests?

Notice the order Peter followed in these verses. In verse 4, he spoke of believers coming “to him, a living stone.” With those words, Peter both looked back to “the Lord” in verse 3 and forward to describing Him as “rejected by people but chosen and honored by God,” a clear reference to Jesus Christ. Once “you come to him,” then you begin to become like Him, as indicated in verse 5. That is, those who come to the “living stone” (singular) become “living stones” (plural) themselves.

Those who come to Jesus, the High Priest of Christianity, are themselves “being built to be a holy priesthood.” Coming to the High Priest who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice results in His followers likewise starting “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (see Rom. 12:1). One does not come to the “great high priest” (Heb. 4:14) without likewise being called to join Him in His priestly ministry.

The call to priestly service is indeed a call to sacrifice, but not to spiritual deprivation. Look again at verse 9 and all the compelling descriptions Peter heaped up in expressing the status of those called by God. How might those

descriptions have impacted the original, persecuted recipients of Peter's letter? How can they impact you today?

According to Peter, why has God made His people to be priests and given them the exalted status that He has?

While verse 10 culminates this section, it also circles back to the opening of the section—verse 1. What connection do you see between verses 1 and 10?

What does it mean to be “God’s people”? To “have received mercy”?

When Peter said his readers “once...were not a people,” he certainly was not implying that they had not been human or that they had no common characteristics. In the first verse of his letter, Peter had identified his recipients as being in several distinct regions of Asia Minor (see 1:1). Regional distinctions and rivalries no doubt came into play between the various groups of people. Quite likely, those things they were to “rid” themselves of in 1 Peter 2:1 had separated them as part of their geographic distinctions. No group can be “a people” when shredded and torn apart by the attitudes and actions Peter had earlier addressed.

But having rid themselves of their past rejection of Jesus, as well as the dividing wedges of 1:1, they had now become “God’s people,” a community united by common submission to the single High Priest, Jesus. Likewise, at one point they “had not received mercy” (nor shown it, likely) because they were outside of “God’s people.” But with their conversion and acceptance into the people of God and the corresponding priesthood of Christ, Peter could say, “Now you have received mercy,” as well as begun to show it in priestly fashion.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can you make a special effort each day this next week to draw near to God?

Does a sense of community and unity, or lack thereof, make it easier or more difficult for you to carry out your priestly calling? Explain. What can you do to facilitate a stronger sense of unity and priestly effectiveness?

Who can you intercede for on a daily basis this week?

How can you honor Christ as your high priest in your prayer throughout the coming week?

PRAYER

As you pray, thank God that Jesus, even now, is interceding for you. Ask God to help each participant in your group adopt the attitude and behavior of a priest. Thank Him for His graciousness in calling all believers to join in the priestly ministry of Jesus.

COMMENTARY

| EXODUS 28:1-5

1. God was the one who chose Aaron and his sons to be priests. They did not appoint themselves to this position. However, they seemed to willingly accept the task God had given them to do. God has different tasks for different people. Whatever task He gives to us, we should do it faithfully.
2. Moses groups Nadab and Abihu into one group and Aaron's other two sons into another group, probably because Nadab and Abihu would later rebel against the Lord and be executed by Him.
3. Verse 3 makes it clear the skillful workers received their skill and wisdom directly from God. There was no room for becoming prideful or praising themselves for their successes. Why were they skillful, but their neighbors, brothers, or friends weren't? They were skillful because God saw fit to give them these talents. And He gave them these talents so that they could complete this special task that He gave to them. Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 1:17, Matthew 25:15, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Ecc 5:19, Deuteronomy 8:17-18. He didn't give everybody the same skills. Even of the ones God did give special skills to, some He made good smiths, some good carpenters, some good weavers, etc. In a similar way, in the church, God gives each of us different gifts, abilities, and talents. Each is to use his own talents for the good of the body and for the glory of the Lord. We are to be grateful for the gifts God has given us without any bragging or pride. Even in secular areas, our skills as good typists, writers, painters, programmers, doctors, etc. are given by God. Remember to thank God for them. Remember to use what you have for others, and not for yourselves. See also chapter 31.
4. These were called "holy garments" (verse 4). They were beautiful and expensive to remind the people of the important role the priests had as representatives of God to the

people. It also served to remind the priests of their important work and ministry to God. Their clothes were very formal and discouraged them from having a casual attitude towards their work and towards the Lord. At times the ephod itself became a snare to the people who became enthralled with its beauty (in the time of Gideon).

5. Each of the 12 tribes of Israel was to be inscribed on the stones and put on the breastplate over Aaron's heart as well as future high priests. Why? This would remind the high priest that he was a servant of the people. It would remind him to intercede for the people, lead a good example, and teach the people what was right. It would help the high priest to keep focused on why he was there and what his purpose was. It's like a pilot that keeps photos of his family in the cockpit of his plane so that he will remember what he is protecting every time he flies a mission, or a doctor that keeps photos of the patients he has helped on his wall to remember his motivation for getting up and heading to the surgery department every morning. Because there weren't photos at that time, instead their names were inscribed in a rock close to his heart. Unfortunately sometimes priests got a big head because of their high position. They fell in love with their power and abused it (such as Annanias and Caiaphas.) At times the priests abused their position in order to profit personally, like the sons of Eli (you can see God's view of their behavior since God punished them by death). Unfortunately there have been times in the history of the church, where church leaders have fallen into this same trap. What is the cause? It would do us well too, if we are teachers, or leaders or do any kind of ministry to always remember why we started off doing this thing and our real purpose. Our purpose is to help build the church and to help others, to strengthen and encourage. Never became prideful or consider that the people "under" you are there to give you power, money or position. We would do well to remember Jesus' instructions on correct leadership. What were they? He always espouses and demonstrated servant leadership.

| HEBREWS 7:23-28

7:23. Throughout Israel's history, there were "many priests" from the Levitical line who served God. That priesthood began when the Lord God instructed Moses at Mount Sinai to set apart Aaron (Moses' brother) and his four sons to serve as priests (see Ex. 28:1). Moses and Aaron were of the tribe of Levi (see Ex. 2:1-2,10; 4:14; 6:16-20). By the time the Israelites were ready to leave Mount Sinai for the promised land, the number of Levites between ages 30 to 50 who were qualified to serve in and transport the tabernacle numbered 8,580 (see Num. 4:46-49).

Another numbering of Israelite priests in Old Testament times can be found in the Book of Ezra. Thousands of priests, Levites, and other temple servants were among the more than 40,000 Jews returning from exile to the promised land (see Ezra 2:1-67). New Testament scholars estimate that around 18,000 priests were available to serve at the temple in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' birth (see Luke 1:8-9 and commentaries on those verses).

Some believers who come to this text may wonder why God ever gave priests to His people. Simply put, the reason is because God is holy and people are sinful. God established the Levitical priesthood for the Israelites as an act of mercy. Likewise, God demonstrated divine mercy when He allowed the Israelites to build a tabernacle (and later a temple) to worship Him. And when He allowed the Israelite high priest to enter the holy of holies once a year to make a sin offering on behalf of all the people.

If God in mercy had not made these provisions for sinful people in Old Testament times, they would never have been able to know Him or learn His ways. If any of the people—priests included—ever tried to encounter God's presence improperly, His awesome holiness would overwhelm and destroy them (see Lev. 10:1-3). Thus God's merciful gift of the Levitical priesthood provided a go-between for sinful people to approach, petition, and learn from the Holy God of Israel.

The Levitical priesthood, while a demonstration of God's mercy, was nevertheless comprised of priests who, like the people they represented, were sinners. Moreover, their lives and their service were limited in scope. Sooner or later, every Israelite priest was removed from the priesthood by his death. As helpful as the priests' ministry was under the old covenant, the priests simply could not provide what the people most needed.

All of us as sinners desperately need forgiveness and cleansing—a new start and a new heart. The priesthood and sacrifices in Old Testament times could never provide this. Instead, they simply foreshadowed and prepared the way for the Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, and His once-for-all atoning sacrifice. Without a Great High Priest, we could never hope to draw near to God and find everlasting grace, mercy, and help. Yet now, in the new covenant, believers are summoned to do so confidently and without fear (see Heb. 4:14-16). We can do so because of the One who is always there to intercede for us, the Son of God and our eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ.

7:24. Jesus' priestly ministry is superior to the Levitical priesthood in that Jesus has a permanent priesthood. He will remain in this ministry forever, because He in fact lives forever and ever. He is our Eternal High Priest.

While there were many priests under the old covenant, there is only one Great High Priest. All of the priests under the old covenant eventually died. One after another, year after year, more and more priests ministered imperfectly, yet in obedience to the Lord. They offered the daily sacrifices, replenished the holy bread, and sacrificed countless animals as a way to show that sin brings death. The ministry of the Old Testament priests never ended. Their never-ending ministry showed there was a need for something greater, something final, that would provide full and final atonement for the sins of God's people.

Because Jesus is eternal, His priesthood and ministry are eternal. Therefore, there never needs to be another one! The many Levitical priests all died, while Christ lives forever. He continues forever, and holds His priesthood permanently, which is exactly what God promised on oath in Psalm 110:4 (see Heb. 7:20-21).

7:25. Jesus saves. Believers know and love this truth. We have trusted in Him for our salvation. But do you understand that salvation cannot be revoked? That it cannot be lost? This truth is helpful to emphasize at this point, given the warning that the writer of Hebrews gave in 6:4-6. Some believers live with a certain fear that they might not be able to sustain their salvation. And the truth is, they can't! But salvation's permanence isn't up to us as believers. It's up to God. Jesus' permanent priesthood therefore guarantees that genuine believers will never lose their salvation.

Verse 25 is the writer's conclusion (therefore) based on verses 23-24. Since Christ is forever our High Priest, the writer concludes that He is always able to save those who come to God through him. He's forever able to save us. He is able to save us completely. He is able to save us to the uttermost. That is His guarantee as believers' Great High Priest.

Furthermore, when the Scripture says that Christ is "able to save," it means that He does save! There is no possibility that He would be unable to do so. The reason no genuine child of God can be lost rests squarely on the certainty that Jesus is always interceding for us. He is in the presence of God right now, advocating for and speaking to the Father about every single believer who has ever lived (see Rom. 8:34-39).

God is even more committed to our endurance and assurance than we often are, to the extent that He has given His Son to be our Atoning Sacrifice and Great High Priest. This is such a cause for worship and thankfulness! The Lord deserves our worship and allegiance for the pardon of all of our transgressions. Jesus paid it all. He has given us forgiveness of sin and peace that endures forever.

The God who calls us into salvation is the God who keeps us saved (see Phil. 1:6). The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we as believers are indeed God's children (see Rom 8:16). There is such peace in knowing that our High Priest will never cease to minister for us and advocate on our behalf. Therefore, one of the most comforting implications of Jesus' eternal priesthood is that we are forever secure in Christ.

7:26-27. First, Jesus is holy—He never sinned and is without fault, though He bore the curse for our sins (see Gal. 3:10-14). Since He is holy, He has permanent access in the heavenly sanctuary of God. Second, He is innocent. That is, He is innocent of the sins that He bore, and in that regard is separate from sinners. Nevertheless, He continually intercedes for believers. Third, He is undefiled. There is no moral blemish in Him that would disqualify Him from this ongoing ministry of intercession. He is perfect.

Because He is sinless, Jesus never has to offer a sin sacrifice for Himself. By contrast, the Levitical high priest was required to do so (see Lev. 16:1-6). Jesus offered an atonement sacrifice for sinners. He did this once and for all—one sacrifice for all time—when He willingly went to the cross (see Heb 12:2).

7:28. Chapter 7 concludes with a final contrast between the old and new priesthoods. The contrast in verse 28 is between how the law appoints priests (only from the tribe of Levi) and the word of God's oath, which appointed Christ (see Ps. 110:4). In Christ, the new priesthood eliminated the need for the old priesthood, since Jesus' priesthood fulfills the old. Nothing can be added to His sacrifice. Nothing needs to be added.

| 1 PETER 2:1-10

2:1. "Rid" carries the idea of taking off a suit of clothes. Previously, as pagans, these Christians had clothed themselves with all manner of wickedness—deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. They were to remove and throw away such clothing. These words concern believers' relationships with one another and with the world. Believers are not to deceive others. Deceit includes all hypocrisy—pretending something other than the truth. Neither are believers to envy others. Envy reveals a failure to rejoice in God's gifts to us and to live in gratitude for His generosity. Slander means "speaking against" others in rumors, false accusations, gossip, or harsh criticism. All such speech violates the command to love that Peter had mentioned a few sentences earlier (1 Pet. 1:22).

2:2. The apostle resumed his earlier analogy of the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23) and compared the readers to newborn infants. This does not necessarily imply they were recent converts or spiritually immature. Peter's emphasis here was on the natural craving of an infant for its mother's milk, not on the readers' spiritual condition. Desire means "to crave." They were to desire God's milk with the kind of craving an infant has for its mother's milk. Peter called this milk unadulterated, meaning "pure"; it is devoid of impurities or anything to dilute it. Furthermore, it is spiritual, as opposed to the physical milk a baby seeks. Obviously Bible study is one source of this milk. The apostle then spelled out the reason for drinking deeply of this milk: that you may grow by it in your salvation. The new birth is only the beginning of our salvation. We must not stop there, as if receiving salvation is all there is. We must continue to grow in that salvation; and we mature only by drinking of the unadulterated spiritual milk that alone produces spiritual growth and maturity.

2:3. Peter then arrived at the point that enables us to understand the nature of this spiritual milk. In saying they had tasted that the Lord is good, Peter implied these Asian Christians should continue to drink what they already tasted. In other words, the spiritual milk they needed centered in Christ Himself. The apostle likely took this idea from Psalm 34:8, which refers to tasting the Lord to see that He, the God of Israel, is good. In applying this verse to our Lord, Peter implied Jesus' Deity in the strongest way possible. To grow in your Christian life, you absolutely must remain in constant, daily fellowship with Jesus Christ. Daily immersion of yourself in God's Word is a valuable discipline in drawing you close to your Savior. Periods of deep, concentrated prayer unite your heart with the living Lord. Periods of meditation on God's Word or listening to what your Lord has to say molds you in His image.

2:4. Many years earlier, Jesus had given Simon the nickname "Rock" (petros in Greek, from which the name Peter comes). Here the apostle nicknamed "Rock" described Jesus as a living stone. (See Psalm 118:22, which refers to the cornerstone that the builders rejected, and also see Peter's use of this psalm in v. 7.) The world at large had rejected Jesus, but God had chosen Him and declared Him valuable. Jesus is the chosen One, and we are chosen because we are in Him. Our entire identity is wrapped up in Him.

2:5. Because of our relation to the resurrected and living Lord, we too can be called living stones (but not in the same sense as Jesus). Just as stones were used to build the temple of God in Jerusalem, so we are being built into a spiritual house, a temple, to God. God now dwells in His people, not in a building (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). Then Peter changed to another word picture and described believers as priests who offer spiritual sacrifices. Under the old covenant the priests of Israel sacrificed bulls and goats in the temple. As

Christians, we are priests of the new covenant who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. These sacrifices are truly acceptable to God, because they are offered through Jesus Christ. Peter specified the nature of these spiritual gifts in verse 9.

2:6. Peter then cited a series of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures on which he based his comments. "It stands" in Scripture is a solemn formula for citing quotations from Scripture as the Word of God. Peter first quoted Isaiah 28:16 as it appears in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Septuagint was the Bible of many in the early church, particularly those who spoke or read Greek. Isaiah had condemned Israel for rejecting the Lord's message and for relying on pagan nations for their support. Through Isaiah, God told Israel He was laying the true foundation stone on which His people were to be built. A cornerstone was the great stone lying at the corner of a building uniting one wall to another. This foundational cornerstone supports everything else and ties it all together. The cornerstone God was laying in Zion was either God Himself or the Messiah. Thus whoever believes in Him will never be put to shame. Those trusting in Jesus never have to worry about whether He will disappoint them. God made that clear to Isaiah, to Israel, and to us.

2:7. Peter pointed out a great difference between those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and those who do not. God gives honor to those who believe. The unbelieving, on the other hand, will be disconcerted to discover that the stone they rejected . . . has become the cornerstone. Here Peter quoted Psalm 118:22. This verse could describe an event in the construction of the temple or perhaps it was a proverbial saying from that period. "Cornerstone" here may mean either a foundational cornerstone as in Isaiah 28:16 or the topmost capstone. Though rejected by the leaders of Israel and Rome, Jesus was the most important stone of the true temple, the people of God.

2:8. Peter next quoted Isaiah 8:14. In this verse, Isaiah said God should be a rock of sanctuary to His people. Instead, they failed to obey God, and they stumbled over Him as they would a huge rock placed in their paths. In a similar manner, Jesus the Messiah is a sanctuary to believers, but the One over whom unbelievers stumble. The statement "they were destined for this" expresses God's sovereignty, but it does not mean unbelievers have no responsibility for disobeying the message. They reject Jesus as Savior and suffer the consequences.

2:9. Peter then identified implications of the new identity that Christians have and are to understand. As Israel was God's chosen people, believers are a chosen race. We are also a royal priesthood, belonging both to the family of the King and to the priestly family. We

are a holy nation, a people for His possession, as Israel had been. Our purpose as the people of God and as priests is to proclaim the praises of God. Here we learn the nature of the spiritual sacrifices of this new priesthood—praising God. Hebrews 13:15 refers to “a sacrifice of praise.” Romans 12:1 speaks of the spiritual worship of offering our “bodies as a living sacrifice” to God. Although Peter did not name the sacrifice of our bodies here, the entire passage implies it. Such a sacrifice of praise is merited by the nature of what God has done for us in Christ. He has called us out of the darkness of our world into His marvelous light in Christ.

2:10. Peter then applied Hosea 2:23 to these largely Gentile congregations. Once they did not belong to God’s people Israel, but then they became part of God’s people, the church. Formerly they knew nothing of God’s mercy to Israel, but then they received mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. Many believers have a faulty sense of identity as Christians. They may see themselves only as church members or as possessing a certainty of a home in heaven. Such believers can find their lives transformed by understanding they are part of something far greater than themselves. They belong to the new people of God. God now lives in them. They are priests serving before God, offering up the sacrifice of praise to Him amid a perverted and lost world.