

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

**TITLE: EXPLORING THE COVENANTAL PROMISE OF PRIESTHOOD IN
EXODUS 19:6: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SINAI AND
PRE-SINAI PRIESTHOODS**

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This thesis explores the covenantal promise of priesthood in Exodus 19:6 by conducting a comparative analysis of the Sinai and Pre-Sinai priesthods. Central to this study is the examination of the term מְמַלְכֶת פְּהָרִים, focusing on identifying its most accurate translation through a critical review of relevant literature. The resulting understanding of priesthood is then compared with the Pre-Sinai, Aaronic, and Levitical priesthods using key criteria designed to support a thorough comparison. These criteria include: the basis of priesthood, roles and functions, access to the divine presence, the relationship between covenant and priesthood, and the connection between leadership authority and priesthood.

This study concludes that מְמַלְכֶת פְּהָרִים functions as an attributive genitive and is best translated as “priestly kingdom,” indicating a corporate, metaphorical priesthood. This interpretation aligns with the immediate and broader context of the

passage, which supports the view that the promised priesthood encompasses the entire nation. Moreover, the wider biblical narrative suggests that this national priesthood was intended to coexist with the Aaronic priesthood, which was instituted prior to the golden calf incident and should not be viewed merely as a response to Israel's rebellion.

The comparative analysis reveals that the promised priesthood in Exodus 19:6 reflects continuity and discontinuity with earlier forms of priesthood. Continuity is seen in the themes of divine appointment, covenant connection, the concept of *בְּכוֹר*, and the shared priestly function of godly influence. Discontinuity arises in access to God's presence, specific roles and duties, and the separation of priesthood from leadership authority. Thus while Israel's corporate priesthood builds upon previous models, it also marks a distinct development in the biblical narrative by highlighting the nation's collective role in God's redemptive plan.

A comparison of the promised priesthood and the Aaronic priesthood determines that while the promised priesthood was metaphoric the Aaronic priesthood was primarily cultic in nature. Thus the study concludes that the Sinai priesthood is the institutionalization of the pre-Sinai priesthood.

The theological implications of this study highlight God's consistent approach to engaging with fallen humanity through the institution of priesthood, which provides a pathway to redemption. The priestly ministry serves a dual purpose: its cultic function maintains the covenant relationship between God and His people, while its metaphorical function invites the unconverted into a relationship with God.

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A thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

by

Nkanyiso Moyo

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In Exodus 19:5, 6 God promises Israel that they would be מְמַלְכֵת פְּהָגִים, however there is no consensus on the interpretation of the phrase. The following are some of the renderings of the phrase: “kingdom of priests”¹, “priestly kingdom,”² “royal priesthood,”³ “a reigning group of priests,”⁴ “kings and priests,”⁵ and “priestly kings.”⁶ The plethora of translations suggests different conceptions of the promise

¹ Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Kingdom of God’ in the Old Testament,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 3, no. 1 (1965): 23.

²Some of the proponents of this rendering are the following: Kyu S. Kim, “The Meaning of מְמַלְכֵת פְּהָגִים Revisited,” *Journal of Biblical Text Research* 35 (October 2014): 260; William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2013), 141–42; Carol L. Meyers, *Exodus*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 141; Jo Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 305 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 51; The Latin Vulgate.

³ The Septuagint (LXX); New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁴ Some of the proponents of these renderings include: T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 2 (London: Apollos, 2017), 451; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 97–98; Paul R. Williamson and Moore College, “Exodus,” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, ed. D.A Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 153.

⁵Some of the proponents of this renderings include: Martin McNamara, Robert Hayward, and Michael Maher, eds., *Targum Neofiti 1, Exodus*, The Aramaic Bible 2 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 80. The Syriac Peshitta Bible with English Translation: *Exodus*, Surath Kthobh (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017), 107; George Rawlinson, “Exodus,” *The Pulpit Commentary, Genesis to Joshua*, eds. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 2:107; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Exodus,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 251.

⁶William L. Moran, “A Kingdom of Priests,” *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. John L. McKenzie, S. J, Saint Mary’s Theological Studies 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), 8.

made to Israel. One view is that God desired to establish Israel as a nation consisting of priests, as the translation "kingdom of priests" seems to imply.⁷ This suggests that Israel was intended to operate as a kingdom comprising individuals who served in priestly capacities. In contradiction another view argues that this assertion conflicts with the subsequent designation of the Levites as Israel's specifically appointed priestly tribe, and Aaron along with his descendants as the lineage of high priests (Exodus 28; Leviticus 8-9). It instead suggests that the context necessitates an interpretation that considers the collective identity of Israel in its relationship with YHWH and the broader world.⁸ The essential query becomes, "Does the establishment of the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods signify the fulfillment of the covenantal promise (Exodus 19:6), or do they arise from the failure of the nation to meet the conditions outlined in the promise?" Some propose the latter⁹ while others the former.¹⁰

The roles of pre-Sinai priestly figures such as Melchizedek (Genesis 14), the patriarchs, and Moses introduce further complexity. Their presence raises crucial theological questions about the origin and function of the priesthood prior to the Sinai covenant. Despite this, there is a noticeable lack of comprehensive comparative studies examining the relationship between the pre-Sinai and Sinai priesthoods. Some

⁷ Gerhard F. Hasel and Michael G. Hasel, *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2020), 66.

⁸ Daniel Isaac Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 150.

⁹ Kevin J. Conner and Kenneth P. Malmin, *The Covenants: Edenic, Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic, New, Everlasting*, updated and revised ed. (Portland, OR: City Bible Publishing, 1997), 57.

¹⁰ Andrew Murray, *The Two Covenants and the Second Blessing* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1974), 85.

scholars treat these eras separately¹¹ while some assume a simple progression without addressing theological discontinuities.¹²

Problem Statement

God's promise to make Israel a *ממלכת כהנים* in Exod 19:6 introduces significant textual and theological ambiguity. The precise meaning of this phrase remains debated among scholars. This has led to differing interpretations regarding whether the entire nation was to function in a priestly role or if the phrase carried a more symbolic or representative meaning. Further complexity arises when considering the subsequent establishment of the Aaronic and Levitical priesthods, raising questions about whether these institutions fulfilled, redefined, or responded to the original covenantal promise. Additionally, the roles of pre-Sinai priestly figures, such as Melchizedek, the patriarchs, and Moses, present a theological tension that is often overlooked: do these earlier priesthods foreshadow, contrast with, or find continuity in the Sinai model? The absence of a focused comparative study on the relationship between pre-Sinai and Sinai priesthods contributes to the ongoing uncertainty regarding the development, purpose, and fulfillment of Israel's priestly identity.

Research Questions

1. What does the phrase *ממלכת כהנים* mean and how does its meaning define Israel's promised priesthood of Exod. 19:6.

¹¹ John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 395 (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004).

¹² Andrew S. Malone, *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 43 (London: Apollos, 2017).

2. How does the Pre-Sinai priesthood relate to Israel's promised priesthood of Exodus 19:6?
3. How does the Aaronic priesthood and the Levitical service compare and relate to Israel's promised priesthood of Exodus 19:6 and pre-Sinai priesthood?
4. What are the implications of the comparative analysis of the Sinai and pre-Sinai priesthoods for theology?

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of the covenantal promise of priesthood, tracing its relationship to the priesthood before the Sinai Covenant and Israel's priesthood after the covenant's establishment. Through this exploration, the study aims to enhance our understanding of God's redemptive plan and the role of believers in embodying the priesthood.

Furthermore, this study seeks to elucidate the implications of this covenantal promise for contemporary Christian theology and practice, particularly in terms of the priesthood of all believers and its contribution to the fulfillment of God's kingdom on earth. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute to a richer understanding of the biblical narrative and its relevance for believers today.

Significance of the Study

The study provides a foundation for understanding the concept of the priesthood of all believers, which features in the current debate on the ordination of women to gospel ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Secondly, the study seeks to shed light on the theological significance of priesthood within the context of covenantal relationships, providing valuable insights into the nature of God's covenantal promises and their implications for believers. Understanding these themes enriches theological discourse and informs Christian identity and discipleship.

Overall, this study has the potential to deepen scholarly understanding of biblical theology, enhance theological reflection within Christian communities, and inspire believers to live out their faith following God's covenantal promises.

Methodology

This thesis employs a comparative analytical approach to examine the Sinai priesthood in comparison to the Pre-Sinai priesthood. The comparative analytical approach combines two elements:

1. Comparison – examining two or more subjects (in this case priesthood phases) to highlight their similarities, differences, and interrelationships.
2. Analysis – evaluation of the components, structures, or meanings involved.

Although this methodology is not attributed to any individual it has been used by notable individuals such as Michael Fishbane, in his *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, to demonstrate the value of intertextual and diachronic analysis in uncovering theological developments.¹³ Walter Brueggemann, in *Theology of the Old Testament*, likewise models comparative readings of Israel's theological traditions across different canonical corpora.¹⁴

The study compares the priesthood phases using a structured framework based on key thematic criteria. These criteria which as a package are unique and were developed through an examination of the Biblical text from Genesis to Numbers, along with existing scholarly discussions on priesthood. They were selected to ensure

¹³ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997).

a comprehensive comparison of the Sinai and Pre-Sinai priesthoods. The criteria include:

1. The Basis of the Priesthood – This entails analyzing the establishment of the priesthood in each period, whether through divine appointment, lineage, communal function, or any other foundational basis.
2. Roles and Functions of Priests – This criterion explores the specific duties of priests in each period, including sacrificial rituals, intercessory roles, and broader religious functions.
3. Access to Divine Presence – This involves investigating the extent to which priests had access to the presence of God, and how this access changed across the different phases of priesthood.
4. Relationship between Covenant and the Priesthood – This criterion assesses how the priesthood was linked to covenantal structures in each phase, whether implicitly or explicitly.
5. The Relationship between Leadership Authority and the Priesthood – This aspect considers whether the priesthood was independent, subordinate, or integrally connected to governance.

The categories of “the basis of the priesthood”, “roles and functions”, and “access to the divine presence,” are drawn from key scriptural themes that define priestly identity and duties. The categories of “Covenant and the Priesthood” and “Leadership Authority and the Priesthood” are selected mainly from scholarly insights on the subject and scriptural themes on the subjects.

The methodology follows a structured comparative study model, proceeding in the following stages:

1. Descriptive Analysis of Each Phase – Each of the phases of priesthood is outlined individually, with attention to their characteristics based on the specified criteria.
2. Comparative Evaluation – Systematically compares the findings from the three phases, assessing points of continuity and discontinuity.
3. Synthesis and Interpretation – The final step involves synthesizing the comparative findings to draw broader conclusions about the nature and development of the priesthood within the Pentateuch. This synthesis will also explore the theological implications.

Delimitation

The focus of the study will be limited to exploring the Sinai Priesthood in Exodus through to Numbers and comparing it to the Pre-Sinai priesthood from Genesis to Exodus. The book of Deuteronomy is excluded because it is essentially the restoration of the Sinai covenant which means the priesthood therein is the same as that of Sinai

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores the covenantal promise of priesthood in Exod 19:6 through a comparative analysis of the Sinai and pre-Sinai priesthoods. By comparing the priestly concepts evident at Sinai with those found in pre-Sinai narratives, the study aims to clarify God's intention for His people in His plan for the salvation of humanity. The literature review aims to identify the most theologically sound interpretation of the phrase מְמַלְכֶת פְּהַגִּים by outlining and critically engaging with a range of scholarly perspectives. A clear understanding of this phrase is the foundation for comparing the covenantal promise of priesthood at Sinai with earlier expressions of priestly function, particularly in light of the later development of the Aaronic priesthood.

While many commentaries briefly mention the covenantal promise in Exodus 19:6, they often give it limited theological or exegetical attention.¹⁵ Among the works that engage the verse more extensively, approaches vary. Davies prefers to categorize the various options of reckoning the phrase by whether there is a passive or an active force to the verbal notion which underlies מְמַלְכֶת.¹⁶ He argues for the superiority of his method over that employed by Scott, which is somewhat

¹⁵ The following is a sample of commentaries that give limited theological or exegetical attention to the promise of priesthood in Exod 19:6: Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Exodus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014); Carol L. Meyers, *Exodus*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 69.

representative of another way of discussing the possible options of rendering the phrase, which hinges on the understanding of כְּהֲנִיִּים. Alexander is among those who fit this category.¹⁷ Kim discusses the various translations before focusing on the individual terms of the phrase, followed by a grammatical analysis of the phrase.¹⁸ This study somewhat adopts Kim's idea of discussing various grammatical options for the phrase.

This study categorizes the various interpretations according to grammatical variants. Each variant is identified and examined with support from syntactical analysis resources. The differing scholarly perspectives on each grammatical variant are then presented, and their arguments are compared and contrasted to determine the most compelling position. Representative scholars who support each view are cited.

Following each major section, the study offers an evaluative summary of the arguments discussed. The question of the phrase's nature, whether it should be understood as a construct or appositional phrase, is then explored primarily through syntactical studies. The literature review concludes with a discussion on the nature of the priesthood itself, considering whether it is to be understood in a cultic or metaphorical sense.

The phrase מִמְלֶכֶת כְּהֲנִיִּים can generally be classified as either two nouns in construct relationship or two nouns in apposition to each other. Below is an overview of the scholarly options on the meaning of ממלכת כהנים.

¹⁷ Alexander, *Exodus*.

¹⁸ Kim, "The Meaning of מִמְלֶכֶת כְּהֲנִיִּים Revisited."

Nouns in Construct Relationship

Attributive Genitive

Some scholars perceive מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים to be a construct phrase. Among these are Kim,¹⁹ Jerome,²⁰ Dumbrell,²¹ Meyers,²² and Wells²³ who propose that the phrase should be translated “Priestly Kingdom/Royalty” which grammatically is an attributive genitive.²⁴ Arnold and Choi posit that in an attributive genitive, the genitive denotes a quality or attribute of the construct. In translation, the genitive often becomes an adjective. Among those who posit that the phrase is an attributive genitive, some consider מַמְלֶכֶת to be active and argue that in Hebrew, "מַמְלֶכֶה" often expressed as “מַמְלֶכֶת” in a genitive structure, doesn't primarily signify the territory under rule, but rather emphasizes the institution of kingship and the importance and function of the office itself. However, while it may sometimes refer to the individual occupying the office, such usage is uncommon.²⁵

Since the two terms are in a genitive relationship, where typically the second Hebrew word serves as a modifier for the first, 'priests' would naturally be anticipated as the qualifying descriptor, serving in an adjectival capacity for 'royalty/kingdom'.

¹⁹ Ibid, 260.

²⁰ Jerome translated the Latin Vulgate which was completed around the late 4th Century and Early 5th Century and is one of the most significant Latin translations of the Bible. It became the official Latin Bible of the Roman Catholic Church for centuries.

²¹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 141–42.

²² Meyers, *Exodus*, 141.

²³ Wells, *God's Holy People*, 51.

²⁴ Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10.

²⁵ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 109.

The Term “priestly royalty/kingdom” is parallel to the term “holy nation,” where “priestly” corresponds to “holy” and “royalty/kingdom” corresponds to “nation.” The phrase "priestly royalty/kingdom" parallels the concept of a "holy nation," reinforcing the idea that priesthood and holiness are complementary aspects of Israel's identity and purpose.

The passive reading of מְמַלְכָה, which translates as "Priestly Kingdom" in the Vulgate, appears to align more closely with the parallel structure of מְמַלְכַת פְּהָגִים ("Priestly Kingdom") and גְּוֵי קְדוֹשׁ ("holy nation") mentioned earlier. The term "kingdom" pairs more naturally with "nation" as a description of the collective entity receiving the promise. While the interpretation of מְמַלְכָה as emphasizing the institution of kingship is supported by linguistic analysis, the specific phrase "מְמַלְכַת פְּהָגִים" is a *hapax legomenon* making it challenging to determine its precise meaning based solely on linguistic patterns.

The interpretation of "מְמַלְכַת פְּהָגִים" as "priestly royalty/kingdom" relies on certain assumptions about the genitive relationship and the intended emphasis of the phrase. These assumptions may not be universally accepted among scholars. Different interpretations of the phrase may be proposed based on alternative linguistic analyses or contextual considerations, leading to differing understandings of its meaning and significance within the broader theological framework.

However, Kim is correct to point out that Interpreting מְמַלְכַת פְּהָגִים as an attributive genitive is the view most suitable to the context. As גְּוֵי is qualified by קְדוֹשׁ, so מְמַלְכָה is qualified by פְּהָגִים a plural of abstraction. This appears to be the simplest understanding of grammar.²⁶

²⁶ Kim, “The Meaning of מְמַלְכַת פְּהָגִים Revisited,” 260.

Epexegetical Genitive

The Septuagint, and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) render מִמְלַכֶּת כֹּהֲנִים as "Royal Priesthood," where מִמְלַכֶּת describes כֹּהֲנִים. This contrasts with the attributive genitive, where כֹּהֲנִים would describe the nature of מִמְלַכֶּת. Thus, the translation "Royal Priesthood" can be understood to be an epexegetical genitive, which is the reverse of the attributive genitive.

Waltke and O'Connor agree when they state that "in an attributive genitive, C is characterized by G; the opposite relation is also found, in the epexegetical genitive, wherein G is characterized by C."²⁷ In this case "C" represents the construct word and "G" represents the genitive word or the absolute word. This means כֹּהֲנִים "Priests" are characterized by "Royalty". Arnold and Choi concur in their assertion "The reverse of the attributive genitive, the specification genitive is characterized by a quality or attribute of an adjectival construct."²⁸ In the case of מִמְלַכֶּת כֹּהֲנִים "כֹּהֲנִים" "Priests" is characterized by "מִמְלַכֶּת" "Royalty" the adjectival form is "Royal". Hence the phrase מִמְלַכֶּת כֹּהֲנִים would literally be rendered "Royal of Priests" and when polished it can be rendered "Royal Priesthood."

Proponents of this view include the Septuagint which renders the term as βασιλείον Ιεράτευμα "Royal Priesthood." Essentially מִמְלַכֶּת expresses an attribute or quality of כֹּהֲנִים. The expression βασιλείον Ιεράτευμα represents an uncommon structure in Exodus, specifically, an unarticulated noun phrase composed of an adjective followed by a noun, contrasting with the second phrase where the order is

²⁷ Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 151.

²⁸ Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 10.

reversed, consisting of a noun followed by an adjective. This arrangement forms a chiastic construction.²⁹

This understanding implies that Israel possesses not just a role as priests but also as kings among the nations. Kim correctly notes that "It's uncertain whether מִמְלֶכֶת can convey the concept of royalty in Exod 19:6, as it shares a semantic field with גֹּי and frequently appears together as a common word pair throughout the Old Testament."³⁰

The expression "royal priesthood" presents a case where the first noun in the pair modifies the second noun an arrangement that Wells queries as he observes that the norm is where the second compliments the first.³¹ Furthermore in Exod 19:6 as Kim correctly observes, this interpretation misses the parallel with גֹּי קְדוֹשׁ.³²

Genitive of Agency

Others who see מִמְלֶכֶת פְּהֻיִם as a construct phrase are Alexander³³, Keil and Delitzsch³⁴, and Williamson and College³⁵ who translate it as "A Reigning group of Priests", whereby, פְּהֻיִם would be seen as the agents or rulers who exercise authority

²⁹John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series 30 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 295.

³⁰ Kim, "The Meaning of מִמְלֶכֶת פְּהֻיִם Revisited," 260.

³¹ Wells, *God's Holy People*, 51.

³² Kim, "The Meaning of מִמְלֶכֶת פְּהֻיִם Revisited," 260.

³³ Alexander, *Exodus*, 451.

³⁴ Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:97–98.

³⁵ Williamson and College, "Exodus," 153

over the kingdom. This translation reflects the genitive of agency grammatical construction.

Waltke and O'Connor explain that in Hebrew, a subjective genitive can take on a verbal meaning or express possession or quality. In a genitive of agency, the second noun performs the action implied by the first noun.³⁶ Arnold and Choi further clarify that the genitive functions as the subject of the verbal idea inherent in the construct noun.³⁷

As a genitive of agency, the emphasis is on the agency or action performed by the noun. In the case of *ממלכת כהנים*, "כהנים" would be seen as the agents or rulers who exercise authority over the kingdom. This leads to the understanding that *ממלכת כהנים* should be translated as "A Reigning group of Priests."

In support of this view, it has been suggested that an examination of other occurrences of *ממלכת* in the Old Testament indicates that it typically signifies the kingdom belonging to or associated with the person or people immediately mentioned afterward. For example, *ממלכת עוג* refers to "the kingdom of Og" (Deut 3:4), *ממלכת צדקיהו* denotes "the kingdom/reign of Zedekiah" (Jer 28:1), and *ממלכת לבת־ירושלם* translates to "the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem" (Mic 4:8; cf. Num 32:33; Deut 3:10, 13; 2 Chr 13:8; 21:4; Jer 27:1). In light of this observation, the phrase *ממלכת כהנים* likely implies "a group of priests ruling as kings."

In contradiction it can be argued that if in a phrase like *ממלכת ישראל* Israel is considered a genitive of apposition (the kingdom of Israel), then it would be as inappropriate to render it as "it (Israel's) kingdom" as it would be to say "River Euphrates" (*נהר־פַּרְת*) can be "it (the Euphrates') river." If Israel is interpreted as an

³⁶ Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 143.

³⁷ Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 9.

objective genitive (dominion over Israel), it becomes clearer why common usage would steer away from the ambiguity of מְמַלְכֶתָּהּ.³⁸

The genitive of agency view rejects the idea that מְמַלְכֶת פְּהַנִּים and נְגִי קְדוֹשׁ are parallel terms all referring to the entirety of Israel. It rather suggests that together the phrases are complimentary and together refer to Israel such that פְּהַנִּים can be applied to an elite group from the whole hence the phrase מְמַלְכֶת פְּהַנִּים refers to a regime of priests while נְגִי קְדוֹשׁ may refer to the rest of the subjects of the kingdom.

Davies elucidates this view thus:

On this understanding, the two expressions מַמְלַכַת כְּהֵנִים and גֹּי קְדוֹשׁ are not synonymously parallel, but are complementary halves of the whole, analogous with other common Hebrew expressions for totality by means of polar opposites such as וְאַבְיוֹן עֲשִׂיר (‘rich and poor’, e.g. Ps 49.3 [ET 49.2]) or מְנַעַר וְעַד זֶקֶן (‘young and old’, e.g. Gen 19.4). They would refer to the ruler and the ruled who thus would comprise the hierocratic state.³⁹

Some defend this perspective by asserting a post-exilic genesis of the text, implying it was composed during an era when priests held sway over the Jewish community.⁴⁰ This assertion introduces a speculative element into the interpretation. While historical context can inform interpretation, the lack of direct evidence for a post-exilic origin may weaken this aspect of the argument.

The idea of an elite group of priests is disputed by some who argue that it is contrary to the structure of the passage which suggests universal application of the priesthood to the corporate body. Bundi clarifies that the waw-conjunction connecting clauses 5c וְהָיִיתָ לִּי סֵגֻלָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים “then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people”, 6a וְאַתָּם תִּהְיוּ־לִּי מְמַלְכֶת פְּהַנִּים “And you shall be to me a priestly kingdom”,

³⁸ Moran, “A Kingdom of Priests,” 10.

³⁹ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 74.

⁴⁰ Kim, “The Meaning of מְמַלְכֶת פְּהַנִּים Revisited,” 251.

and 6b וְגַיִי קְדוֹשׁ “And a holy nation” serves a copulative function. Moreover he observes that this copulative conjunction operates as a hendiadys rather than a coordinating conjunction. Consequently, the three promises refer to the same subject, overlapping and interconnecting without being logically dependent on one another. He thus concludes that the context indicates that the shared referent of these promises is Israel.⁴¹ Hence questions arise about the coherence of the interpretation within the larger context of Exodus 19:6.⁴²

Furthermore, the context provided in Exod 19:4-6 contradicts this interpretation. "מְמַלְכֶת כֹּהֲנִים" represents a special status granted as a reward for obedience to the condition outlined in the passage: "If you listen to my voice and keep my covenant." It seems unlikely that this privileged covenantal status would manifest as a political system governed by priestly leaders.⁴³

The interpretation of "מְמַלְכֶת כֹּהֲנִים" as "a reigning group of priests" may have theological implications regarding the role and authority of priests within Israelite society. This aspect of the interpretation may require further theological exploration and justification to ensure its consistency with broader theological principles.

Genitive of Apposition

Davies in his outline of the passive interpretation of the phrase, posits that this would understand the phrase to mean a kingdom or realm whose citizens are (in

⁴¹ Andrew Bundi, "Israel as a Kingdom of Priests: An Exegetical Study of Exodus 19:6a," *Pan-African Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (2023): 23.

⁴² Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 81.

⁴³ Kim, "The Meaning of מְמַלְכֶת כֹּהֲנִים Revisited," 257.

some sense) priests. According to Davies, this understanding is effectively a Genitive of Apposition.⁴⁴

The passive interpretation of מְמַלְכָה brings up the question of who governs Israel. Davies suggests that most proponents of this view believe the term does not imply rule by a monarch (whether human or divine) but instead functions as a synonym for "nation" or "state." However, some interpret it more narrowly as referring to the domain or people governed by a king. The preferred king in this case is God as opposed to a human monarch.⁴⁵

Some dismiss the possibility of the priesthood being attributed to individuals within the collective based on the reasoning that since מַמְלַכַת כְּהֵנִים and גְּוֵי קָדוֹשׁ should be understood as parallel expressions as mentioned above. It follows that as holiness is predicated on the collectivity, the nation, then the priesthood is also collective, belonging properly to the kingdom.”⁴⁶ “The concern here is with the priesthood of *all* believers (the community of faith) not, as much protestant interpretation has traditionally taken it to mean in the light of 1 Pet 2, the priesthood of *every* believer (each individual within the community).⁴⁷

Evaluation

Based solely on grammatical and syntactical considerations, the epexegetical genitive appears to be the weakest option. This is due to a grammatical objection noted by Wells, who points out that it is uncommon for the first noun in a genitive construction to modify the second, as is the case in the phrase 'royal priesthood.' In

⁴⁴ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 69, 70.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 71.

⁴⁶ Moran, “A Kingdom of Priests,” 7.

⁴⁷ Wells, *God's Holy People*, 52.

contrast, the other proposed interpretations are equally plausible from a grammatical and syntactical standpoint. Therefore, only contextual analysis can determine which genitive is most likely among the remaining options.

Contextual considerations appear to eliminate the genitive of agency as a viable option, which would interpret the phrase as 'a reigning group of priests.' As previously noted, the structure of the passage suggests a universal application of the priesthood. Bundi's analysis of the *waw* conjunction supports this, indicating that the promises in Exodus 19:5, 6 share a common referent, the whole of Israel, thereby excluding the idea of a select, reigning group of priests. Similarly, the genitive of apposition can be dismissed for the same reason, as it interprets the phrase to mean a kingdom whose citizens are, in some sense, priests. This interpretation conflicts with the notion that the priesthood is attributed collectively to the entire nation.

The attributive genitive, which renders the phrase as 'priestly kingdom,' appears to align with the context. The phrase מְמִלְכַת פְּהֻיִים ('priestly kingdom') stands in parallel with גֵּי קֹדֶשׁ ('holy nation'), reinforcing the idea that priesthood and holiness are complementary dimensions of Israel's identity.

Nouns in Apposition

Kings and Priests

The Targum Neofiti⁴⁸, The Syrian Peshitta⁴⁹; the Rawlinson⁵⁰, Kaiser,⁵¹ and Alexander⁵² posit that the phrase should be translated "Kings and Priests". This

⁴⁸ McNamara, Hayward, and Maher, *Targum Neofiti 1, Exodus*, 80.

⁴⁹ *The Syriac Peshitta Bible*, 107

⁵⁰ Rawlinson, "Exodus," 107.

⁵¹ Kaiser, *Exodus*, 251.

⁵² Alexander, *Exodus*, 451.

translation considers the phrase to be nouns in apposition. According to Waltke and O'Connor, "an appositional phrase is a sequence of nouns (or noun phrases) with the same syntactic function and agreement and with comparable reference."⁵³ In this construction, the first word is considered the lead word, and the second word the appositive. In the phrase מְמַלְכֶתָּהּ פְּהַגִּים, two distinctions of status and function are promised to the covenant recipients. In support of this view there are various instances in the Bible where the term מְמַלְכֶתָּהּ is interpreted as "king," such as 1 Sam 10:18; 1 Kgs 5:1; 10:20; Isa 13:4; Jer 1:15; 25:26; Amos 7:13; Ps 68:33; 135:11; Lam 2:2; 2 Chr 12:8; and 17:10.⁵⁴

The Syrian Peshitta translates "מְמַלְכֶתָּהּ" as "Kingdom," but in this context, "kingdom" should be understood actively, possibly as a group of royal individuals. Moran correctly notes that "the alleged apposition is an extremely rare construction and not at all at home in prose" a fact which probably influenced the translation posed by the Targum Neofiti 1 which renders the expression as two concrete nouns "kings and priests."

Regarding Israel's royal role as perceived in this perspective, Rawlinson references Luther's interpretation, which suggests Israel's purpose was to exercise dominion over death, the devil, hell, and all forms of evil. Additionally, it notes that Israel would not have an earthly king appointed over them, as they would live under a theocracy (2 Sam 12:12), and they would exercise authority over the nations.⁵⁵

It has been suggested that in Exod 19:6, the main idea conveyed is that the 'royalty' or 'sovereignty' given to Israel is a prestigious status, adding to their sense of

⁵³ Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 227.

⁵⁴ Moran, "A Kingdom of Priests," 11–12.

⁵⁵ Rawlinson, "Exodus," 107.

being valued and privileged in their relationship with God. This status, along with the grant of 'priesthood,' enables Israel to partake in the divine king's royal court.⁵⁶

The fusion of royal and priestly motifs mirrors a broader cultural backdrop in the ancient Near East, where kingship and priestly roles were seen as closely intertwined. This connection is exemplified in Israelite tradition by figures like Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem, mentioned in Gen 14:18 and Ps 110:4.⁵⁷ Within the proponents of this perspective, some understand the priestly role as applicable to every Israelite.⁵⁸

While the view emphasizes Israel's dual role as rulers and priests, it may raise theological questions about the nature and extent of Israel's authority and priesthood. The idea of Israel exercising dominion over death, the devil, and evil, as suggested by Luther, may require further theological justification and interpretation.

A Kingship/Kings i.e. Priests

According to this View, מַמְלָכָה carries an active meaning as described earlier and is placed in apposition to כְּהֹנָיִם, yet the conjunction "and" is omitted, resulting in the phrase "a kingdom, namely priests." This implies the exercise of royal authority by individuals who are indeed priests.⁵⁹

While the interpretation provides a grammatically plausible reading, the absence of the conjunction "and" introduces some ambiguity to the phrase. Without

⁵⁶ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 86.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 93.

⁵⁸ Rawlinson, "Exodus," 107.

⁵⁹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 119.

the conjunction, the precise relationship between "ממלכת" and "כֹהֲנִים" becomes less clear, leaving room for alternative interpretations.

Attributive Appositive

Moran presents a view espoused by J.B Bauer whereby the phrase ממלכת כֹהֲנִים is appositional and translated as "Priestly Kings".⁶⁰ In this view ממלכת is in the absolute state. Additionally, it is interpreted as representing an abstract concept rather than a specific, tangible entity. This interpretation suggests that ממלכת is understood in a broader, conceptual sense rather than as a concrete, literal kingdom or realm. The Israelites participate in Yahweh's kingship by sharing in His victories over their adversaries, thereby embodying aspects of royal authority.

Interpreting "ממלכת" as an abstract concept representing priestly kingship may stretch the semantic range of the term beyond its typical meaning of "kingdom" or "realm." While linguistic flexibility is common in biblical interpretation, such a broad interpretation may require additional justification or support.

Syntactically, "priests" serves as an appositive to "kings," functioning similarly to an adjective in its role and impact. However, Moran correctly notes that the supposed apposition is an exceptionally uncommon structure and does not fit naturally within prose.⁶¹

Evaluation

There are no grammatical or syntactical distinctions among the various permutations of the appositional genitive. Each interpretation understands ממלכת as functioning actively and translates it as 'king.' However, given the context, which

⁶⁰ Moran, "A Kingdom of Priests," 8.

⁶¹ Ibid, 8.

supports a universal application of the covenantal promises, this would imply that Israel is to be a nation of kings, an idea with no precedent. The notion of a spiritual dominion over death, the devil, hell, and all forms of evil, as proposed by Luther, lacks clear support elsewhere in Scripture and is therefore improbable.

What Kind of Phrase is מְמַלְכֶת פְּהַגִּים

According to Waltke and O'Connor "Like many constructions in Hebrew, an appositional phrase has a head-first (regens-rectum) shape. It is differentiated from a construct phrase in that both parts of such a phrase remain completely distinct words and all its parts agree in definiteness and reference."⁶² Arnold and Choi add that "Such nouns generally agree in gender, number, and definiteness, have the same function in the syntax, and refer to the same person, place, or thing in the external world."⁶³

One could contend that the phrase מְמַלְכֶת פְּהַגִּים cannot be appositive because, firstly in every instance of the term מְמַלְכֶת (mamlechet) in the OT, is not completely distinct but rather is consistently linked to the noun it is adjacent to. Secondly, the two nouns do not match in number as מְמַלְכֶת is single while פְּהַגִּים is plural.

Moreover, Futato asserts that, feminine singular nouns beginning with a מ prefix and ending with הָ: often form the construct with segolization.⁶⁴ This suggests that מְמַלְכֶת is the construct state of מַמְלֵכָה. The phrase מְמַלְכֶת פְּהַגִּים is thus most likely a construct phrase.

⁶² Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 227.

⁶³ Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 22.

⁶⁴ Mark D. Futato, *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake, IN: Penn State University Press, 2003), 71.

What Kind of Priesthood

Two viewpoints emerge concerning the fundamental nature of Israel's corporate priesthood: the cultic outlook, which underscores the functional aspects akin to the duties of priests of that era, and the metaphorical interpretation, which omits ritualistic practices like sacrifices. The concept of metaphorical priesthood is most coherently interpreted within the theological framework of the New Testament. Traditionally, the role of a priest is that of a mediator, chosen from among the people to present sacrifices on their behalf, as affirmed in Heb 5:1. However, in the New Testament, this mediatory function is exclusively fulfilled by Christ (1 Tim 2:5), thereby precluding others from occupying this role in a literal sense. Consequently, the metaphorical priesthood does not entail the offering of physical sacrifices; rather, it involves the presentation of spiritual sacrifices, as emphasized in 1 Pet 2:5, along with the proclamation of God's salvific work (1 Pet 2:9). Whereas the priesthood in its cultic form centers on reconciling God and humanity through a system of ritual sacrifices, the metaphorical priesthood engages in spiritual offerings that likewise serve the purpose of reconciliation.

Cultic

Primarily the view that Israel's promised priestly role included the cultic function hinges on the understanding that they would be a people comprised wholly of priests. This view is held by Cassuto,⁶⁵ Ponyatovskiy,⁶⁶ and Hasel and Hasel.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Reprinted, Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 227.

⁶⁶ Feliks Ponyatovskiy, "Analysis of the Golden Calf Incident (Exodus 32:1-10) and Its Impact on the Sinai Covenant in the Pentateuchal Text" (PhD Dissertation, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Tagaytay, Philippines, 2012), 70.

⁶⁷ Hasel and Hasel, *The Promise*, 66.

Moreover, the instructions given regarding the building of an altar in the introduction to the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22-26) are regarded as an inference that every individual would participate in cultic activities. These instructions are addressed to all the Israelites, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel” (v. 22) and stipulate how a person should approach an altar (Exod 20:26).⁶⁸

Evidence for the cultic view is also deduced in Exod 24:5 where Moses sent “young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD” with some proposing that we may see here an implementation of the promise of the priesthood.⁶⁹

Another line of argument for the cultic viewpoint is the understanding that the promise of priesthood should be informed by the practice of the Aaronic priesthood. “The priesthood was a two-directional representational or mediatory task between God and the rest of the Israelites, bringing the knowledge of God to the people and bringing the sacrifices of the people to God.”⁷⁰ The notion that being designated as a “special treasure” signifies their status, while the promise of priesthood and holiness indicates their role⁷¹, appears to align with the cultic perspective, suggesting that function can encompass the recognized duties of priests acting on behalf of others.

Davies challenges this view by proposing that the essence of the excerpt from Exodus 19 revolves around the pledge of a divine gift, a significant privilege

⁶⁸ Ponyatovskiy, “Analysis of the Golden Calf Incident, 70.

⁶⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2011), 384.

⁷⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 355.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 273.

bestowed upon Yhwh's cherished people, contingent upon their continued faithfulness to Him. This grant primarily entails a deepened relationship with Him. The focus is not on the consideration of other nations as recipients of Israel's concern. Therefore, rather than seeking a functional definition of priesthood, the emphasis should be on an ontological one.⁷²

Davies suggests that the function of the priesthood of Israel would not constitute a gift thus implying it would be a burden. However, he overlooks the benefits of the function such as the privilege of access to God.⁷³

Metaphoric

The perspective that the promised priesthood pertains more to ontology than function encapsulates the metaphorical interpretation. In harmony with this perspective, some including Davies,⁷⁴ Waltke and Yu,⁷⁵ Rawlinson,⁷⁶ and Dumbrell,⁷⁷ interpret the priestly function as extending to all Israelites, granting them the authority to communicate with God through prayer and to serve as intermediaries between God and non-believers by setting a positive example. However, this mediation does not encompass sacrificial offerings. Texts that are cited in support of this viewpoint include (cf. Deut 4:5-8; Isa 42:1-4; 44:3-5; 45:22; 49:6; 51:4-5).

Unlike the cultic view which envisions every individual as a priest the metaphoric view applies the priesthood to the corporate body of Israel as a whole.

⁷² Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 97.

⁷³ Hamilton, *Exodus*, 384.

⁷⁴ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 97.

⁷⁵ Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 519.

⁷⁶ Rawlinson, "Exodus," 107.

⁷⁷ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 118.

Within the metaphoric perspective some restrict the promised priesthood to the exclusive privilege of directly approaching God's presence, symbolizing a closer, more personal connection with the divine, yet excluding the intermediary role of priesthood.⁷⁸

The metaphorical perspective also suggests that the priesthood symbolizes God's intended role for Israel in relation to other nations, portraying Israel's priesthood as passive in nature.⁷⁹ Moreover, advocates of the metaphorical interpretation assert that Israel's collective priesthood symbolized the nation's divine commission to spread the eternal message of salvation to all corners of the earth.⁸⁰

Dumbrell's argument in favor of the metaphoric view seems convincing when he posits that כֹּהֲנִים cannot reference a structured religious priesthood since "such an institution would be established through laws originating from the Sinai covenant. In this context, its usage appears to go beyond religious confines and might be associated with the blessings conferred upon Israel because of her relationship with Abraham, as implied by the covenant referenced in verse 5."⁸¹

Moran provides additional support for the metaphorical interpretation by referencing the views of Wildberger and Buber, who draw on 2 Sam 8:18 and 1 Kgs 4:5. In the first passage, David's sons are referred to as priests, and in the second, Zabud, the king's companion, is also called a priest. Wildberger, following Baudissin, concludes that "priest" was an honorary title given to the king's sons and high-ranking

⁷⁸ Alexander, *Exodus*, 452.

⁷⁹ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 425.

⁸⁰ Skip MacCarty, *In Granite or Ingrained? What the Old and New Covenants Reveal about the Gospel, the Law, and the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2007), 42.

⁸¹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 118.

court officials, none of whom had any specific cultic role. Similarly, the Israelites are called "priests" to signify their status as close confidants of King Yahweh. Buber goes further, arguing that these texts demonstrate that "priest" could be a completely secular title, with David's sons and Zabud holding a non-religious court position described as "the first at the hand of the king" in 1 Chr 18:17, the parallel to 2 Sam 8:18. In this way, the Israelites' role in Yahweh's kingdom is metaphorically likened to such a position.⁸²

Evaluation

The notion that "the instructions given regarding the building of an altar in the introduction to the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22-26) should be regarded as an inference that every individual would participate in cultic activities." Can be countered by the wider context of the covenant code where we see the cultic functions being restricted to Aaronic priesthood. The intent of the instructions seems to be prevent the improper building of altars to those who would later be individually obliged to build.

Moses' instruction to the young men of the Israelites to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings to the Lord (Exod 24:5) should not be viewed as a fulfillment of the covenantal promise in Exod 19:6. At this stage, the covenant was still in the process of being ratified and therefore not yet in effect. Furthermore, since the later restrictions on cultic activity had not yet been instituted, Moses utilized what was legally and ritually permissible at the time to carry out the necessary actions for the covenant's ratification.

⁸² Moran, "A Kingdom of Priests," 8-9.

The idea that the priesthood promised to Israel in Exod 19:6 should be informed by the Later Aaronic priesthood which included cultic functions is challenged by the fact that the priesthood pronounced on Christians in the New Testament (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10) cannot include offering of any sacrifices as that era has passed by the sacrifice of Jesus (Col 2:14). Furthermore, there is a promise of priesthood to those who will rise in the first general resurrection (Rev20:6), a priesthood which cannot include a mediatory role.

Summary

The purpose of the literature review was to clarify the meaning of the phrase מִמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים and thereby shed light on the nature of the covenantal promise in Exodus 19:6. Leading authorities on Hebrew syntax have been shown to generally affirm that the phrase should be understood as a construct rather than an appositional phrase. Analysis of grammatical, syntactical, and contextual factors has been shown to support interpreting the phrase as an attributive genitive, most accurately rendered as “priestly kingdom.” Furthermore, a critical evaluation of scholarly perspectives on whether the priesthood described is cultic or metaphorical has been shown to indicate that the arguments for a cultic interpretation are largely unconvincing, making the metaphorical reading the more plausible understanding.

The debate over whether the priesthood promised in Exodus 19:6 entailed cultic functions or was merely metaphorical has shown an inherent tension between this concept of priesthood and the Aaronic institution, thereby calling for a comparative examination of their relationship. Furthermore, the approach of interpreting the promised priesthood through the framework of the Aaronic model prompts critical reflection on the role of pre-Sinai priesthoods and how they may have

anticipated or prefigured the promised priesthood. This highlights the importance of a comparative analysis between the pre-Sinai and Sinai priestly structures.

CHAPTER 3

PRIESTHOOD FROM GENESIS TO NUMBERS

The priesthood as depicted from Genesis to Numbers may be delineated into two distinct phases: the Pre-Sinai and the Sinai priesthods. The Sinai phase appears to encompass both the anticipated corporate priesthood of Israel and the formal establishment of the Aaronic priesthood alongside the Levitical service. The biblical narrative first introduces the notion of priesthood in Genesis 14, where Melchizedek is identified as a priest of the Most High. Although the patriarchs exhibit priestly functions, the text does not explicitly designate them as priests. The figure of Moses represents a pivotal transition between the Pre-Sinai and Sinai priesthods, marking the shift from implicit to institutionalized priestly roles.

Melchizedek

Melchizedek is the first individual explicitly referred to as a priest, and his title, "priest of the Most High God," (Gen 14:18) identifies him as a worshiper of the True God, with the narrator acknowledging him as such.

Basis of Priesthood

Melchizedek's priesthood was likely based on a direct appointment by God, as there is no evidence linking it to lineage. He is explicitly called the priest of the Most High God (Gen 14:18) without being associated with any specific people in his priestly title. Furthermore, though he is the king of Salem, he is not identified as its priest.

Roles and Functions

Accepting Tithes. Despite fulfilling a priestly function, Abraham seems to recognize the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood by offering him a tenth of the spoils of battle (Gen 14:20; compare Heb 7:4). In accepting Abraham's tithes Melchizedek performed the priestly function of affording Abraham an avenue of showing his loyalty to God in returning to Him what He claims as His own.

Pronouncing Blessing. Melchizedek performed the priestly function by pronouncing blessings over Abraham, further affirming the superiority of his priesthood (Num 6:22–27; Heb 7:6, 7).

Access to the Divine Presence. Scripture does not specify how Melchizedek accessed the divine presence, but he likely did so through the sacrificial system, as that was the established means of worship during that time.

The Covenant and the Priesthood. The scriptures do not mention the existence of a covenant between God and Melchizedek, therefore, to specify the relationship between the two can only be speculative.

Leadership Authority and the Priesthood. Leadership authority and priesthood are linked in Melchizedek who is both the king of Salem and the priest of the Most High God (Gen 14:18), however, neither role seems dependent on the other.

The Patriarchs

The priesthood of the patriarchs is not mentioned as such but is implied from an analysis of their roles in their families which align with those of later priests. This priesthood is traced in the lives of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac whose family leadership included priestly functions on behalf of their families and society in general.

Basis of Priesthood

Family leadership. The patriarchal priesthood seems to be rooted in family leadership, with the responsibility passing to the heir who assumed leadership of the family.

“The Firstborn”. The Hebrew root בכר, found in many Semitic languages has the general meaning ‘(to be) early’. בכור, ‘firstborn’ is used for people and animals, and the first-born son’s privileges and responsibilities are known as his ‘birthright’ בְּכֹרָה. The first-born was regarded as ‘the beginning of (his) strength’ (רְאֵשִׁית אוֹנֵי – Gen 49:3; Deut 21:17; cf. Ps 78:51; 105:36)⁸³

The eldest son’s special position was widely recognized in the ancient Near East. The accompanying privileges were highly valued and in the OT included a larger inheritance, a special paternal blessing, family leadership and an honored place at mealtimes (Gen 25:5-6; 27:35-36; 37:21ff.; 42:37; 43:33; Deut 21:15-17).⁸⁴

Consequently, as the heads of the families held the priestly responsibility, this duty transferred to the firstborn son upon their passing, as he inherited the family's leadership. Thus, the firstborn was designated as the inheritor of the priesthood. In a declaration regarding the birthright of the eldest son, White asserts that the recipient of the birthright would assume the role of the family's priest.⁸⁵

⁸³D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 369; Baruch A. Levine, “Firstborn,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA in association with the Keter Pub. House, 2007), 2:45; Rol Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*. (New York: McGraw-hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), 41.

⁸⁴ Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 369.

⁸⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets: As Illustrated in the Lives of Holy Men of Old*, [Repr. d. Ausg.] 1956 (Boise, ID: Pacific Pr. Publ. Ass, 19), 177.

According to Deut 21:15-17, a father is forbidden to disregard the order of the birth of his sons and to assign the privileged position of the major beneficiary of his possessions to his favorite son who is not the firstborn. This is called “the right of the firstborn” (מִשְׁפַּט הַבְּכֹרָה), which is defined as “כִּי שְׁנַיִם” of all that he (i.e., the testator) has.”⁸⁶

However the status of "בְּכוֹר" was not automatically conferred, but rather designated, even though eldest sons typically enjoyed its privileges. Consequently, Deut 21 shouldn't be interpreted as closing a loophole where some children were falsely labeled firstborn to bypass primogeniture rules. Instead, it should be seen as a modification of customary practices, narrowing the criteria for selecting a בְּכוֹר.⁸⁷

That the status of בְּכוֹר is transferable is inferred from the story of Esau selling the בְּכוֹרָה to Jacob. Furthermore, that Jacob and his mother did not violate the cultural norm can be gleaned from the fact that while the biblical interpretation of Jacob's name as "supplanter" (Gen 27:36) may imply criticism of his exploitation of his brother's distress, there is no suggestion of a violation of norm in the narrative. Reuben, Jacob's son, is also reported to have forfeited the birthright (1 Chr 5:1). Similarly, the Psalmist declares that God appointed David as His firstborn (אֶרֶץ-אֱוִי (בְּכוֹר אֶתְגַּהֲרוּ, Ps 89:28).⁸⁸ When Elisha prayed for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, he simply wished to be considered the firstborn, i.e., the successor, of the prophet.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Matitiah Tsevat, “בְּכוֹר,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 2:125.

⁸⁷ Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 59.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 58.

⁸⁹ Thomas Lewis, “First-Begotten,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*. Completely rev. and reset ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979-1988), 2:308

בְּכוֹר should, therefore, be understood in a way that is less rigid than the conventional rendering "firstborn" normally implies.⁹⁰ This fact is reflected in בְּכוֹר metaphorical use in reference to Israel (Exod 4:22) and David (Ps 89:28).

Role and Functions

Building of altars of sacrifice and officiating on them. The patriarchs' function as priests can be observed in actions such as that of building altars of sacrifice and initiating worship on them (Gen 12:7-8; 13:18; 35:1-15). They performed the priestly function of mediating between humanity and God because their actions were aimed at forging and sustaining a bond with God while affording others similar opportunities.

Teaching of Truth. White elucidates Abraham's priesthood thus:

Abraham, "the friend of God," set us a worthy example. His was a life of prayer. Wherever he pitched his tent, close beside it was set up his altar, calling all within his encampment to the morning and evening sacrifice. When his tent was removed, the altar remained. In following years, there were those among the roving Canaanites who received instruction from Abraham; and whenever one of these came to that altar, he knew who had been there before him; and when he had pitched his tent, he repaired the altar, and there worshiped the living God.⁹¹

In addition to leading worship for his own family, Abraham also shared his knowledge of the true God with his neighbors. As a result, even after his departure, they continued to honor his teachings by sacrificing at the altars he had constructed. It underscores the idea of chosen people who are called to mediate His blessings to the world.

⁹⁰ Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 60.

⁹¹ White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets*, 128.

Intercession. Abraham exercised the priestly role of intercession when he interceded for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah and his nephew Lot (Gen 18:22-32). Because of this intercession Lot was saved (Gen 19:29).

Access to the Divine Presence

On occasion, God manifested himself to the patriarchs through theophanies. Malone suggests that the niph'al form of the verb הִפָּגַע is commonly acknowledged as the standard technical term for describing theophanies. He argues that this verb form alone provides sufficient evidence of God's appearances to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2, 24; 35:1, 9; 48:3). Furthermore, he observes that even during the patriarchal era, God was present with his people in a manner consistent with the priestly role he would later establish.⁹²

During the Patriarchal Age, God was also accessed at altars of sacrifice. An analysis of the story of Jacob suggests that the altar of sacrifice may have been considered to be at the base of the heavenly sanctuary corresponding to the courtyard of later sanctuaries. In his dream Jacob saw a stairway connecting heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending on it and at the top he saw God who renews with him the covenant which He had established with Abraham and Isaac (Gen 28:12-15). On awakening Jacob calls the place “the house of God” (Gen 28:17). On his return at a later date he built an altar there and named the place Bethel, meaning “House of God” thus suggesting that he believed the place to be part of God’s heavenly dwelling “the sanctuary” (Gen 35:6-7, 14). Furthermore, the definite article on the word translated “the place” in Gen 28:11 suggests it was a place known to the narrator of the story. Similarities in Abraham and Jacob’s sojourn near Bethel

⁹² Andrew S. Malone, *God’s Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 43 (London: Apollos, 2017), 74.

suggests “the place” where Jacob built his altar and called Bethel, is the same place where Abraham build an altar in his sojourn and was thus known to the narrator. At “this place” Abraham and Jacob in essence worshiped in the court of the Heavenly Sanctuary.

The Priesthood and the Covenant

The context implies that the covenant that God promises to establish with Noah (Gen 6:18) and later confirms with him (Gen 9:8-17) is, in essence, a covenant with the entire creation, with Noah serving as a priestly mediator, much like Moses would later mediate the establishment of God's covenant with Israel. Thus priesthood and covenant are shown to be linked.⁹³

There appears to be a connection between God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their priestly role. God explicitly states that He chose Abraham to instruct his household in keeping the way of the Lord by acting righteously and justly (Gen 18:19), a role that can be seen as priestly. God’s covenant with them also included a blessing for all nations (Gen 12:2; 26:4; 28:14), which may also be viewed as a priestly function, further reinforcing the link between the covenant and their priesthood.

Leadership Authority and the Priesthood

It has already been established that family leadership is a basis of priesthood during the patriarchal age, thus establishing a strong link between the priesthood and leadership authority.

⁹³ Block, *Covenant*, 43.

Moses

Although Moses is not explicitly called a priest, he is recognized because of the priestly functions he performs, furthermore, he is referred to as a priest in Ps 99:6 proving that although not explicitly called a priest he was indeed one. This lends credence to the notion that although not explicitly called priests the patriarchs were indeed so.

Basis of Priesthood

The priestly functions performed by Moses are carried out under God's direction thus suggesting that his priesthood should be understood as a direct appointment by God. God is therefore revealed as the one who initiates the priesthood, in alignment with Hebrews 5:4, which affirms that no one assumes the honor of priesthood on their own, but must be called by God to that role.

Roles and Functions

Mediation. Jethro Moses's father-in-law counseled him to serve as an intermediary between God and the people. This involved representing the people before God, bringing their concerns and cases to Him. Additionally, Moses is to convey God's commands and laws to the people, warning them to live accordingly (Exod 18:19, 20). Moses accepted this advice, thus embracing a dual role of representing both God and the people, akin to that of a priest.

After God revealed Himself to Israel through a theophany while delivering the Ten Commandments, the people were terrified and asked Moses to approach God on their behalf to receive His word and relay it to them (Exod 20:18-19). God was

pleased to communicate with the people through Moses (Exod 20:22). Thus Moses' mediatorial role was confirmed.⁹⁴

Intercession. Later during the golden calf incident when God wanted to destroy Israel because of their sin (Exod 32:9-10), Moses interceded for them (Exod 32:11-13), and the Lord relented from the harm He had intended on the people (Exod 32:14).

Leading in the sacrificial system. Moses like the patriarchs before him, also constructed altars for worship following the victory over Amalek and overseeing the covenant ratification ceremony (Exod 17:15; 24:4-8). Furthermore, Moses is depicted collaborating with the priests and speaking on matters of religious significance after the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood (Num 3:38-39; 4:34-49; 14:5; 16:3; 26:1-3; 31:51-54; Deut 27:9).

Access to the Divine Presence

Moses first encounters God's presence at Mount Horeb when the angel of the Lord appears to him in a flame of fire from within a bush (Gen 3:2). Later, on the mountain, God's presence is revealed to him, and though Moses cannot see God directly, he speaks with God face to face (Exod 19:20). Later, at the tent of meeting outside the Israelite camp, God descends in a pillar of cloud to converse with Moses face to face (Exod 33:9-11). Additionally, Moses accessed God at the altar of sacrifice and within the sanctuary in the most holy place above the mercy seat between the golden cherubim (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89).

⁹⁴ Malone, *God's Mediators*, 35.

The Covenant and Priesthood

Moses functions as the mediator of the covenant at its establishment at Mount Sinai. He approaches the divine presence to receive the terms of the covenant (Exod 19:3-6) and relays them to the people (Exod 19:7-8) and carries the people's response back to God. He builds an altar for the covenant ratification ceremony and sprinkles some of the blood onto it and some on the people (Exod 24:4-8). At the inauguration of the sanctuary, he again performs priestly roles (Exod 40:18-33). There is thus a close relationship between Moses's priestly role and the covenant.

Leadership Authority and the Priesthood

Moses held both leadership authority and a priestly role (Exod 18:13-26; 24:3-8). These roles appear intertwined with the priesthood seemingly arising from his leadership. As the nation's leader before the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood, he carried out all the functions that would later be reserved for the Aaronic priests.

The Priests of Exodus 19:22, 24

Ambiguity surrounds the priests mentioned in Exod 19:22, 24. The text suggests a group known as priests before the establishment of the Sinai Covenant. This group could be the firstborn sons or heads of families who functioned as priests before the ordination of Aaron and his descendants as Cassuto suggests.⁹⁵ Malone argues that the language used is probably proleptic, meaning the priests mentioned were those who would later be granted the priesthood.⁹⁶ However, Enns contends that the references to priests in Exodus 19:22 and 24 point to the presence of an already

⁹⁵ Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 234.

⁹⁶ Malone, *God's Mediators*, 88.

active priesthood during the Sinai events, rather than a merely anticipatory or future institution. He observes that although Moses appears to downplay the need to consecrate priests, mentioning only the people's restriction from approaching the mountain and omitting any reference to the priests in verse 23, God's explicit instruction in verse 24 to address both the people and the priests indicates that a functioning priestly group was already in place.

The argument made by Enns seems stronger as it is supported by evidence from the immediate context while that of Malone lacks scriptural support and rather seems to be based on theological reasoning.

Enns' argument appears more compelling, as it is grounded in the immediate textual context, whereas Malone's position relies primarily on theological reasoning and lacks direct scriptural support. The most plausible identification of the priests mentioned is the firstborn sons and elders, whose priestly roles are attested in the pre-Sinai tradition.

The Promise of Priesthood in Exodus 19:6

The outcome of the literature review that מְמַלְכֶת כֹּהֲנִים is an attributive genitive giving the translation "Priestly Kingdom," which suggests that the priesthood promised in Exod 19:6 is a collective priesthood that encompasses the entire nation. It is a symbolic priesthood that does not involve any ritualistic or cultic duties. This view is supported by contextual considerations.

In clauses 3:4 "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob" and 3:5 "and tell the house of Israel", it is clear that God's message is directed to the entire Israelite community, not just an elite group. Clauses 4:1-5 call upon the whole nation to remember God's redemptive acts toward them and against the Egyptians, forming the foundation of the covenant God is establishing with Israel. The conditional clauses

indicate that Israel's election depends on their collective obedience. Clause 5:4 specifies the outcome of their obedience as in that they will become God's special treasure while clause 6:1 further defines this status as being "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation."

Clauses 3:4 and 3:5 ("Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the house of Israel") along with Clauses 6:2 and 6:3 ("These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel") create what is known as an *inclusio* which is a literary structure where a passage begins and ends with similar phrases, reinforcing its unity, coherence, and thematic connection. This framing device highlights that Moses is explicitly instructed to address the entire nation of Israel. The *inclusio* leaves no ambiguity about whom the covenant's terms are directed to, affirming that they apply to the whole community rather than a select group.

Bundi's study of the conjunctions in the passage rightly notes that they play a crucial role in determining the relationship between clauses 5c, 6a, and 6b.⁹⁷ His study determines that the waw-conjunction between these clauses functions as copulative. It also notes that the copulative conjunction functions as a hendiadys and not a co-ordinate conjunction.⁹⁸ This means the three promises point to the same referent and overlap or interrelate although they do not logically relate to one another. The context indicates that the common referent to the triple promise is Israel. Thus the context shows that the priesthood promised is corporate.

⁹⁷ Andrew Bundi, "Israel as a Kingdom of Priests: An Exegetical Study of Exodus 19:6a," 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 23.

The Basis and Nature of the Priesthood

Obedience. The promised priesthood is conditioned on Israel's obedience to God's voice and keeping His covenant (Exod 19:5), thus showing that the corporate priesthood could only be realized when the majority within Israel fulfilled the stipulated condition.

Ordination. Scholars such as Davies,⁹⁹ Nicholson,¹⁰⁰ and Rodriguez¹⁰¹ have drawn parallels between the rituals of the covenant ratification in Exod 24:1-11 and the ordination of priests.¹⁰² This suggests that the ratification ceremony essentially serves as the ordination of the nation into the priesthood promised in Exod 19:6. Before the ceremony, a barrier was erected around the mountain where God's presence would be revealed (Exod 19:11), and later, an altar of sacrifice was built at the mountain's base (Exod 24:4). Only Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel were permitted to ascend the mountain and worship from a distance, while Moses alone approached the divine presence (Exod 24:1-2). Additionally, Moses, Aaron, the seventy elders, Nadab, and Abihu ate and drank on the mountain before the Lord (Exod 24:9-11). Furthermore, the people were required to wash themselves and their garments as an act of consecration (Exod 19:10-11). The ratification of the Sinai covenant also involved sacrifices, including burnt offerings and peace offerings

⁹⁹ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 122.

¹⁰⁰ E W Nicholson, "The Covenant Ritual in Exodus XXIV 3-8," *Vetus Testamentum* 32, no. 1 (1982): 84.

¹⁰¹ Angel Manuel Rodriguez, "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 24, no. 2 (1986): 132-34.

¹⁰² The parallel drawn between the covenant ratification ceremony and the ordination ceremony for the priests is discussed in detail in chapter 4 under the topic "The Basis of Priesthood" and sub topic "ordination."

(Exod 24:5). Some of the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the altar (Exod 24:6), while the rest was sprinkled on the people as part of the ritual (Exod 24:5).

The Role and Functions

The Role and duties of the Priesthood are implied in the wording of the promise itself. The conditional nature of the promise suggests that their corporate priestly role is their obedience to God's voice and covenant, thus their positive influence towards the nations is their priestly role. Their priestly role may also involve teaching God's truth to other nations as a natural result of knowing and living the truth.

Access to the Divine Presence

The general population of Israel which constitutes the corporate priesthood does not have direct access to the divine presence and can only have access through the Aaronic priestly ministry, however, the presence of the sanctuary in their midst provided them greater proximity to the divine presence than other nations.

The Covenant and the Priesthood

Israel's corporate priesthood is connected to the Sinai covenant, which was established as part of the covenantal promise. The relationship between priesthood and covenant can be rightly assumed, since both function as essential components in the outworking of God's plan of salvation.

Leadership Authority and the Priesthood

Leadership authority and Israel's corporate priesthood are distinct, with God as the ultimate sovereign. Moses serves as the visible leader under God, with additional leaders appointed to oversee various divisions of the congregation.

The Beginning of the Aaronic Priesthood and Its Progression in Exodus and Leviticus

The Aaronic priesthood is first alluded to when Moses is instructed about the lighting of the Tabernacle, with Aaron and his sons designated to tend the lamps for all generations (Exod 27:20-21). Exod 28–29 offers detailed specifications for their formal appointment, attire, and ordination.

Ponyatovskiy correctly points out that while the concept of priesthood is initially confusing given the promise of priesthood to the entire nation of Israel, the narrative in Exodus indicates the necessity for an additional priesthood centered on Aaron and his sons.¹⁰³

The Basis of the Aaronic Priesthood

Appointment. In Exod 28:1, God specifically appoints Aaron and his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar to the priesthood. Their appointment, before the Golden Calf incident in Exodus 32, indicates that the Aaronic priesthood was not a reaction to that event but was part of God's original plan for His people, to whom He had promised a priesthood. Consequently, the Israelite priesthood and the Aaronic priesthood were intended to coexist.

Lineage. The appointment of Aaron and his sons as priests was meant to extend to their descendants, as shown in Ezra 2:61-62 and Neh 7:63-64, where certain individuals were excluded from the priesthood because they were not found in the genealogical records. Lineage thus became the basis of the priesthood after the initial appointment, extending the priestly role to the descendants of the appointed priests.

Attire. The purpose of Aaron and his descendants' priestly attire was to consecrate them, enabling them to perform their priestly duties (Exod 28:3). It can be

¹⁰³ Ponyatovskiy, "Analysis of the Golden Calf Incident", 153.

argued that to a certain extent, their priestly attire gave them a basis for their very priesthood since they could only perform their core duties only while clad in their priestly attire.

The onyx stones, engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and placed on the shoulders of the ephod (Exod 28:9-12), along with the twelve precious stones, each engraved with a name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel and placed on the breastplate of judgment (Exod 28:15-21), symbolized that the Aaronic priesthood was exclusively for the benefit of the nation of Israel.

Roles and Duties

Maintenance and service of the tabernacle. The additional Aaronic priesthood was required for the maintenance and service of the tabernacle, which served as a place for God's presence and worship. Aaron and his sons are portrayed as maintainers of order within the tabernacle, with their duties emphasized over their status as priests. Their ordination, particularly Aaron's, is depicted as integral to the tabernacle itself, suggesting a close association between the priesthood and the sanctuary.¹⁰⁴

Maintenance of corporate priesthood. In addition to the Aaronic priesthood's responsibility of ministering in the Tabernacle, Hartley rightly asserts that it was established to help the Israelites sustain their relationship with the Holy God.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the nation of priests was empowered to fulfill their role and uphold their status through the Aaronic priesthood.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 153.

¹⁰⁵ J. E. Hartley, "Holy and Holiness, Clean and Unclean," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 430.

Presenting offerings and sacrifices. In Leviticus, the priests had key responsibilities in presenting offerings and sacrifices. For burnt offerings, while the individual bringing the offering chose and killed the animal (Lev 1:3-5a), the priests were in charge of managing the blood and ensuring the proper burning on the altar (Lev 1:5b, 7-9b, 11b, 12b, 13b, 15-17). The priests performed the killing for bird offerings (Lev 1:14-15). In grain offerings, the priests burned a portion on the altar as a memorial and kept the remaining part for their own use (Lev 2:2, 3, 8, 9, 16).

For peace offerings, the priests managed the blood and burned specified internal organs and fat on the altar (Lev 3:2, 5, 8, 11, 13, 16). In the case of sin offerings for unintentional sins, the priests offered a bull for themselves, handled its blood, and burned certain parts on the altar (Lev 4:3-12). They followed a similar procedure for the sin offerings for the entire congregation (Lev 4:16-21). For the sins of a ruler or an ordinary person, the priest took care of the blood and burned the fat of the sacrificed animal (Lev 4:22-35). For trespass offerings, the priest managed the offering process, whether it involved a female lamb or goat, two turtledoves or pigeons, or fine flour, offering them as sin or burnt offerings (Lev 5:5-13).

Instructing the Israelites in God's laws. Besides handling these sacrifices, priests were responsible for instructing the Israelites in God's laws (Lev 10:11). The responsibility of instructing Israel in the law indicates that the priest's role extended beyond facilitating reconciliation after sin—it also involved helping to prevent sin from occurring in the first place.

Leprosy issues. The Priests also had the duty of inspecting people and objects for leprosy (Lev 13). When the people and objects previously leprosy were

deemed clean the priests performed the purification rituals (Lev 14) which confirmed their cleansing.

Annual Service. Annually, the high priest performed atonement rituals for the sanctuary, altar, priests, and the entire congregation (Lev 16). In contrast, the other priests were responsible for daily tasks. This suggests that the priesthood had ranks or levels of holiness, as some propose.

Access to the Divine Presence

The priests access the divine presence through the sacrificial system on behalf of the people of Israel. The sanctuary serves as the center of worship, where the priests offer sacrifices at the altar on behalf of the people (Lev 1:5b, 7-9b, 11b, 12b, 13b, 15-17; Num 28:3-8). They also minister daily in the holy place (Exod 30:7-8), while the high priest alone enters the most holy place once a year (Lev 16). Only the high priest has access to the visible manifestation of God's presence above the mercy seat between the golden cherubim (Lev 16:2).

The Covenant and Priesthood

The text of the Sinai Covenant appears to be confined to Exodus 19–24. However, Exodus 24:18 states that Moses remained on the mountain for forty days, a period that extends through Exodus 25 up to the golden calf incident in Exodus 32. Since the laws of the Sinai Covenant were given during this time, these chapters should be considered part of the covenant text. The appointment of Aaron and his sons as priests in Exodus 28, along with the explanation of the priesthood through Exodus 31, suggests a close connection between the Aaronic priesthood and the covenant. Moreover, the Aaronic priesthood seems to be specifically designed to uphold and sustain the covenant through their service at the altar and in the sanctuary on behalf of Israel.

A link between the Sinai Covenant and the sanctuary is evident in that the central point of the sanctuary, the most holy, exists to house the Ark of the Covenant. Heb 9:1 confirms this link in stating that the first covenant had a sanctuary that contained the Ark of the Covenant which contained the Tables of the Covenant (Heb 9:4). The service of the Aaronic priesthood in the sanctuary which is linked to the covenant effectively links the covenant and the priesthood.

Leadership Authority and the Priesthood

The biblical texts of Exodus and Leviticus do not attribute leadership authority to the Aaronic priesthood, indicating a distinction between priestly and leadership roles. Moses retains leadership authority alongside the appointed leaders of the various divisions of the people (Exod 18:25-26).

Priesthood in Numbers

The discussion of priesthood in numbers largely focuses on the Levite's service as assistants to the priests, however, the Aaronic priests are also mentioned albeit to a lesser extent. During the census of the children of Israel, the Levites were excluded as they were chosen from among the Israelites to replace the firstborn (Num 3:11-13).

Basis of the Priesthood

The Levites held their office by the direct appointment of God (Num 1:47-53; 3:6-9). Their fidelity in choosing to be on the Lord's side during the golden calf incident and obeying the directive to slay the unrepentant (Exod 32:25-28) may be the reason why they were chosen. This is implied when Moses bids them to consecrate themselves to the Lord that He blesses them for their act of opposing their sons and brothers for God's sake (Exod 32:29).

Roles and Functions

The Levites were appointed over the Tabernacle of Testimony and its furnishings and all things that belonged to it and where to camp around it (Num 1:47-53). Additionally, they served the Aaronic priests and attended to the needs of the congregation near the tabernacle, fulfilling their duties in the service of the sanctuary (Num 3:6-9). Organized into three divisions—Gershon, Kohath, and Merari—the Levites had distinct roles:

Gershonites. The Gershonites were responsible for the tent and its coverings and the curtain at the entrance of the tent of meeting. They were also responsible for the hangings of the courtyard, and the curtains around the tabernacle and the altar (Num 3:25-26).

Kohathites. The Kohathites were responsible for everything found within the tabernacle. They handled the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary in their ministry, as well as the curtains and all related tasks (Num 3:31-32).

Merarites. The Merarites were tasked with the frames, crossbars, posts, sockets, and utensils of the tabernacle, along with all associated duties (Numbers 3:36-37). Oversight of these responsibilities was held by the Aaronic priests (Num 3:32; 4:16, 27-28, 33; 7:8).

Administration of the law. The priests administered the law of jealousy when a man suspected his wife of infidelity (Num 5:12-31). This priestly function shows God's concern with the mental health of His people and the stability of the marriage.

Blessing. The Priests blessed the Israelites in a specific way (Num 6:24-26) to place the name of the Lord upon them, ensuring His blessing (Num 6:27). The priests facilitated God's blessing of the people.

Blowing trumpets. The priests blew the trumpets when the Israelites went to war and during times of gladness at the feasts (Num 10:8-10). The involvement of the priests in times of joy and distress suggests God's interest in all aspects of His people's lives.

Receiving gifts. The priests received the holy gifts of the Israelites and the heave offering as their portion (Num 18:8). The sin offerings were reserved for the priests and their sons (Num 18:9-10), while the heave offerings could also be eaten by their daughters (Num 18:11). The Levites were given the tithes of the Israelites (Num 18:21, 24) as their due for the work they performed in the tabernacle. They, in turn, gave a tithe as a heave offering for the priests' use (Num 18:26-28) as their due for their service. The Levites and priests depended on these tithes for their survival, as they did not receive an inheritance of land like their brethren (Num 18:20, 24). The Levites and priests receiving tithes and offerings provided the Israelites with a means to fulfill their obligations and present their gifts to God.

Access to the Divine Presence

As assistants to the priests, the Levites are prohibited from entering the sanctuary and from performing specific duties reserved for the priests (Num 3:6-10; 18:2-3; 4:19-20) thus they have no access to the divine presence and together with the general population rely on the Aaronic priesthood to represent them before God.

The Covenant and the Priesthood

The link between the covenant and the priesthood is preserved through the assistant priesthood of the Levitical service. This link is seen in that the Levites participate in a ministry that is closely tied to the covenant through their supportive role towards the Aaronic priesthood.

Leadership Authority and the Priesthood

In the book of Numbers, the Levites do not hold leadership authority, and similarly, the priests continue to lack such authority as seen in Exodus and Leviticus. This indicates that the formal establishment of the priesthood results in a separation between leadership authority and priestly function.

CHAPTER 4

A COMPARISON OF THE PRIESTHOODS

The Basis of Priesthood

Family Leadership and בְּכוֹר

In the patriarchal age, priesthood was closely tied to family leadership, with the head of the household serving as both leader and priest. The passing on of the leadership to next generation also included the passing on of the priesthood simultaneously.

The concept of בְּכוֹר inheriting family leadership and the priesthood extends beyond individual family structures to the national level, as seen in Israel's designation as God's בְּכוֹר. Although Israel was not the first nation chronologically, it was chosen for this special status, anticipating its priestly calling in Exodus 19:6. Just as בְּכוֹר and priesthood were intertwined in patriarchal society, Israel's role as God's בְּכוֹר signifies its appointment to the corporate priesthood.

Ordination

The ritual of the ratification of the covenant in Exod 24:1-11 and that of the ordination of priests have been identified as parallel by some scholars, such as

Davies,¹⁰⁶ Nicholson,¹⁰⁷ and Rodriguez.¹⁰⁸ This has rightly led to the conclusion that the ritual of the covenant is Israel's ordination to the priesthood.¹⁰⁹

Rodriguez correctly argues that there is a symbolic parallel between the structure of the sanctuary and the events surrounding the giving of the law at Mount Sinai in the Book of Exodus.¹¹⁰ He suggests that the arrangements at Mount Sinai, such as the fence around the mountain, the limited access of certain individuals to specific areas, and Moses' exclusive ability to approach the presence of Yahweh, mirror the layout and functions of the sanctuary described later in Exodus.¹¹¹

Specifically:

1. The fence around the mountain and the altar at its foot correspond to the court of the sanctuary and its altar of burnt offering.
2. The limited group of people permitted to ascend partway up the mountain corresponds to the priests of the sanctuary, who could enter the first apartment or "holy place."
3. Moses' unique privilege of approaching the very presence of Yahweh corresponds to the high priest's exclusive role in entering the inner apartment or "most holy place" of the sanctuary.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 122.

¹⁰⁷ Nicholson, "The Covenant Ritual in Exodus XXIV 3-8," 84.

¹⁰⁸ Rodriguez, "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus," 132-34.

¹⁰⁹ Nicholson, "The Covenant Ritual in Exodus XXIV 3-8," 84.

¹¹⁰ Rodriguez, "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus," 132.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 132-34.

¹¹² *Ibid* 132-34.

It therefore follows that the location of the covenant ratification ceremony at the foot of the mountain (Exod 24:4) corresponds to the consecration of the priests at the door of the tent of the meeting (Exod 29:4; Lev 8:3).

During the ordination of Aaron and his Sons, they underwent ritual washing and were dressed in priestly garments (Lev 8:6-9). This mirrors the directive given to the Israelites, who were instructed to sanctify themselves and cleanse their garments before taking part in the covenant ratification ceremony.

At Aaron and his sons' ordination, various sacrifices were offered, including a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, as well as a ram for a consecration offering (Lev 8.14-23). These sacrifices served to consecrate Aaron and his sons for their priestly duties, purifying them and setting them apart for service to God. Similarly, at the ratification of the Sinai covenant, sacrifices were offered, including burnt offerings and peace offerings (Exod. 24:5). While the contexts differ, both sets of sacrifices convey the themes of consecration, purification, and commitment.

At Mount Sinai some blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled on the altar (Exod. 24:6) and similarly at the ordination of Aaron and his sons (Lev 8.15, 19, 24). In both instances, the act of applying blood to the altar served as a significant ritual element. The people were sprinkled with some of the blood of the sacrifices (Exod. 24:5) and similarly the priests were sprinkled with blood (Exod 29:21-28; Lev 8:30).

While the priests partake of the consecration meal at the Tabernacle's entrance (Lev 8:31), Moses, Aaron, the seventy elders, Nadab, and Abihu eat and drink on the mountain (Exod 24:9-11). Here, the similarity lies in the act of eating before the Lord, while the distinction is in the location: the nobles dine at a location corresponding to the holy place, whereas the priests are positioned at the entrance.

Whereas all the people pledged to do all that the Lord had said (Exod 24:3, 7) but unfortunately failed to honor their pledge, Aaron and his sons did all the things that the Lord had commanded them (Lev 8:36).

Appointment

The fact that Melchizedek is referred to as the priest of the Most High (Gen 14:18) seems to imply divine appointment which serves as a precursor to the Aaronic priesthood, which is explicitly instituted through God's designation (Exod 28:1). Likewise, the Levitical priesthood follows the same pattern (Num 3:5-9), being initiated by God's appointment. In each case, priesthood is established through divine selection, emphasizing the central role of God's authority in determining priestly service. This exercise of God's discretion in the initiation of priestly service is somewhat reflected in God's choice of Israel's corporate priesthood. Thus from Adam and Eve to Israel's corporate priesthood, the Aaronic priesthood, and Levitical service, divine appointment is a recurring theme. Thus, the promised priesthood of Exod 19:6 exhibits continuity with earlier priesthoods because it exists due to divine appointment.

Obedience

Obedience which served as the foundation for Israel's corporate priesthood was also implied in other priesthoods. Thus the promised priesthood exhibits continuity with earlier priesthoods in that obedience is required. For instance, Abraham's obedience and his ability to guide his descendants in following God (Gen 18:19) may be seen as the basis for God establishing His covenant with him, ultimately leading to Israel's corporate priesthood. The patriarchs' priesthood inherently demanded obedience to God's law, requiring them to exert a godly

influence on their neighbors. This principle is evident in God's selection of Jacob over Esau (Mal 1:2-3; Rom 9:13) as the heir to Abraham's covenant promises, including the priesthood. In His foreknowledge, God foresaw the distinct characters of the two brothers—recognizing Esau as godless (Heb 12:16-17) and Jacob as spiritually inclined (Gen 35:1-3) and therefore chose Jacob over Esau.

Roles and Functions

Unlike the patriarchs' and Moses' role of building altars and offering sacrifices, both of which foreshadowed the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods, Israel's corporate priesthood did not include these responsibilities, as they were performed on behalf of the people by the Aaronic priests. Similarly, roles such as accepting tithes and pronouncing blessings, seen in Melchizedek's priesthood and later in the Aaronic priesthood, were not part of Israel's corporate priestly function. Thus Israel's corporate priesthood differed from earlier priesthoods in its lack of specific duties thus exhibiting discontinuity with them. Israel's role was their obedience to God which would exert a positive influence on other nations.

Access to the Divine Presence

In the patriarchal era access to the divine was primarily centered on the altar of sacrifice. Which has been shown to have been part of the heavenly courtyard of the heavenly sanctuary. There were exceptional instances when God revealed Himself directly, such as through a theophany to Abraham (Gen 18) and when He spoke with Moses face to face on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:20), and above the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89). Apart from Moses, only the high priest had access to God's presence in the Most Holy Place. By God's design, Israel's corporate priesthood coexisted with the Aaronic priesthood, which alone had direct access to the visible representation of the divine presence. As a result, Israel's corporate priesthood

only experienced mediated access to God. Likewise, the Levites, despite serving as priestly assistants, also had only mediated access. This mediated access ensured the continuation of Israel's corporate priesthood, allowing the nation to benefit from its proximity to the divine presence. While earlier priesthoods had access to the divine presence, the promised priesthood only had mediated access, thus marking discontinuity with the earlier priesthood. The Aaronic priesthood which emerges after the promised priesthood exhibits continuity with earlier priesthoods in having access to the divine presence.

The Priesthood and the Covenant

While the patriarchal priesthood is connected to the covenant, Melchizedek's priesthood differs as no covenant is explicitly recorded to be connected to it in the biblical text. Moses, as the mediator of the Sinai Covenant, fulfills a priestly role, reinforcing the pattern of a connection between covenant and priesthood set from the beginning. The priesthood promised to Israel is a covenantal promise, further highlighting the deep connection between priesthood and covenant. Similarly, the Aaronic priesthood and Levitical service are closely tied to the Sinai Covenant, functioning as key facilitators of its fulfillment. The connection between priesthood and covenant is evident throughout. Thus, the promised priesthood exhibits continuity with earlier priesthoods in being intimately connected to the covenant.

Leadership Authority and the Priesthood

Throughout biblical history, leadership authority and priesthood are sometimes linked but remain distinct roles, with varying degrees of overlap depending on the context. This connection between leadership and priesthood is pronounced in the patriarchal age, where family leadership directly corresponds to priestly function, reinforcing a strong link between the two roles.

A similar dynamic is seen in Melchizedek, who serves as both king of Salem and priest of God Most High (Gen 14:18), yet his leadership and priestly roles are not shown to be dependent on one another. Likewise, Moses combines both leadership authority and priestly function, with his priesthood seemingly emerging from his role as leader (Exod 24:3-8).

However, in Israel's corporate priesthood, its collective nature suggests no direct connection to leadership authority. This distinction is further evident in the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods, where neither the Aaronic priests (Exodus – Leviticus) nor the Levitical priests hold leadership authority, as governance remained with Moses and appointed leaders (Exod 18:25-26).

While the patriarchs, Melchidezek, and Moses combined leadership and priestly roles, later priesthoods (Aaronic, Levitical, and Israel's corporate priesthood) were distinct from leadership authority. The promised priesthood thus exhibits discontinuity with earlier priesthoods in being separate from leadership authority. This discontinuity is maintained in the establishment of the Aaronic priesthood and Levitical service.

Summary

The promised priesthood of Exod 19:6 reflects both continuity and discontinuity with earlier priesthoods. Continuity is seen in the themes of divine appointment, covenant connection, the concept of **בְּכֹרֶת**, and the shared priestly function of godly influence. Discontinuity arises in the areas of access to God's presence, specific roles and duties, and the separation of priesthood from leadership authority.

The comparison between the promised priesthood of Exodus 19:6 and the Aaronic priesthood highlights a shared feature: divine appointment. While the

promised priesthood is primarily based on obedience, the Aaronic priesthood is founded on divine selection, continuing through Aaron's lineage regardless of the obedience of its members. The Aaronic priesthood was chiefly cultic in its duties, though it encompassed other responsibilities as well. In contrast, the defining role of the promised priesthood was obedience. This promised priesthood gains mediated access to God through the Aaronic order. Both priesthoods are closely tied to the covenant, the promised priesthood being a covenant promise while the Aaronic priesthood seems to be designed to maintain the covenant. While leadership authority and priesthood had been united before. At Sinai, a deliberate separation is introduced between priestly and leadership roles. The promised priesthood and the Aaronic priesthood appear to function as complementary components of a unified priesthood, with aspects of both being present in the pre-Sinai priesthoods.

Implications for Theology

The concept that the Sinai priesthood, which merges Israel's corporate priesthood with the Aaronic priesthood, mirrors earlier priesthoods that embodied elements of both points to the consistency of God's approach in addressing the problem of sin. Like the Sinai priesthood, these earlier priesthoods were dual: serving a cultic role to help God's covenant people maintain their relationship with Him, and a metaphorical role to influence the ungodly to repentance. The consistency of God in His use of the priesthood also points to the importance of Priesthood in the plan of salvation.

The impartiality of God's love for all humanity is affirmed by God's use of priesthood to access both his professed people and those who have not yet committed to being in a relationship with Him. God's desire to save all of humanity is affirmed in His use of priesthood in His plan of salvation.

The consistency of God's use of priesthood in His plan of saving humanity suggests that we can look forward to His continual use of this tool even up to the close of probation. This suggests that this study can be used as a foundation to understanding even the priesthood of the New Covenant

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The study begins with a review of relevant literature to determine the meaning of the phrase מְמִלְכָת פְּהָגִים in Exod 19:6 thus serving as the basis of a comparative analysis of pre-Sinai and Sinai priesthoods. The phrase can be taken to be either a construct phrase or an appositional one, but after consulting the foremost authorities on syntax, the conclusion is that it is a construct phrase. An outline of plausible grammatical variants and an evaluation of them concludes that the most probable rendering of the phrase is that it is an attributive genitive, translating as “priestly kingdom”. The review of relevant literature also concludes that Israel was promised a metaphoric priesthood as opposed to a cultic one.

Following the establishment of the meaning of the phrase מְמִלְכָת פְּהָגִים, the study systematically traces the development of the priesthood concept from Genesis to Numbers, employing defined evaluative criteria. Utilizing these same criteria, it then undertakes a comparative analysis of the Sinai and pre-Sinai priesthoods, thereby illuminating both the elements of continuity and discontinuity between them. The findings of this analysis suggest that the promised priesthood of Israel and the Aaronic priesthood should be understood as complementary components within a unified priestly structure, with aspects of both evident in the pre-Sinai configurations. The study concludes by articulating the theological implications that emerge from this comparative evaluation.

Conclusions

The study aimed to answer the question: What does the phrase מְמִלְכַת כֹּהֲנִים mean and how does its meaning define Israel's promised priesthood of Exod. 19:6? A review of relevant literature determined that the phrase is an attributive genitive translated as "priestly kingdom". This translation suggests the metaphoric nature of Israel's priesthood a suggestion which is confirmed by the literature review. Furthermore the context is shown to affirm a corporate priesthood as opposed to the idea of a nation comprised of individual priests.

The study also aimed to answer the question: How does the Pre-Sinai priesthood relate to Israel's promised priesthood of Exod 19:6? It determined that the promised priesthood of Exod 19:6 reflects both continuity and discontinuity with earlier priesthoods. Continuity is seen in the themes of divine appointment, covenant connection, the concept of קָבוֹר which is institutionalized in its application to Israel and the shared priestly function of godly influence. Discontinuity arises in the areas of access to God's presence, specific roles and duties, and the separation of priesthood from leadership authority.

Furthermore, the study aimed to answer the question: How does the Aaronic priesthood and the Levitical service compare and relate to Israel's promised priesthood of Exod 19:6 and pre-Sinai priesthood? It established that the Aaronic priesthood and the promised priesthood of Exod 19:6 were designed to coexist thus suggesting that the Aaronic priesthood did not emerge as a result of Israel's rebellion in the golden calf incident. Furthermore, while the Aaronic priesthood primarily exhibits cultic functions, Israel's promised priesthood is metaphoric in nature. The Aaronic priesthood and Israel's priesthood combined embrace all aspects of the

pre-Sinai priesthood, suggesting that they are complementary and constitute a complete priesthood together.

Another aim of this study was to answer the question: What are the implications of the comparative analysis of the Sinai and pre-Sinai priesthoods for theology? The study found that the promised corporate priesthood and the Aaronic priesthood represent the institutionalization of pre-Sinai priestly functions, serving a dual purpose: maintaining the covenant relationship between God and His people through the cultic functions of the priesthood, and initiating a relationship with God through its metaphorical role. This finding suggests that God has been consistent in His use of the priesthood in His plan of salvation.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that future study analyze the term **קָהָן** in Exod 19:5 and the phrase **קָהָן קָדוֹשׁ** in Exod 19:6 and explore their relation to the phrase **מִמְלֶכֶת** **וּפְהָגִים** in Exod 19:6 and the implications on the covenantal promise at Sinai.
2. Further study is also encouraged to explore the elements of the Sinai Covenant in comparison to the elements of the New Covenant with particular attention to the implications for the continuity and discontinuity between the covenants.

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