Answer:

In the Old Testament, priests were divinely appointed men who served as mediators between God and the people of Israel. They performed their duties first in the Tabernacle (Mishkan) during Israel’s wilderness journey (Exodus 28–29), and later in Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6).

Their core responsibilities included:

- Offering sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:15–17),
- Teaching the Law of God to the nation (Malachi 2:7),
- Maintaining ceremonial cleanliness and overseeing religious festivals (Leviticus 23).

Only men from the tribe of Levi, specifically from the family of Aaron, were permitted to become priests (Exodus 28:1; Numbers 18:1–7). Other Levites served in support roles—such as guarding the temple and assisting in worship—but only Aaron’s descendants could offer sacrifices.

> *“And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.” — Hebrews 5:4 (NKJV)*

New Testament Fulfillment: Jesus, the Great High Priest

Under the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is the ultimate and eternal High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–16). He fulfilled the entire sacrificial system by offering Himself once for all as the perfect atonement for sin.

> *“But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.” — Hebrews 10:12 (NKJV)*

> *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” — 1 Timothy 2:5 (NKJV)*

Because of Christ’s sacrifice, the old Levitical priesthood is no longer required (Hebrews 7:11–28). Instead, all believers in Christ now participate in a spiritual priesthood.

Who Are Pastors?

In the New Testament, pastors (Greek: *poimēn*, meaning *shepherd*) are spiritual leaders given to the Church by Christ Himself. Their role is to shepherd, teach, equip, and care for the body of believers.

> *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,*
> *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” — Ephesians 4:11–12 (NKJV)*

Pastors are under-shepherds of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). They do not mediate through animal sacrifices but through the preaching of the Word, prayer, discipleship, and pastoral care.

> *“Feed My lambs… Tend My sheep… Feed My sheep.” — John 21:15–17 (NKJV)*

While they mirror some of the priestly roles (like spiritual leadership, teaching, and intercession), pastors serve through the finished work of Christ, not through ritual.

All Believers Are Priests in Christ

A foundational New Testament truth is the “priesthood of all believers.” Every Christian, through Christ, now has direct access to God and is called to serve, worship, and proclaim the gospel.

> *“…To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,*
> *and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father…”*

> *— Revelation 1:5–6 (NKJV)*

> *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people,*
> *that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” — 1 Peter 2:9 (NKJV)*

> *“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus…” — Hebrews 10:19 (NKJV)*

So, pastors are not the only priests under the New Covenant. All Spirit-filled believers share in a spiritual priesthood, each called to offer spiritual sacrifices and participate in the ministry of reconciliation.

> *“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ,*
> *and has given us the ministry of reconciliation…” — 2*

> *Corinthians 5:18 (NKJV)*

> *“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood,*
> *to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” — 1 Peter 2:5 (NKJV)*

A Word to Pastors: Shepherd the Flock Faithfully

God has given a strong warning to leaders who neglect His people. The prophecy in Ezekiel 34 stands as a solemn reminder that pastoral leadership is a sacred trust.

> *“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?” — Ezekiel 34:2 (NIV)*

>

> *“You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured... So they were scattered because there was no shepherd.” — Ezekiel 34:4–5 (NIV)*

God promises to hold shepherds accountable who fail to care for His flock:

> *“I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock.” — Ezekiel 34:10 (NIV)*

In Summary

Priest (Old Covenant)	Pastor (New Covenant)
Mediated through animal sacrifices	Preaches reconciliation through Christ’s blood
Came from tribe of Levi (descendants of Aaron)	Called and gifted by the Holy Spirit
Taught the Law	Teaches the Gospel
Pointed to a future Messiah	Proclaims the finished work of the Messiah
Limited access to God	Encourages direct access to God for all believers

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Final Word

If you’re a pastor today, take your calling seriously. Your role is not just to preach, but to feed, protect, and love the flock that belongs to Christ.

> *“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care… not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” — 1 Peter 5:2–3 (NIV)*

And if you are a believer in Christ, know that you too are a priest — called to draw near to God, proclaim His gospel, and serve His people.

May the Lord Jesus Christ help us to be faithful in every part of our calling.

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