

Priests and Priesthood in the Mosaic Law

In the Bible, a priest is a kind of mediator between God and man.

The Need for Priesthood

The need for priests came about because of the following:

- God, as our creator, is superior to man in every way.
- God is perfect and faultless in every way.
- Man was created perfect and without sin, but chose to rebel against God.
- That sin created a gulf between God and man, because man's sinful state is unacceptable to God. Man's sin is incompatible with the sinless God.
- If man is to have fellowship with God, this problem of sin must be addressed, and the gulf between God and man must be bridged.
- Priesthood is that "bridge" between God and man.

“Levite” Priests

Numbers chapter 3

Numbers 18:1-7

All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.

Israelite Tribe: Levi

Sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, Merari

– their descendants served as assistants to the priesthood

Descendant of Kohath: Aaron (“HIGH PRIEST”, or “the anointed priest”)

– High Priests were selected from heads of this family

Aaron's sons and their descendants: PRIESTS.

The common term is “Levite priests”, but we could just as well say “Kohathite priests”, or “Aaronic priests”. By the time of Christ, there was also a group called “the chief priests”.

What did priests do?

In a general sense:

The priests helped to bring man to an acceptable state before God via offerings and other rituals. They mediated at a personal level, and also on a national level on behalf of the people as a whole. They offered different sacrifices on behalf of individuals, the entire nation, and also offerings for the priesthood itself.

In one way, they also represented God to man, being a picture of God's holiness and purity.

What did priests do? *(continued from previous page)*

In a specific sense:



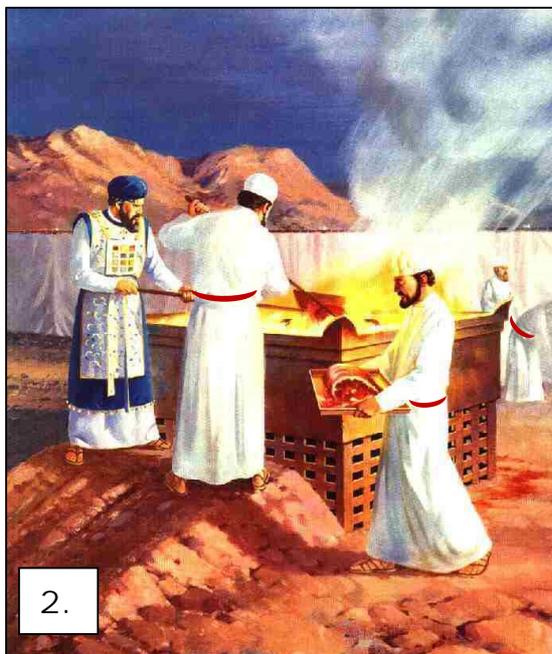
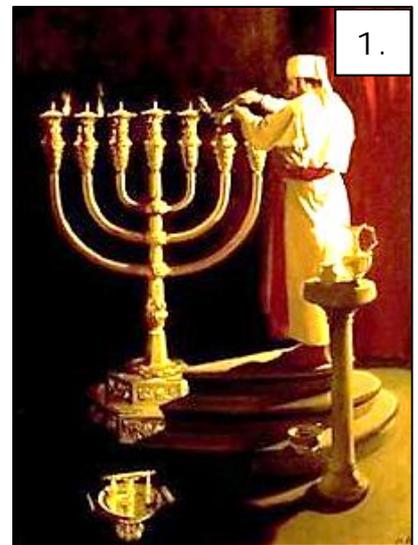
The common priests carried out many tasks, several to do with the service of the sanctuary. They offered sacrifices on behalf of the nation, and assisted with the sacrifices made by commoners (Leviticus 1 to 7). The priests were also to be consulted as judges to make decisions, about both local and national issues (Deuteronomy 17:8-13; 21:5). Some priests had administrative roles, including being responsible for the treasury. Others maintained the sanctuary buildings, items and grounds. Some were musicians, and many even did guard duty the temple guards. A list of some of these may be found in the last few chapters of 1 Chronicles. The priests were also responsible for teaching the Law to the people; sometimes this was done by public readings.

The High Priest was the highest representative of the people before God, and at the centre of many of the ceremonies. He performed quite a number of the same duties as the priests, but not so much maintenance, etc. He wore special clothing whilst ministering (all highly decorative and symbolic). He also held onto the Urim and Thummim for making major “yes/no” “50/50” decisions. The High Priest had a special role in the Day of Atonement ceremonies, and was the only person allowed in the Most Holy place, only once a year (Leviticus 16). If he was not considered to be ceremonially clean and acceptable before God, then neither were the people.



Priests, and some of their duties:

1. Priest attending to the oil in the lampstand in the Holy Place of the Sanctuary.
2. Priests and the High Priest burning offerings on the altar of sacrifice in the Tabernacle courtyard.
3. Priests providing music for the dedication of Solomon's Temple.



More pictures of priests may be found in the publications

“The Jerusalem Temple” and
“The Rose Guide to the Temple”.

