

A Word Study by Pastor Melissa Scott, Ph.D.

“Priest”

Etymological investigation of:

1) priest 2) hierarchy 3) minister

1) Priest (Old English) *preost*, Old High German *prest*, Old Frisian *prestere* from Latin presbyter – from Greek πρεσβύτερος – elder, presbyter. Origin of Old English obscure.

Signification

Etymologically “priest” represents Greek πρεσβύτερος
Latin – presbyter, elder

By 375 AD or even perhaps earlier, thus long before this word was taken into English, the Latin word *sacerdos*, closer to the Greek ἱερεύς applied to the sacrificing priests of the heathen deities, as well as the translation of the scriptures referring to the Jewish priests, and then applied to Christian ministers in time becoming a synonym of “presbyter.” In Old English, Latin “presbyter” was represented *preost* and the Latin *sacerdos*. At the close of the Old English period *sacerdos* fell into disuse and *preost*, *prest*, and Old French *prestre* became the current word, *pretre* – priest.

For the benefit of this study, included is the etymological background for *sarcerdos*.

Sacerdos – from the Latin *sacerdotalis*, pertaining to a priest, from *sacerdos* (genitive *sacerdotis*) “priest” literally, “offerer of sacrifices” from *sacer* – sacred, holy + stem of *dare* – to give. Relative to this is the word “sacred,” from an obsolete word *sacren*, to make holy. Latin *sacrare*, to make sacred, dedicated, holy from a Proto Indo European (PIE) root *sak-* to sanctify.

The word “minister” c.1300 from the Old French *menistre* defined as “servant, valet, member of a household staff, administrator, musician, minstrel” – from the Latin *ministri* “inferior, servant, priest’s assistant,” from *minus*, *minor* “less” hence “subordinate.” It is from this reference we see the word “priest” is attested to in the English by the 14th century.

Finally the *hieratic*, pertaining to sacred things – Latin *hieraticus*, from the Greek *heiratikos* – pertaining to a priest or his office, from Greek *hierus*, priest from *hieros* – sacred, holy or hallowed.

The Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Grecian and Roman Empires, which the Jewish high priests had seen overshadowing the world, had each, except the last one, withered away. The last successor of Aaron was stripped of his sacerdotal robes, and the temple, which he served, was leveled with the ground. But the True High Priest, King and Minister of the sanctuary and true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man, offered his one sacrifice, once and for all, taking His place at the right hand of the Majesty, a continuing Priest forever – in the sanctuary which shall never fall or be taken down.

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Study of Hebrews 4:14 and related word study within Hebrews

1 – high priest (ἀρχιερεύς, *arkhierūs*) Strong’s #749 from Strong’s #746 ἀρχή, and Strong’s #2409 ιερεύς a priest from Strong’s 2413

In the New Testament:	Matthew	25 times
	Mark	22 times
	Luke	16 times
	John	21 times
	Acts	22 times
	Hebrews	17 times

Scriptural references: Hebrews 2:17, 3:1, 4:14, 15, 5:1, 5, 10, 6:20, 7:26, 27, 28, 8:1, 3, 9:7, 11, 25, 13:11

2 – priest (ιερεύς, *hierūs*) Strong’s 2409 from Strong’s 2413 ιερός sacred, holy

In the New Testament:	Matthew	3 times
	Mark	2 times
	Luke	5 times
	John	1 time
	Acts	4 times
	Hebrews	13 times
	Revelation	3 times

Scriptural references: Hebrews 5:6, 7:1, 3, 11, 15, 17, 20*, 21*, 23, 8:4, 9:6, 10:11, 21

3 – priesthood (ιερωσύνη, *hierōsunee*) Strong’s 2420 from Strong’s 2413 ιερός sacred, holy

In the New Testament: Hebrews (only) 4 times

Hebrews 7:11, 12, 14, 24

4 – The office of the priesthood or priest’s office (ιερατεία, *hieratia*) Strong’s 2405 from Strong’s 2407

In the New Testament:	Luke	1 time
	Hebrews	1 time

Scriptural references: Luke 1:9, Hebrews 7:5