

## The Jewish Priesthood

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Following the Exodus from Israel and subsequent giving of the Mosaic law, God setup the Mosaic priesthood. In [Exo\\_28:1](#); [Exo\\_29:44](#); [Exo\\_40:13-15](#), Aaron (the first high priest) and his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar (the second high priest-[Num\\_20:25-28](#)), and Ithamar were set apart by God to serve as priests. It was during this time that Aaron made the golden calf for the people (Exodus 32) and Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire to the Lord (Leviticus 10). It was also, however, in this time that the righteous priest Phinehas stopped a plague ([Num\\_25:7-13](#)). Leviticus was written for the priestly tribe (the Levites-[Num\\_3:11-13](#)) and family (Aaron's- [Num\\_25:13](#)). When the Israelites entered into the promised land the Levites were given 48 scattered cities from which to serve the other twelve tribes (Joshua 21).

As the time approached for Israel to have a king, Eli, the high priest (whose own sons were wicked-[1Sa\\_2:12-36](#)), reared Samuel who would anoint the kings. Quite a lot happened to the priesthood during this time, for one of those kings, Saul, massacred the members of the priestly community of Nob ([1Sa\\_22:9-19](#)). Another, David recognizing that the priests had grown to a great number divided into twenty-four courses that served a week at a time (1 Chronicles 24)-even down to the time of Zechariah, John the Baptist's father ([Luk\\_1:5-8](#)). In the time of the last kings of this period, David and Solomon, Zadok, acting at one point as co-high priest ([2Sa\\_8:17](#); [2Sa\\_15:24-29](#), [2Sa\\_15:35](#); [2Sa\\_19:11](#)) seized the reigns of the priesthood thereby serving as the progenitor of priests well into the inter-testament period.

Shortly after Solomon, Jeroboam, in setting up calf worship in Dan and Bethel (the extremities of what became the Northern kingdom Israel), changed numerous things about the worship of the people, including the priesthood ([2Ch\\_11:13-15](#); [1Ki\\_13:33](#)). As a result the kingdom was divided with Jeroboam reigning over Israel and Rehoboam, Solomon's son, reigning in Judah (the Southern kingdom) ([2Ch\\_11:16-17](#)).

Over the following years Judah and Israel were divided and desperate. During this time many of the priests did what they could to keep the people close to God. Such priests were Jehoiada who protected the young Joash (2 Kings 11,12), Azariah who withstood King Uzziah ([2Ch\\_26:16-20](#)), and Hilkiah who removing Baal worship from the temple spurred Josiah's reform (2 Kings 22,23). This does not mean that there were no wicked priests at this time, for there were (e.g. Uriah ([2Ki\\_16:10-16](#)) and Pashhur ([Jer\\_20:1-6](#))).

After the return from captivity, the high priest Joshua, along with the governor Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3; [Ezr\\_6:9-15](#); Haggai 1,2).

In 171 B.C. Antiochus IV Epiphanes replaced the rightful priest, Onias III, with Onias' Hellenistic brother Jason, or Jesus, due to the offer of large sums of money and increased Hellenization. Jason later was replaced by Menelaus thereby

changing the family line of the priesthood (II Maccabees 4). When the Maccabees gained control the role of the high priest took on more of a role around political and military leadership. Such priests were Jonathan and Simon.

In the time of Jesus the priesthood became a split institution containing a Jewish priest (Annas) and a Roman appointment (Annas' son-in-law Joseph Caiaphas) ([Luk\\_3:2](#)). It was to a son of Annas, Ananias, that Paul was taken in [Act\\_23:2](#); [Act\\_24:1](#). Actually it was through Jesus that God wholly removed the priesthood from Jewish hands, making His Son, the Christ, a high priest ([Heb\\_2:17](#); [Heb\\_3:1-2](#); [Heb\\_4:14-15](#); [Heb\\_5:5](#); [Heb\\_7:26](#); [Heb\\_8:1-3](#); [Heb\\_9:11](#); [Heb\\_10:21](#)) after the order of Melchizedec ([Heb\\_5:6](#), [Heb\\_5:10](#); [Heb\\_6:20](#); [Heb\\_7:11-12](#), [Heb\\_7:15](#), [Heb\\_7:17](#), [Heb\\_7:21](#)) and making all Christians priests ([1Pe\\_2:5](#), [1Pe\\_2:9-10](#)).

Numerous sources, including Holman's and Easton's were consulted for this information