

Priestly Authority

Historical Development of Hebrew Worship

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Patriarchal

Mosaic

Davidic & Solomonic

Exilic & Restoration

- The OT scriptures were compiled over a period of 10 centuries (roughly between the time of Moses (1400) and Ezra (400))
- Actual Hebrew history extends this period by 6 centuries earlier to the time of Abraham (2000)
- ***Patriarchal Period – age of Yahweh’s early covenant dealings with the Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs including God’s initial promise to Abraham***
- ***Mosaic Period – witnessed birth of Israel as a nation thru the covenant law instituted by Yahweh at Mt Sinai; Divine law established a worship center (tabernacle), ordained a priesthood in worship and established a religious calendar to regular life***
- ***Davidic & Solomonic Period – construction of the Temple, division of responsibilities among the temple personnel, rise of prophetic movement***
- ***Exilic & Restoration Period – brought renewed emphasis on ritual law and the role of the priesthood in Hebrew worship in response to foreign exiles***

Patriarchal Period (2000-1700 BCE)

- The Hebrew nation traces its beginning to God’s call to Abram to leave Haran for the land of Canaan
- **2 important religious elements emerge:**
 - Worship **is initiated by God**
 - Worship **is a response** to God’s self-disclosure
- Worship is an active (not passive) response
- Patriarchal worship was mostly *informal and spontaneous*, not restricted by time and place
 - Building of altars, offering of sacrifices were forms of praise and thanksgiving
 - The purpose of worship in the OT is the glorification of God

Melchizedek

- NO organized priesthood during Patriarchal period – patriarchs or elders of the family/clan served as the priest
- Sole exception – Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek (Gen. 14)
 - A mysterious priest-king of Salem (Canaanite)); he is a “priest of God Most High”
 - Led Abram in worship after defeat of the kings of the plain and the rescue of Lot
 - Appears to be monotheistic in the middle of a polytheistic culture

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- With the gifts of bread and wine (no animal sacrifice), he offered a blessing over Abram in the name of God
- In return, Abram offered a tithe of 1/10 of everything

Mosaic Period (1400-1000 BCE)

- The revelation of the name Yahweh ("I Am") to Moses marked a new stage in God's progressive self-revelation ... transcendence
- **Mt. Sinai marked the Hebrews agreement to worship & serve Yahweh alone** ... as well as the prohibition of representing Yahweh's likeness with an image
- Rituals included:
 - Specific types of animal & grain sacrifice and offerings
 - Ritual cleansing and giving of tithes and offerings to the Lord
 - Instruction in & recitation of the word of God
- The formal institution of Hebrew worship included the tabernacle or tent of meeting and the ***establishment of the Levitical priesthood***

Davidic & Solomonic Period (1000-600 BCE)

- David is credited as the king who organized Israel into a worshiping covenant community
- Contributions by David:
 - Brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem
 - Purchased land for a permanent home for the ark (later becomes the Temple site)
 - Assigned specific liturgical roles
 - Formed musical guilds to compose & direct songs of praise and thanksgiving in all Temple celebrations and worship services

King Solomon's contribution was to build the Temple of Yahweh and further the development of sacrificial worship

- **Prophetic movement** gave rise to:
 - Public spokespersons for Yahweh
 - Served as spiritual & political advisor to the king
 - Ministered to the nation regarding covenant morality

Exilic & Restoration Period (600-400 BCE)

- The fall of Jerusalem and the deportation of thousands to Mesopotamia profoundly impacted religious life
- Worship of Yahweh did NOT cease during exile:
 - Religion shifted from sacrificial to non-sacrificial
 - Corporate worship at Temple gave way to individual worship highlighting confession, lament, prayer, and praise
- Exilic period gives birth to synagogue
- Ezra & Nehemiah instituted specific measures for Restoration:
 - Covenant ceremony (Neh. 9:38-10:27)
 - Rehabilitation of the priesthood (Ezra 10:18-44)
 - Reinstitution of Temple ritual and Sabbath observance (Neh. 8, 13)
 - Introduction of the Law of Moses as the rule of community life (Neh. 8)

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- These reforms had considerable impact:
 - State and king replaced by temple and priestReligious, social, and economic policy now determined by Mosaic Law
- Offices of priest and scribe redefined:
 - Pre-exile – a scribe was a high-ranking cabinet member of the state bureaucracy (never functioned as a priest)
 - Ezra – role of scribe redefined as a priest-scribe which became the model for a later class of religious professionals

What happened?

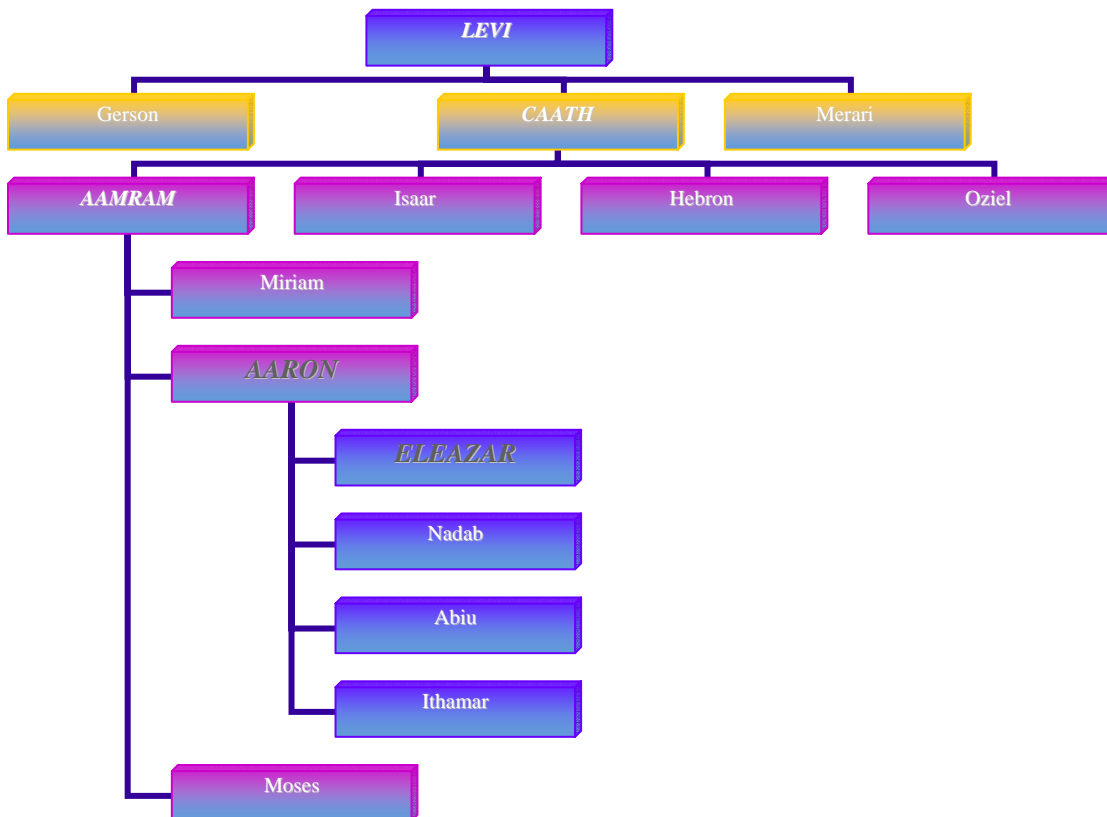
- To maximize community obedience to covenant stipulations related to personal purity, the Mosaic code was supplemented with legal language called the oral law (“tradition of elders”).
- Priesthood became more about political and economic issues
- By the time of Jesus, a professional class of scribe (lawyers) had usurped the priestly role as spiritual leaders of the people (Matt. 23:27)

Jewish Priesthood

- By the time of Moses, the priesthood was formally organized with 3 ranks:
 1. high priests (Kohein or Kohanim)
 2. priests
 3. Levites

⇒ All 3 were members of the tribe of Levi

Levi's Descendants



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Jewish Priestly Orders & Duties

- Priests/High Priests:
 - must be Hebrew male, between ages 20 and 60, and descendant of Aaron
- Duties fell into 2 categories:
 - Superintending tabernacle/temple worship
 - Instructing the people of God in the Law of Moses
- High priest duties:
 - Directed/supervised sacrificial worship
 - Only priest permitted to enter the Holy of Holies
 - THE model of holiness and purity
- Duty of Priests:
 - Officiated sacrificial worship under the direction of the high priest, especially altar of burnt offering
 - Led the congregation in corporate and festival worship
 - Blessed the people at corporate gatherings
 - Responsible for transporting the ark of the covenant
 - Assessed and enforced Mosaic Law related to issues of ritual purity (childbirth, leprosy)
 - Charged with the duty of religious education of all people
 - Served as advisers to judges, kings, other civic leaders
- Duty of Levites:
 - Assisted priests in temple services
 - In charge of sanctuary and its furnishings including keeping guard, transporting the ark
 - Cleaning and maintaining the Temple, baking the bread, assisting in grain offerings

The Jews placed stress on the office of High Priest – for generations the people had access to God only through the High Priest.

HEBREWS 7

Verse	Meaning
1-3	<i>Melchizedek is a TYPE of Christ</i> ; he foreshadows Jesus as a king-priest of Jerusalem
4-7	v. 7 refers to the <i>filial</i> principle: <i>those who are of lesser rank should honor those who are of greater rank</i> (Melchizedek being greater than Abraham)
8-10	v. 9-10 refers to the <i>federal</i> principle: what our ancestors do affects us (<i>Melchizedek's priesthood is greater than the priesthood descending from Abraham</i>)
11	<i>God never planned the Levitical priesthood to be permanent.</i> If he had, he would never have spoken of the Messiah as a Melchizedekian priest.

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Verse	Meaning
12, 18, 19a 1919a	Priesthood and the old law were bound together; one was a subordinate part of the other ... thus it followed <i>if the priesthood is changed, "there is necessarily a change in the law as well."</i>
14	<i>Melchizedek's position as High Priest was not dependent on ancestry</i> ... neither was Christ's
19, 22	<i>Through Jesus, God has provided a better way to relate to him.</i>
26-27	The Levitical priests (who were sinful themselves) offered animals which could never take away human sin. Those priests died. <i>In Christ we have the perfect sacrifice</i> which covered all our sins and never has to be repeated. Christ lives forever!

Bottom line?

- It means Christ was NOT a High Priest as in Aaron and the Levitical order. Christ was, and is, a High Priest like Melchizedek. (Heb. 7:26-27)
- OT priests were servants of the old covenant between God and Israel – theirs was a covenant relationship in that they served as mediators representing both God and his people. In the new covenant, ***Jesus***, the supreme high priest, now ***serves as the sole mediator*** between God and his people (1 Tim. 2:5-6)
- *Priests today serve not as a mediator but in "persona Christi Capitis" – in the "person of Christ."* CCC 1548

Holy Orders (Ministerial Priesthood)

- What did Jesus say about the priesthood? What did the early Christian communities expect of their priests?
 - There are no easy answers, but NT mentions different ministries of the priesthood including: teachers, prophets, healers, preachers, evangelists and shepherds
- Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church. (CCC 1536)
 - 3 degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate
- Originally "episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate" referred to secular offices
 - *Episcopos* – "overseer" or "leader"
 - *Presbyter* – "elder" or "adviser"
 - *Diaconos* – "minister" (as in civil gov't)
 - Early Christians used these terms interchangeably
- By the 3rd or 4th century the variety of ministries was assumed into the ministry of leadership
- The ***episcopos*** (bishop) became the primary minister.

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- The bishop exercised his ministry with the help of a council of elders (presbyters)
- The principle function of *presbyters* was to advise the bishop and share responsibility for the local church.
- Deacons assisted bishops in specific ministries such as assistance to widows and orphans, care of the sick, finances, education and administration
- As the Christian community grew and became distinct from Judaism, it explained its rituals in contemporary terms ... Christians gathered for the “Breaking of the Bread” and saw this sacred meal to be the sacrament of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary
 - Those who presided at this sacrifice, bishops and especially presbyters, came to be called “priests”
 - The function of the priests began to be seen as similar to the Jewish Levitical priesthood
- By the end of the 3rd century the Christian community leader was seen as a sacred person, one set apart to offer sacrifice on behalf of the faithful.
 - The Orders of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons became Sacred Orders

Common Priesthood

- No one can be baptized and not have a role to play in the Church. Baptism and discipleship go together.
- As disciples in Christ, we are entrusted with carrying on the mission and ministry of Christ. (CCC 1548)
- We call this priesthood that is shared by all the baptized “the common priesthood of all the faithful.” (CCC 1547)
 - This is not a new idea – 1 Pt. 2:5 says: “...like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”
- If the common priesthood is not new, the importance given to it by Vatican Council II **IS!**
- A new emphasis given to Baptism and the common priesthood has created a resurgence of lay ministry at the parish, diocesan and world-wide level.
 - We now see lay ministers as readers of the Word, Communion ministers, spiritual directors, catechists, liturgists, ministers to the sick, directors of religious education, parish managers (all previously restricted to the ordained).