

Christ, Our Priest



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 110:1–5; Gen. 14:18–20; Heb. 7:1–3; Rom. 8:31–34; 1 Tim. 2:4–6; Heb. 8:6; Heb. 2:17, 18; Heb. 3:6; Heb. 10:1–14.*

Memory Text: “Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (*Hebrews 8:1, 2, NASB*).

After His resurrection and ascension to the heavenly sanctuary, Christ entered into a new phase of the plan of redemption (*Heb. 2:17*). With the indispensable requirement of His sacrifice fulfilled, He was inaugurated as Priest and began His priestly ministry in order to mediate His perfect sacrifice in behalf of those covered, by faith, by His blood. His priestly ministry consists of two phases, both foreshadowed in the earthly sanctuary: the daily ministry and the yearly ministry during the Day of Atonement.

This week we will study the work of Jesus during His daily ministry and see some of the practical ramifications that His work has for us. We can, indeed, draw great comfort from knowing that Jesus is now standing in the presence of God, ministering the merits of His sacrifice in our behalf. The sanctuary message offers hope and encouragement to even the weakest of His followers.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 23.*

Our High Priest

The New Testament book that speaks the most about Christ as Priest is Hebrews. The Old Testament backbone of Hebrews consists of two verses quoted from Psalm 110. Verse 1 is cited to confirm that Christ is exalted above all because He sat down at the right hand of God. This is a recurring theme in Hebrews, one that emphasizes Jesus' divinity and Messiahship (*Heb. 1:3, 4:14, 7:26, 8:1, 12:2*). Psalm 110:4 is used to demonstrate that Christ's priesthood has been foreshadowed by Melchizedek (*Heb. 5:6*).

In what ways does Christ fulfill the divinely promised priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek? Compare Gen. 14:18–20, Ps. 110:4, and Heb. 7:1–3.

The Bible does not provide much information regarding Melchizedek. Yet, what it does reveal shows remarkable similarities to Jesus. Melchizedek is the king of the city of Salem (Salem means “peace,” so he is the “King of Peace”). His name means “King of Righteousness,” which speaks of his character. He is detached from history, as his familial line is not given. His birth and death are not mentioned. So, it seems as if he had no beginning and no end, and he is “priest of the Most High God.” Melchizedek’s priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, because through Abraham, Levi gave tithes to Melchizedek (*Heb. 7:4–10*). Melchizedek, then, is a type of Christ.

But Christ is even more. Aaron was the first high priest in Israel. Hebrews 5:1–4 describes an idealized Aaronic high priestly office: divine appointment, representative of men, mediation before God, compassionate, and offering sacrifices for the people and for himself.

The book of Hebrews portrays Christ as the new High Priest. He is of a better order than even Aaron; not only does He fulfill the requirements of the Aaronite priesthood, He enhances them. Jesus had no sin, was fully obedient, and did not need to bring an offering for Himself. On the contrary, He Himself was the offering—the most perfect offering possible.

Jesus fulfilled both the Aaronite and the Melchizedek high priesthood in a better way than either of those priests, or priesthoods, ever did or could. Both types met their antitype in Christ.

Advocate and Intercessor

Read Romans 8:31–34. What great hope and promise is offered us here?

The background of verses 31–34 is a courtroom scene in which we should visualize ourselves on trial. Questions are asked: Who is against us? Who will bring a charge against us? Who condemns us? Such a situation could easily send shivers down our spines. After all, are we not well aware of our human imperfection and sinfulness?

However, we do not need to fear. The promise that nothing and no one can separate us from God’s love centers on several important points: God is for us (*vs. 31*), God delivered His Son for us (*vs. 32*), God freely gives us all things (*vs. 32*), and God justifies us (*vs. 33*). Jesus Christ is on our side. Jesus is the answer to any fear of condemnation, for He died, was raised, and is now continuously interceding for us in the heavenly sanctuary at the right hand of God (*vs. 34*).

If someone goes so far as to die willingly for us, we should feel confident of His love. The assurance revealed in Romans 8:31–39 is really telling us about the kind of God we believe in. If we understand that our God loves us so much that nothing can thwart His purposes for us (*vss. 35–39*), the divine courtroom becomes a place of joy and jubilation.

This truth becomes even clearer in 1 John 2:1, 2. The Greek *parakletos* designates a legal assistant or advocate, someone who appears in another’s behalf as “intercessor.” Jesus is our Advocate, and He defends us because otherwise we would have no hope.

Our Advocate is “righteous,” which gives us the assurance that the Father will hear Christ’s intercession, for Christ could do nothing that His righteous Father would reject. Christ intercedes for those who have sinned, presenting Himself—the One who has not sinned—as the Righteous One who stands in their stead.

How can you better experience the marvelous truth that nothing will separate you from God’s love? How can you use this assurance as a motivation to live as God would have you live, as opposed, perhaps, to how you are living now?

Mediator

“Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:4–6, NKJV). How do these verses help us to understand just what Christ is doing for us in heaven?

Christ is called the one Mediator between God and man. There is no one else because, in fact, no one else is necessary. Through Christ’s position as Mediator, salvation and knowledge of truth are universally available (1 Tim. 2:4). The crucial question for us all is whether or not we will take advantage of what Christ has offered to each of us, regardless of our status, race, character, or past deeds.

Mediator is a term from the ancient Greek commercial and legal world. It describes someone who negotiates or acts as arbitrator between two parties in order to remove a disagreement or to reach a common goal in order to inaugurate a contract or covenant.

In Hebrews, Christ as Mediator is connected to the new covenant (Heb. 8:6, 9:15, 12:24). He has made reconciliation. Though sin had destroyed the close communion between humanity and God and would have led to the destruction of the race, Christ came and restored the connection. This is reconciliation. He alone is the link between God and humanity, and through this link we can enjoy a full covenant relationship with the Lord.

Paul’s reference to Him as the “man Christ Jesus” expresses His unique quality of being both human and divine (1 Tim. 2:5). Salvation and mediation are anchored precisely in Jesus’ humanity and His voluntary self-offering. By being both God and human, Jesus is able to link heaven and earth with ties that can never be broken.

“Jesus Christ came that He might link finite man with the infinite God, and connect earth that has been divorced by sin and transgression from heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 253.

Think: there is a human being in heaven right now, mediating in your behalf. What should this tell you about your importance in the eyes of God? How should this truth influence how you live and how you treat others?

Great High Priest

What do the following texts reveal about Christ’s ministry as High Priest? *Heb. 2:17, 18; 3:6; 4:14, 15; 7:24–28; 8:1–3.*

Jesus is the “great High Priest” (*Heb. 4:14, NKJV*). He is superior to all high priests and rulers of earth. Jesus is the true and only High Priest. The Bible assigns a number of qualities to Jesus as great High Priest:

Merciful and faithful. The two characteristics of merciful and faithful (*Heb. 2:17*) fit Christ’s role as Mediator, for He bestows His gifts on us (is “merciful”) and is loyal to His Father and to us (is “faithful”).

With us. Jesus can sympathize with us (*Heb. 2:18; 5:2, 7*). Because He has lived as a human, we can trust that He is a compassionate and perfect Helper. Yet, He is not in the same situation as we are, because He is “without sin” (*Heb. 4:15*).

Over us. Jesus as High Priest is not in the community of believers as Moses was; He is over us, as a son presides over the house of his father (*Heb. 3:6*). Christ enjoys full authority among the saints.

As we are. Jesus’ divine origin did not give Him any exclusive rights. He was tempted just as we are (*Heb. 4:15*). The selected temptations in the Judean desert show that He was tempted in the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions (*Matt. 4:1–11*).

For us. Christ appears in the heavenly sanctuary in the presence of God “for us” (*Heb. 9:24*), and He also is making intercession for us (*Heb. 7:25*). Thank God that we have a Divine Representative to appear in the judgment in our place.

Jesus is in heaven “for us.” What does that mean? How can you draw some assurance and security from this wonderful truth?

The One Sacrifice

As we have seen, a crucial purpose of the earthly sanctuary service was to reveal—in symbols, in types, in mini-prophecies—the death and high priestly ministry of Jesus. Sin is something too terrible to be solved merely by the death of animals (as sad and unfortunate as those deaths are). Instead, all of that spilled blood was to point to the only solution for sin, and that was the death of Jesus Himself. That it took His death, the death of the One who was equal to God (*Phil. 2:6*), in order to atone for sin shows just how bad sin really is.

Read Hebrews 10:1–14. How does this passage contrast the function and work of the earthly sanctuary service with the death and high priestly ministry of Jesus?

Many crucial truths ring out of these texts, one of the most important being that the deaths of all those animals was not sufficient to deal with the sin problem. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (*Heb. 10:4, NKJV*). They merely point to the solution; they were not the solution themselves. The solution was Jesus, His death, and then His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf.

Notice another crucial point in these texts: the complete sufficiency of Christ’s one death. Though the animal sacrifices had to be repeated time and time again, day after day, year after year, Jesus’ single sacrifice was sufficient (after all, look at who was sacrificed!) to cover the sins of all humanity. God powerfully revealed this crucial truth when the inner veil of the earthly sanctuary was torn supernaturally after the death of Jesus (*Matt. 27:51*).

Look around at the world, look at the damage that sin has caused: the pain, the loss, the fear, the hopelessness. How can we learn day by day, moment by moment, to cling to Jesus as the only solution to the sin problem in our own lives?

Further Study: “The Atonement, Part II—High-Priestly Application of Atoning Sacrifice,” pp. 476–488, in Appendix C of *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A.

“Step away from Satan’s voice and from acting his will, and stand by the side of Jesus, possessing his attributes, the possessor of keen and tender sensibilities, who can make the cause of afflicted, suffering ones his own. The man who has had much forgiven will love much. Jesus is a compassionate intercessor, a merciful and faithful high priest. He, the Majesty of heaven—the King of glory—can look upon finite man, subject to the temptations of Satan, knowing that he has felt the power of Satan’s wiles.”—Ellen G. White, *Christian Education*, p. 160.

“The conscience can be freed from condemnation. Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus. Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities. We may claim sanctification. We may enjoy the favor of God. We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 32, 33.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read Hebrews 2:17. Why was it necessary for Jesus to become human and to suffer before He could become our High Priest?
- ❷ Dwell on the second Ellen G. White statement listed above. Look especially at the line: “We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute.” How does this help us to understand what comes before, when she talks earlier about being “made perfect in Christ Jesus”?
- ❸ Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, is the Surety of our salvation, and He administers the effects and benefits of His sacrifice and blood. With Him on our side, we have nothing to fear. How can we take these wonderful truths, so powerfully expressed in the book of Hebrews, and apply them to ourselves, especially at times of great temptation?
- ❹ The book of Hebrews is very clear that Jesus’ once-and-for-all sacrifice was all that was needed for dealing with sin. What should that tell us about any religious practice that claims to repeat this sacrifice as a necessity for the forgiveness of sins?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Hebrews 7:25 and 8:1, 2*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Know our High Priest, Jesus Christ, and the meaning of His intercessory ministry.

Feel: Foster the feeling of love toward sinners as God intercedes for them.

Do: Pray for sinners to repent as Jesus wants to help each one in their daily struggles, save them, and vindicate them against Satan’s accusations.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus Our High Priest

A Why do we need Jesus Christ’s mediatory and intercessory work?

B Why is Jesus the only true Intercessor? What disqualifies Mary and the saints for this role?

C Who is the only One who can bring assurance into our lives, and why?

II. Feel: No Competition Between Christ’s Intercession and the Father’s Love

A How can Jesus be closer to you when you understand with Paul that our Intercessor is the “man Jesus Christ”?

B Jesus’ intercessory ministry does not mean that the Father is angry, and it does not mean that Christ has to appease His wrath or change His “negative” attitude. Why is this so?

III. Do: Jesus Vindicates Against Satan’s Accusations

A Explain the way in which Jesus is the Great High Priest.

B What does it mean that we can come to Jesus as we are but not just in any manner?

► **Summary:** Our only spiritual safety is in the acceptance of both Christ’s great sacrifice for our past and His daily intercession for us in the present. In this way, our future is secured because it lies in God’s hands.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Hebrews 7:25 and 8:1, 2*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Christ intercedes for His people in the heavenly sanctuary and is always ready to help them even though they struggle with the reality of sin. He not only wants to make sinners aware of their destructive behavior but especially assists them through His infinite love. As their Mediator and Intercessor, He desires to give them victory over sin. In spite of their failures, He does everything possible to win their trust and to build meaningful relationships with them.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson should help class members to understand the meaning of Jesus’ intercessory ministry for them. He wants to save them completely and help them in their everyday struggles. Nothing and nobody can separate us from His love, save our own stubborn choices to remain in sin.

Opening Discussion: Many people struggle to understand the meaning of the intercessory ministry of Jesus. They cannot grasp the necessity and importance of Christ’s work for us today. Philip Yancey openly declares: “Would it not have been better if the Ascension had never happened? If Jesus had stayed on earth, he could answer our questions, solve our doubts, mediate our disputes of doctrine and policy. . . . By ascending, Jesus took the risk of being forgotten.”—Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), pp. 297–299. What do you think: Why do you need Christ as your Intercessor and Advocate?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: The popular understanding of an intercessor is of one who is a go-between for two antagonistic parties. This model of two opposed sides and a mediator or intercessor coming between them and trying to reconcile them by changing their mutual hatred, misunderstanding, prejudices, feelings, and attitudes toward each other lies at the heart of this misunderstanding. The implications of such an understanding of Christ’s mediation are quite devastating. The Lord is seen as an angry God who has to be begged, bended, and changed in His attitude toward humans in order to give them grace and grant them mercy. What a horrible picture of God. This distortion of

God's character has terrible consequences in popular Christian thinking: Jesus is not powerful enough to intercede; He needs help. Thus, Mary is pleading with God and, in addition, Peter, Paul, the apostles, plus all international, national, and local saints. In this way, God is depicted as a monster, an angry deity who is not easy to appease. But the biblical model of intercession is completely different!

Bible Commentary

I. What does it not mean for Jesus Christ to be our Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary? (Review 2 Cor. 5:19–21 with your class.)

1. Jesus does not need to plead with the Father on our behalf or beg Him to be merciful toward us, because our heavenly Father loves us (*see John 16:26, 27*).
2. Jesus does not need to change the Father's attitude toward us or appease an angry God so that He will give us a little bit of His grace, and this is because He provides the means of reconciliation: " 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' " (*John 3:16, NIV*).
3. Jesus does not need to reconcile God with us, but we humans are in need of being reconciled with Him! Paul explains that as God's ambassadors our message is: "Be [you people] reconciled to God" (*2 Cor. 5:20, NIV*).

Discussion Question: Jesus Christ is our only Intercessor (*1 Tim. 2:2–6*). Paul's assertion was intended to counter the Gnostic teaching of his time. There is no power that can stand between God and this world. He is our Intercessor, because He gave Himself for humanity in order to redeem us. He is our Mediator because He is our Savior. His intercession is actually a continuation of His saving activity on our behalf. In reality it is the realization and actualization of His work for us on the cross. He needs and wants to apply to our lives today what He did two thousand years ago. We need His death and life in order to be alive, in order to be His followers today. Why are Jesus' incarnation and death prerequisites for Christ's intercessory ministry for us?

II. What Does the Intercessory Ministry of Jesus Mean? (Review Hebrews 7:25 and Revelation 12:10–12 with your class.)

1. Jesus Christ and the heavenly Father meet together (in biblical languages "to intercede" means "to meet") in order to help humans in their everyday struggles against evil. The first tangible result of that meeting between the

heavenly Father and Jesus was the giving of the Holy Spirit to the believers (see *Acts 2*). All heaven is united to help us in our struggles with sin, Satan, and temptation (*John 15:5, Phil. 4:13*). Jesus Christ did not come to save us “in” sin but “from” sin (*Matt. 1:21*). Hebrews 4:16 spells out eloquently why the intercessory ministry of our High Priest is needed for us: “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (*NIV*). We are constantly in need of Jesus and are completely dependent upon Him, as well as upon the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is called *parakletos*, which means that “He is Someone called for help,” “Someone to stand by” (*John 14:26*).

2. Jesus Christ saves completely by forgiving our sins and justifying us (*Heb. 7:25*). Jesus identifies with us when we give our lives to Him; He becomes one with us. This identification is so close that it is compared to a very sensitive part of the body: “For this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘. . . whoever touches you touches the apple of his [Lord’s] eye’ ” (*Zech. 2:8, NIV*). Other clear examples of His identification with His believers are the following statements: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (*Matt. 25:40, NIV*); “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (*Matt. 25:45*); “He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied” (*Acts 9:4, 5, NIV*). “‘He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me’ ” (*Luke 10:16, NIV*). Jesus saves all who come to Him, as they are, confessing their sins openly, honestly, and sincerely in order for Him to transform them by His grace.

3. Jesus Christ vindicates us against the accusations of Satan (see *Rev. 12:10–12*). He personally stands against Satan’s accusations. Our victory is in Him, because He is the Victor. Because Jesus Christ is our Intercessor and He is vindicating us in front of the whole universe, we can have no fear for the day of judgment (*1 John 2:28, 4:17*).

Activity: Ask the members of your class to discuss a clear definition of God’s anger, which is often misunderstood. Consider carefully the following explanation: on the cross, Jesus took upon Himself God’s anger, which was aimed against sin and not against people (unless they associate with sin; see *John 3:36*). It means that God’s anger is His uncompromised No to sin, His passionate reaction toward evil. Jesus died for us in our place, experiencing God’s anger and punishment in order that we may live when we put our faith in Him (*Rom. 3:21–26; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, 21; Gal. 3:13, 14*). Only through Christ’s atoning sacrifice can we be at one with our heavenly Father.

III. Jesus Is Praying for You (Review *John 17:20, 21* with your class.)

According to John 17, Jesus prays for us. He prays for His disciples and the successive generations of His followers to be united and faithful. He did the same specifically for Peter (*Luke 22:32*). So, the intercession of Jesus means that Jesus is praying for us so that we do not fall. This is an example for us of how we should pray for one another.

Discussion Question: Why are even God’s people more interested in God’s blessings of Jesus’ ministry for them than in wholehearted obedience?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The book of Hebrews stresses that Jesus is our High Priest and Intercessor. Discuss with your class how they feel when they know that Someone is there for them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. He loves, forgives, justifies, helps, sanctifies, delivers from the power of sin, and vindicates against the accusations of Satan. What else could we need that He has not already taken care of!

Life Application: Find biblical examples of humans mediating or interceding for others and compare these instances with Jesus’ intercessory ministry for us. Why is Christ’s intercession superior? How can you act like Jesus by being there for others and by helping them to see God’s goodness in their lives?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Our God does everything in order for us to know that He is for us and never against us. The intercessory ministry of Jesus on our behalf proves it. As our Intercessor, He died for us so that we can live. Intercession is built on a sacrifice. Discuss with your class different possibilities of how we can sacrifice something in our own lives to help people in need to be more comfortable. How can you show love to people who are homeless or to those who refuse your kind attention or notoriously (mis)use your goodness?

Activities:

① With your class members, create a list of people who need your prayers and then pray that God can help them to live a happy and victorious life in Christ Jesus, however difficult the circumstances of their lives may be.

② During this week, personally visit people who you think may need your assistance. They may be sick, financially broken, discouraged, disappointed, or have lost a loved one, friends, or a job.