

PRIESTHOOD: SERVANTS OF GOD'S HOUSE

1. Israel's special priesthood

1.1 Holy status: Parallels in symbol, status, and function between priests and sanctuary

The Aaronic priests (hereafter, simply “priests”) were worship leaders set apart for a holy status with respect to the rest of the nation of Israel. There are many parallels between the Tabernacle and the function and dress of the priesthood, which suggests that the priests were living embodiments of the Tabernacle and thus personal bearers of God's holy presence.

- Consecration: The priests have to be made holy by special acts of consecration in order to serve in the Tabernacle (Exod 29; Lev 8). They received the very same acts of consecration (anointing with oil and blood) used to consecrate the Tabernacle and altar (Lev 8).
- Clothing: Same kinds and gradations of materials as sanctuary
 - Same levels of skill (designed or skillful/embroidered/woven)
 - Same grades of materials
 - Square breastpiece links w/ shape of Holy of Holies

Tabernacle	Priest
Court white woven linen curtain	Inner clothing white woven linen coat & turban
Holy Place <ul style="list-style-type: none">• blue, purple, scarlet, embroidered wool curtain & screen• gold covered furniture	Middle clothing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• blue embroidered wool robe• embroidered sash• blue, purple, and scarlet pomegranates at the bottom• gold bells at the bottom
Holy of Holies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• blue, purple, scarlet, embroidered wool curtain• gold furniture• holiest place due to God's gold ark-throne	Outer clothing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• blue skillfully designed ephod with gold thread• square gold breastplate• gold name plate on turban (“Holy to the LORD”)

- Privileged access and function: Priests represent the nation before God within the sanctuary itself, which is off-limits to the rest of the nation as a symbolic lesson that the way into God's heavenly throne-room had not yet been fully opened to the people of God (Heb 9:8). During Israel's wilderness sojourn, the family of Aaron camp at the entrance to the Tabernacle (Num 3:38) and travel with the Tabernacle at the central and most protected position among the procession of tribes (Num 10:11–28).

The high priest is a walking, personal sanctuary. God's presence is embodied not merely in a building but ultimately in persons because people are the ultimate images of God in creation. In the Aaronic priesthood, the old covenant prefigures the incarnation and high priesthood of Christ.

1.2 Liturgical leadership

God calls and sets apart (ordains) the Aaronic priests within Israel to provide liturgical leadership for the people of Israel. They have special access and duties at the sanctuary to serve as attendants at God's house/palace, i.e., as Yahweh's palace servants. God gives this special access to the Aaronic priests in order that they might serve as mediators who embody God's personal presence to his people and also the presence of the people before God in the sanctuary.

- Priestly duties

- (1) Pastoral duties for the people in the sanctuary

- Offering incense morning and evening (high priest; Exod 30:7–8)
- Trimming lamps morning and evening (high priest; Exod 30:7–8; Lev 24:1–4)
- Entering Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood before ark on Day of Atonement (high priest; Lev 16)
- Replacing bread of the presence in the Holy Place (Lev 24:5–9)
- Guarding the sanctuary, along with the Levites (Num 3:8, 38)

- (2) Pastoral duties with the people

- Ministry of the word*

- Calling Israel to worship (Lev 9:1–5; Num 10:1–10)
- Reading God's word (Exod 24; Josh 8; 24; Deut 31:9–13; Neh 8:1–8)
- Teaching God's word (Deut 33:10; Mal 2:6–7; Jer 18:18; Hos 4:4–6)
- Blessing God's people (Lev 9:22–23; Num 6:22–27; Deut 21:5; 1 Chron 23:13).
- Prayers of intercession (1 Sam 7:5–8; cf. bearing incense: Lev 16:12–13).
- Delivering oracles of revelation via Urim and Thummim (Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; 1 Sam 14:41; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65).
- Teaching about and determining states of holiness/cleanness (Lev 10:8–11).

- Ministry of sacrament*

- Leading Israel in worship by assisting in offering sacrifices at the bronze altar (e.g., Lev 1–9)

- Ministry of rule*

- Serving as judges in certain cases along with elders (Deut 17:9; cf. Num 5:1–31).

Priests are worship leaders through whom God draws his people near to enjoy a special audience and communion with their divine King. The priests speak and act in God's name as God's representatives to serve the people and by leading the people to draw near to God in worship. In these liturgical functions, the priesthood prefigures the incarnation and high priesthood of Christ and some features of the ministry of Christian ministers/pastors.

2. Israel as general priesthood and holy nation

2.1 Kingdom of priests

Israel as a whole is a “kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6). As such, the whole nation represents the world before God and represents God to the world as witnesses of God’s revelation and bearers of God’s blessings to the whole creation. In a broad sense, the whole creation is God’s temple/house, and, as a priestly nation, the people of God have the role of serving God by calling, teaching, and assisting all peoples to worship God rightly and to care for the rest of the created order as stewards in order to glorify God and care for his house.

Note: The priesthood of all believers is not a privilege that is new with the coming of Jesus nor an exclusively NT concept! This means that there is no fundamental inconsistency between the whole people of God being a priesthood and some functions of liturgical leadership in corporate worship being restricted to a special office of leadership in the church.

2.2 Holy nation

Just as the Aaronic priests are holy with respect to the rest of Israel, so by analogy the whole people of Israel is holy with respect to the rest of the nations due to the unique way that God is present in their midst and dwells among them. They have greater access to God and a more intimate covenant relationship with God than any other people. As a response to that gracious gift of God’s special covenant with them, they also have a calling to reflect God’s holy character in every aspect of their national life.