

THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

EXODUS 28:1

Man has an inherent knowledge of God (Rom. 1:18-32) and sinfulness (Rom. 2:14-15) and it seems every religion has some sort of priesthood to represent man to God. In the case of Judaism, it was the Aaronic Priesthood.

Romans 1:18–19 ¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Romans 2:14–15 ¹⁴For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

In Exodus 27:21, we noted the first hint of the appointment of Aaron and his sons to be the priests of Yahweh. In Exodus 28:1, the appointment was officially proclaimed.

Exodus 28:1 ¹“Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest [כֹּהֵן] to Me—Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.

The word כֹּהֵן is not the word for priest; that word is כֹּהֵן and it refers to the position of priest as mediator between God and man. This word, כֹּהֵן, means to act or to serve as a priest, hence, the NASB translates it to “minister as priest.” One is the noun and one is the verb. Priests represented man to God and prophets represented God to man. Some priests, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Ezekiel, were also prophets.

Aaron, אֶהְרֹן, and his sons, Nadab, נָדָב, Abihu, אַבִּיהוּא, Eleazar, אֶלְעָזָר, and Ithamar, אִיתְמָר, were chosen by God out of all the men of Israel to be His priests. As we learned earlier, they were from the tribe of Levi. Later in the Pentateuch, we will discover Nadab and Abihu committed an offense involving the fire they brought into the Tabernacle and were struck dead by God. They had no sons to carry on their line of the priesthood which left Eleazar and Ithamar to carry on the line of priests.

Exodus 2:1 ¹Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi.

Leviticus 10:1 ¹Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.

Numbers 3:4 ⁴But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

Numbers 26:61 ⁶¹But Nadab and Abihu died when they offered strange fire before the LORD.

1 Chronicles 24:2 ²But Nadab and Abihu died before their father and had no sons. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests.

Eleazar succeeded his father Aaron as High Priest.

Numbers 20:25–26 ²⁵“Take Aaron and his son Eleazar and bring them up to Mount Hor; ²⁶and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar. So Aaron will be gathered to his people, and will die there.”

At some point in early Israelite history, Ithamar’s sons replaced Eleazar’s sons in the high priestly line of descent. Eli [עֵלִי] and his sons Hophni and Phinehas

were from the line of Ithamar but due to their unfaithfulness, their line would eventually be replaced and the position would revert back to the line of Eleazar from which a faithful priest would come.

1 Samuel 2:34–35 ³⁴This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni [הֹפְנִי] and Phinehas [פִּינְחָס]: on the same day both of them will die. ³⁵But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always.

During David's reign, two priests were serving together with him, Zadok [זָדוֹק] and Abiathar [אַבְיָתָר] who was the son of Ahimelech [אַחִימֶלֶךְ]. Abiathar was serving as the High Priest. Zadok was from the line of Eleazar and Abiathar was from the line of Ithamar.

The genealogy in 1 Chronicles 6:1-8 identified Zadok as a priest in the line of Eleazar.

1 Chronicles 6:4, 8 ⁴Eleazar became the father of Phinehas, and Phinehas became the father of Abishua ... ⁸and Ahitub became the father of Zadok, and Zadok became the father of Ahimaaz ...

Ahimelech and Abiathar were from the line of Ithamar.

1 Chronicles 24:3 ³David, with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to their offices for their ministry.

1 Chronicles 15:11 ¹¹Then David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites ...

Ahimelech died when Saul ordered Doeg to kill all the priests at Nob for giving aide to David and his men by providing them with the consecrated

bread to eat. Abiathar fled with the ephod and was shortly thereafter identified as the priest.

1 Samuel 22:20; 23:6, 9 ²⁰But one son of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David.... ⁶Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, *that he came down with an ephod in his hand....* ⁹Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here."

Abiathar faithfully served King David and supported him through the rebellion by David's son Absalom but then defected to Adonijah when he sought to usurp the throne as David lay dying. As a result, Solomon spared Abiathar's life but removed him from the priesthood and appointed Zadok to the office of High Priest.

1 Kings 2:26–27, 35 ²⁶Then to Abiathar the priest the king said, "Go to Anathoth to your own field, for you deserve to die; but I will not put you to death at this time, because you carried the ark of the Lord GOD before my father David, and because you were afflicted in everything with which my father was afflicted." ²⁷So Solomon dismissed Abiathar from being priest to the LORD, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD, which He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.... ³⁵The king appointed Benaiah the son of Jehoiada over the army in his place, and the king appointed Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar.

When Abiathar was removed from office, the prophecy made long before to Eli was fulfilled and removing Abiathar removed the office of the High Priest from the line of Ithamar and restored it to the line of Eleazar.

The line of Zadok was still operating in the Temple when it was destroyed and Jehozadak, a priest descended from Zadok, went into exile at that time.

1 Chronicles 6:15 ¹⁵and Jehozadak went *along* when the LORD carried Judah and Jerusalem away into exile by Nebuchadnezzar.

Joshua, son of Jehozadak, returned to Jerusalem along with Ezra both of whom were priests in the line of Zadok.

Ezra 7:1, 5 ¹Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, *there went up* Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah ... ⁵son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest.

Haggai 2:2, 4 ²“Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying ... ⁴‘But now take courage, Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD, ‘take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares the LORD of hosts.

The line of Zadok was removed from the office of High Priest when the Seleucids ruled Israel and the effort was made to Hellenize the Jewish people a couple of hundred years before Christ.

The line of Zadok, the faithful priest, will be the line of priests in the Messianic Kingdom.

Ezekiel 40:46 ⁴⁶but the chamber which faces toward the north is for the priests who keep charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who from the sons of Levi come near to the LORD to minister to Him.”

Ezekiel 44:15 ¹⁵“But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood,” declares the Lord God.

Moses and Aaron were from the tribe of Levi but it wasn't until the rebellion of the golden calf incident at Sinai the Levites were assigned special duties to serve the Lord.

Exodus 32:26–28 ²⁶then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to

him. ²⁷He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.'" ²⁸So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day.

Deuteronomy 10:8 ⁸At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to serve Him and to bless in His name until this day.

The Aaronic Priesthood stood apart from the rest of the Levites. Only Aaron and his descendants could offer sacrifices in the Tabernacle (Lev. 8-10). The Levites performed the lesser, but very necessary duties, in the Tabernacle. As one of the twelve tribes of Israel, they were set apart for God in order to perform the duties He assigned them to do.

Numbers 3:5–10 ⁵Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁶"Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. ⁷"They shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle. ⁸"They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. ⁹"You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel. ¹⁰"So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death."

Numbers 16:8–9 ⁸Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi, ⁹is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the *rest* of the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them;

The duties of the Levites included "preparing grain offerings and the showbread, ... purifying all the holy instruments used in the temple, ... singing praises to the Lord at morning and evening offerings, ... assisting the priests with burnt offerings on Sabbaths and feast days, and ... being in charge of the tem-

ple precinct and the chambers of the priests.... [Later, they added duties] including the keeping of the gates, judges, craftsmen, musicians, and overseers of the royal treasury."¹ The Levites conducted a lot of the Tabernacle's business, but they were not eligible to assume the office of High Priest unless they were descended from Aaron. The High Priest was separate from all the other priests and set apart by the clothing he wore, by the priestly duties he performed not only on his own behalf but on behalf of all the people, and by some specific requirements in addition to being the first-born son of the reigning High Priest.

The title "High Priest" was one title among many and the priest was known by a number of different titles throughout the Old Testament. They were often simply referred to as "the priest" which we have already read a number of times in the Scriptures covered to this point. Exodus 31:10 referred to "Aaron the priest." The High Priest was called the "anointed priest" in Leviticus 4:3. He was called the "priest who is the highest among his brothers" in Leviticus 21:10, and he was called the chief priest in 2 Chronicles 26:20. As the chief priest, he was "over you [Levites, priests, and the heads of the tribes appointed by Jehoshaphat to be judges] in all that pertains to the Lord" (Yahweh) (2 Chron, 19:11). Of course, "high priest" was used in Scriptures such as Numbers 35:25, 28.

Guidelines for the qualifications and conduct of the sons of Aaron were revealed in Leviticus 21:1-22:16. Not only did the High Priest have to meet the same qualifying characteristics as the other priests, but he had to meet some

¹ Chad Brand, gen. ed., s.v. "Levites," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2015), 1007.

additional criteria as well. Presumably, if these criteria were not met, the next son in the line of succession would assume the position.

Leviticus 21:10–15 ¹⁰The priest who is the highest among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; ¹¹nor shall he approach any dead person, nor defile himself even for his father or his mother; ¹²nor shall he go out of the sanctuary nor profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him; I am the LORD. ¹³He shall take a wife in her virginity. ¹⁴A widow, or a divorced woman, or one who is profaned by harlotry, these he may not take; but rather he is to marry a virgin of his own people, ¹⁵so that he will not profane his offspring among his people; for I am the LORD who sanctifies him.'"

The priests in general and the High Priest in particular were to represent holiness to the people. The Israelites as a nation were to be holy because they were created by Yahweh to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6).

These regulations involved death, marriage, and health. From our vantage point, we have the advantage of understanding these issues to a greater degree than the Israelites did because we have the blessing of additional, progressive revelation they did not know. Death, physical or spiritual, was not part of God's original plan for creation; it was introduced by Adam's, mankind's, rebellion. Unless a person was immediate family, the priest could not defile himself by being in the presence of a dead body. The High Priest could not mourn even his immediate family; His obligation to God was complete and total. There were certain mourning rituals the priests could not perform: they could not shave their heads, trim their beards, or cut themselves. These were pagan mourning prac-

tices involving what I would call animism which is, among other things, ancestor worship.

The New Testament reveals to us the fact that through death we immediately go into the presence of God and in that we have hope.

Philippians 1:21 ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 ¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

“God put very high standards on those who represented him to the people. The people had to be reminded of the holiness and the hope of their covenant even in times of bereavement. After all, God was the God of the living; he created life, and he would restore it. The priests—of all the people—could not weep and mourn as the world mourns. For them to do so made the covenant profane.”²

We now know the Messiah has conquered death. Many Scriptures have revealed this truth to us.

John 5:24 ²⁴“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Romans 8:2 ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Marriage was also important because we know the covenant relationship God had with Israel was metaphorically linked to marriage and the church's re-

² Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 384.

lationship with Christ is also linked to marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33. The book of Hosea is a metaphor of Israel as an unfaithful wife to Yahweh. At least one factor at play in this command is the purity of the Aaronic line of priests; they had to be descended from Aaron and they had to be sanctified children. The High Priest himself could only marry a virgin Israelite woman. Children born of any of the prohibited women would be common and profane and because the office was hereditary, it could not go to such children.

Ezekiel 16:32³²“You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!

Isaiah 54:5 ⁵“For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts ...

2 Corinthians 11:2 ²For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.

Concerning the priest's health, they could not minister before the Lord if they had certain birth defects or crippling injuries.

Leviticus 21:16–23 ¹⁶Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁷“Speak to Aaron, saying, ‘No man of your offspring throughout their generations who has a defect shall approach to offer the food of his God. ¹⁸‘For no one who has a defect shall approach: a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a disfigured face, or any deformed *limb*, ¹⁹or a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, ²⁰or a hunchback or a dwarf, or *one who has* a defect in his eye or eczema or scabs or crushed testicles. ²¹‘No man among the descendants of Aaron the priest who has a defect is to come near to offer the LORD's offerings by fire; *since* he has a defect, he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. ²²‘He may eat the food of his God, *both* of the most holy and of the holy, ²³only he shall not go in to the veil or come near the altar because he has a defect, so that he will not profane My sanctuaries. For I am the LORD who sanctifies them.’”

When the priests became unclean, they had to ritually purify themselves in order to be allowed to perform their duties.

Leviticus 22:6–7 ⁶a person who touches any such shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat of the holy *gifts* unless he has bathed his body in water. ⁷But when the sun sets, he will be clean, and afterward he shall eat of the holy *gifts*, for it is his food.

After God instituted the Aaronic Priesthood, a Levite named Korah fomented a rebellion against Moses and Aaron because he thought everyone was capable of being a leader since the whole congregation of Israel was holy; therefore, Moses and Aaron were exalting themselves above all the other members of the covenant community. Moses' reply, however, suggested Korah's real motive was in seeking the priesthood. Obviously, Korah neglected the fact that Moses and Aaron did not seek out their positions; they were installed in them by God and it was His choice to place them in leadership. Ultimately, Korah's real rebellion was not against his cousins Moses and Aaron, it was against the God of the Israelites who appointed them to their leadership positions.

Numbers 16:3, 10 ³They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"... ¹⁰and that He has brought you near, *Korah*, and all your brothers, sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking for the priesthood also?

Moses also told Korah God had decided who would be priests and who would not. The priests would be the ones chosen by God. They would be men sanctified, set apart, or holy for His use by being brought near to Him to serve Him. Moses reminded them they already had a favored position within the congregation and in the sight of the Lord because they had been appointed to

draw near to the Lord to serve Him in the Tabernacle and to minister to the people (Num. 16:9).

Numbers 16:5 ⁵and he [Moses] spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, “Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His, and who is holy, and will bring *him* near to Himself; even the one whom He will choose, He will bring near to Himself.

God confirmed His choices of Moses as leader and Aaron as priest by destroying Korah and the other rebels. Eleazar was instructed to gather the bronze censers of the rebels and hammer them out for plating on the altar as a reminder to the people only those who are in the line of Aaron are allowed to minister before the Lord.

Numbers 16:39–40 ³⁹So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as a plating for the altar, ⁴⁰as a reminder to the sons of Israel that no layman who is not of the descendants of Aaron should come near to burn incense before the LORD; so that he will not become like Korah and his company—just as the LORD had spoken to him through Moses.

The day after Korah's rebellion, the people blamed Moses and Aaron for the deaths of the rebels. In response, God sent a plague on them. Aaron took fire from the altar, placed it in his censor, put incense on it which made atonement for the people, and stepped among them which stopped the plague (Num. 16:41-50). God revealed to the people his choice of Aaron to be the priest by means of the rod that budded. The twelve tribes each presented a rod to be placed before the Lord along with the rod of Aaron. When Aaron's rod sprouted, produced buds and flowers, and bore ripe fruit overnight, the choice

of God was made perfectly clear to the people (Num. 17:1-11). Then God reiterated the differences between the Aaronic priesthood and the Levites.

Numbers 18:1-7 ¹So the LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and your father's household with you shall bear the guilt in connection with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the guilt in connection with your priesthood. ²"But bring with you also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you, while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony. ³"And they shall thus attend to your obligation and the obligation of all the tent, but they shall not come near to the furnishings of the sanctuary and the altar, or both they and you will die. ⁴"They shall be joined with you and attend to the obligations of the tent of meeting, for all the service of the tent; but an outsider may not come near you. ⁵"So you shall attend to the obligations of the sanctuary and the obligations of the altar, so that there will no longer be wrath on the sons of Israel. ⁶"Behold, I Myself have taken your fellow Levites from among the sons of Israel; they are a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD, to perform the service for the tent of meeting. ⁷"But you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil, and you are to perform service. I am giving you the priesthood as a bestowed service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

During David's reign as king, the descendants of Aaron had increased to the point they needed some organization for service before the Lord. The decision was made to divide them into twenty-four divisions each of which served for a period of time until the next division rotated in for their time of service.

1 Chronicles 24:1-5, 19 ¹Now the divisions of the descendants of Aaron were *these*: the sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²But Nadab and Abihu died before their father and had no sons. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests. ³David, with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to their offices for their ministry. ⁴Since more chief men were found from the descendants of Eleazar than the descendants of Ithamar, they divided them thus: *there were* sixteen heads of fathers' households of the descendants of Eleazar and eight of the descendants of Ithamar, according to their fathers' households. ⁵Thus they were divided by lot, the one as the other; for they were officers of the sanctuary and officers of

God, both from the descendants of Eleazar and the descendants of Ithamar....
¹⁹These were their offices for their ministry when *they* came in to the house of the LORD according to the ordinance *given* to them through Aaron their father, just as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him.

We know this procedure survived the Babylonian exile and it was still operative at the time of the Lord's First Advent. Zacharias, John's father, was serving in the Temple during his division's rotation in the Temple when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in the Holy Place and told him his wife would bear him a son who was to be named John.

Luke 1:8–9 ⁸Now it happened *that* while he was performing his priestly service before God in the *appointed* order of his division, ⁹according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

One of the primary responsibilities of the priests was the instruction of the people in the Law, and they were to read it to the people every seven years during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Deuteronomy 31:9–13 ⁹So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. ¹⁰Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, ¹¹when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. ¹²"Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. ¹³"Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

The problem was they failed in their duty to teach the people the Law. Besides the priest's failure to teach it, they themselves turned from it, and led the people away from their God in the process.

Hosea 4:6–10 ⁶My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. ⁷The more they multiplied, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame. ⁸They feed on the sin of My people And direct their desire toward their iniquity. ⁹And it will be, like people, like priest; So I will punish them for their ways And repay them for their deeds. ¹⁰They will eat, but not have enough; They will play the harlot, but not increase, Because they have stopped giving heed to the LORD.

Not only had the priests failed in their duty to instruct the people in the Law, but they allowed idolatry to invade even the Temple itself. The end result of that was the destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple. Ezekiel, who was a priest, was deported from Jerusalem to Babylon before the final destruction and he was given a vision of the idolatry around and in the Temple before it was destroyed.

There was some sort of idol called the idol of jealousy set up at the north gate to the inner Temple court (Ezek. 8:3). Somewhere in the Temple was carvings of idols and abominations with seventy elders of Israel worshipping before them (Ezek. 8:7-12). Women were sitting outside the north gate worshipping Tammuz (Ezek. 8:14). Right outside the entrance to the Temple sanctuary, men were facing east and worshipping the sun (Ezek. 8:16). These men may have been priests since they were in such close proximity to the sanctuary.

Hosea and Ezekiel were written before the Babylonian destruction of the Temple, but Malachi was written after Israel had returned to the land from their captivity, yet they had again fallen away and the priests had again failed in their duty to instruct the people. It didn't have to be that way; Ezra had instructed the people in the Law when they returned to Jerusalem. Later, he read the Law to them as they participated in the first celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles since the days of Joshua.

Ezra 7:10 ¹⁰For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Nehemiah 8:1–2, 8, 13, 18 ¹And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. ²Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.... ⁸They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.... ¹³Then on the second day the heads of fathers' *households* of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.... ¹⁸He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day [of the Feast of Tabernacles]. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day *there was* a solemn assembly according to the ordinance.

By the time of Malachi when the four hundred years of silence we call the intertestamental period commenced during which Israel did not hear the Word of God, the priests had again failed in their duty to instruct the people in the Law.

Malachi 2:7–9 ⁷“For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. ⁸“But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,”

says the LORD of hosts. ⁹“So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

There is an application in this for those who pastor and teach today. It is the primary responsibility of the pastors and the teachers to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). We aren’t to fail to teach it as so many do today, we aren’t to pervert or change it as so many do today, and we aren’t to lead people away from the truth and into falsehood as so many do today. We are to instruct people in sound doctrine by teaching the historical background of the Bible and the literal truth presented according to proper literal and grammatical exegetical methods in the interpretation of the text. A lot of people who call themselves pastors and teachers today are going to hear the same sort of rebuke when they stand before the Lord that He levelled against the Aaronic priests when they were failing in their duties. This is an entirely avoidable situation.

One could argue the most important function of the High Priest was conducting the duties of the priest on the Day of Atonement. The process was involved. The High Priest’s duties are described in Leviticus 16. This was considered to be the most awesome, solemn day in Judaism and it still is. On this day, and only on this day, was anyone allowed to enter the Most Holy Place and that person was the High Priest.

The office of High Priest continued until the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, but by the time of Christ’s First Advent, it was no longer the Aaronic Priesthood in the sense that the appointment of the High Priest was supposed to

be dependent on physical descent from Aaron. That changed when politics stuck its nose in the business of Judaism. Once Gentiles controlled Israel, the rules God established were set aside. Whether this was due to pure politics or to corruption by means of bribery is of no account; it happened for both reasons.

When the Greeks ruled the area, they exerted great pressure on the Jews to become Hellenized eventually resulting in the revolt of the Maccabees. A Jew named Jason overthrew his brother Onias III by means of bribery.

2 Maccabees 4:7–10 ⁷But when Seleucus died, and Antiochus, who was called Epiphanes, succeeded to the kingdom,⁸ Jason the brother of Onias supplanted his brother in the high-priesthood, promising in a petition to the king three hundred and threescore talents of silver,⁹ besides eighty talents from another fund; in addition to which he undertook to pay a hundred and fifty more, if he was commissioned to set up a gymnasium and ephebeum and to register the Jerusalemites as citizens of Antioch.¹⁰ And when the king had given his assent, Jason at once exercised his influence in order to bring over his fellow countrymen to Greek ways of life. (AOT).

Jason was himself overthrown by Menelaus who was even more inclined to Hellenize the Jewish people. Jason was the last High Priest in the line of Zadok.

2 Maccabees 4:23–26 ²³Now after a space of three years Jason sent Menelaus, the aforesaid Simon's brother, to convey the money to the king and to remind him of some matters which required attention.²⁴ But Menelaus got into favour with the king, whom he extolled with an air of impressive authority, and secured the high-priesthood for himself, outbidding Jason by three hundred talents of silver.²⁵ On receiving the royal mandate, he appeared in Jerusalem, possessed of no quality which entitled him to the high-priesthood, but with the passions of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a wild beast.²⁶ So Jason, who had supplanted his brother, was in turn supplanted by another man, and driven as a fugitive into the country of the Ammonites. (AOT)

Before the revolt, some of the Maccabees were appointed to the office of High Priest by Seleucid rulers. Jonathan Maccabee was appointed to the post and called the “king's friend.”

1 Maccabees 10:20 ²⁰And now we have appointed thee this day (to be) high-priest of thy nation, and (it is our will) that thou shouldest be called the king's Friend'—and he sent unto him a purple robe and a crown of gold—‘and that thou shouldest take our part, and keep friendship with us.’ (AOT)

The same situation existed in the appointment of Simon Maccabee. His appointment combined the Temple with the state when he was declared both High Priest and governor (ethnarch).

1 Maccabees 14:38 ³⁸And king Demetrius confirmed him [Simon Maccabee] in the high-priesthood in consequence of these things, and made him one of his Friends (AOT).

1 Maccabees 15:1–2 ¹And Antiochus, son of Demetrius the king, sent letters from the isles of the sea unto Simon the priest and governor of the Jews, ²and to all the nation; and the contents thereof were after this manner: 'King Antiochus to Simon the high-priest and governor, and to the nation of the Jews, greeting: (AOT).

The Romans also politicized the office of High Priest. Annas was High Priest for a time, but he continued to wield extraordinary power and influence. Perhaps the Jews recognized him as their High Priest as long as he was alive no matter who the Romans installed in his place, but even after being deposed, he influenced the appointment of five of his sons and a son-in-law, Caiaphas, to the post.

Since the life of Christ, we know the Aaronic Priesthood was a type of the true priesthood which is according to the order of Melchizedek and the true

High Priest, Christ Jesus. The Aaronic Priesthood will be represented in the Messianic Kingdom through the order of Zadok, but the High Priest will be in the order of Melchizedek.

There had to be a process for succession to the office of High Priest because Aaron's descendants died. Christ is an eternal Priest and there is no need for a successor.

Hebrews 6:19–20 ¹⁹This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, ²⁰where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.