

Lesson 11: The Priesthood (1)

Read: Exodus 28:1-5, Leviticus 21:1-24

A priest is a *mediator* between God and man, a minister who performs procedures and ceremonies relating to the worship of God on behalf of a community of people. The official Aaronic priesthood was established by God's commands at the same time He gave Moses the instructions for the building of the tabernacle. The first priests chosen by God were Aaron – Moses' brother – and his four sons.

The high priest, a descendent of Aaron through the first-born son of each generation, was the spiritual leader of the people. He was a token of consecration and of God's special anointing. He carried upon himself the tremendous duty of entering the Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood upon the atonement cover on the Day of Atonement each year, seeking God's forgiveness of sins for the whole nation of Israel. If the high priest fell short of the holiness God required and did not fulfill his job, Israel's sins remained unforgiven until the next Day of Atonement.

Discussion:

1. Was the concept of a priest foreign to the Israelites when God instituted it? Why or why not?
2. Why did the priests have to wear special clothing?
3. We read about some laws regarding the priesthood in Leviticus 21. What do these laws point to in regards to the priesthood? What does this say about the character of God? (Pay attention to v.8.)

4. What were some of the responsibilities of the priests? (See Leviticus 1:2-9, 13:2-3, 24:2-9, Numbers 10:8-9 for some examples.)

5. We have read the story of Nabad's and Abihu's death previously in Leviticus 10:1-3. This tragic incident happened right after the consecration rituals that inducted Aaron and his sons as priests in the Lord's tabernacle. In light of the roles of priests, why did God strike Nabad and Abihu dead and what lesson can we learn from their mistake?

6. The concept of priesthood to the Israelites was not limited to the individuals who served in the tabernacle. Read Exodus 19:5-6. What does it mean for Israel to be a "holy nation" and "kingdom of priests"? What did this covenant mean to Israel?

7. Read Isaiah 29:13 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. Did Israel succeed in her role as a kingdom of priests? What was the result?

Optional further reading: The tribe of Levi was commanded to help the priests in the care of the tabernacle and all its furnishings. The three clans of the Levites (male descendents of Gershon, Kohath and Merari) were assigned specific tasks and were responsible for carrying different components of the tabernacle during the Israelites' travels through the wilderness. For more information, read Numbers 1:47-54 and chapters 3-4, and 8:5-26.