

## Doctrine of the Levitical Priesthood

1. The English word for priest is derived from the Hebrew *cohen* referring to someone who officiates at a religious ceremony.
2. The *New Testament* Greek word for priest is *hiereus* and speaks of a person who is holy, sacred, set apart for ministry.
3. A priesthood was needed for man had sinned. His soul was corrupt. He was laden with a consciousness of guilt. Atonement was needed. Someone should offer up prayers of repentance followed by thanksgivings and sacrifices.
4. The priest fulfilled these duties in matters pertaining unto God.
5. The priest also became the representative of God to man.
6. A specialized priesthood was first established for the Israelites in the family of Aaron; all the sons of Aaron were priests. They stood between Aaron the high priest on the one hand and the Levites on the other.
7. The ceremony of their consecration is described in Exodus 29:1; Leviticus 8:1.
  - *Exodus 29:1 And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them to hallow them, to minister unto me in the priest's office: Take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish,*
  - *Leviticus 8:1 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and a bullock for the sin offering, and two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; 3 And gather thou all the congregation together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 4 And Moses did as the Lord commanded him; and the assembly was gathered together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 5 And Moses said unto the congregation, This is the thing which the Lord commanded to be done. 6 And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water. 7 And he put upon him the coat, and girded him with the girdle, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod upon him, and he girded him with the curious girdle of the ephod, and bound it unto him therewith. 8 And he put the breastplate upon him: also he put in the breastplate the Urim and the Thummim. 9 And he put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, even upon his forefront, did he put the golden plate, the holy crown; as the Lord commanded Moses.*
8. The clothing which the priests wore during their ministrations consisted of the following items.
  - Linen drawers.

- Cassock. The cassock was made of white linen. It was close fitting and had a chess-board pattern on it. This garment came nearly to the feet. Jesus had on such clothing when He was crucified. *John 19:23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.*
- Girdle. The white cassock was gathered round the body with a girdle of needle work. The high priest wore a beautiful belt with threads of blue, purple and scarlet intermingled with white, and worked in the form of flowers.

*Exodus 28:39 And thou shalt embroider the coat of fine linen, and thou shalt make the mitre of fine linen, and thou shalt make the girdle of needlework.*

*Exodus 28:40 And for Aaron's sons thou shalt make coats, and thou shalt make for them girdles, and bonnets shalt thou make for them, for glory and for beauty.*

- Ephod. This sacred garment of gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen was worn by the Jewish high priest.

*Exodus 39:2 And he made the ephod of gold, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen.*

*Exodus 28:4 And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broidered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 5 And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen. 6 And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen, with cunning work. 7 It shall have the two shoulder pieces thereof joined at the two edges thereof; and so it shall be joined together. 8 And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen. 9 And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel:*

The ephod fit closely around the shoulders and was held on by two straps. A hole in the top admitted the head. On top of each of the shoulder straps an onyx stone was encased in a filigree setting of gold and engraved with the names of six tribes of Israel.

*Exodus 28:9 And thou shalt take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the children of Israel:*

*Exodus 39:6 And they wrought onyx stones inclosed in ouches of gold, graven, as signets are graven, with the names of the children of Israel. 7 And he put them on the shoulders of the ephod, that they should be stones for a memorial to the children of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses.*

The robe of the ephod was a garment different from the ephod. It was blue, sleeveless, and fringed at the bottom with bells of gold and pomegranates of blue, gold, purple, and scarlet.

*Exodus 28:31 And thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all of blue. 32 And there shall be an hole in the top of it, in the midst thereof: it shall have a binding of woven work round about the hole of it, as it were the hole of an habergeon, that it be not rent. 33 And beneath upon the hem of it thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: 34 A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about. 35 And it shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he cometh out, that he die not.*

*Exodus 39:22 And he made the robe of the ephod of woven work, all of blue. 23 And there was an hole in the midst of the robe, as the hole of an habergeon, with a band round about the hole, that it should not rend. 24 And they made upon the hems of the robe pomegranates of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and twined linen. 25 And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates upon the hem of the robe, round about between the pomegranates; 26 A bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, round about the hem of the robe to minister in; as the Lord commanded Moses.*

Ordinary priests wore a simpler linen ephod.

*1 Samuel 22:18 And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.*

Samuel also wore such an ephod as a child (2:18), as did David when officiating before the Ark as king.

*1 Samuel 2:18 But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.*

*2 Samuel 6:14 And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.*

- Head covering. Upon their heads the priests were to wear caps or bonnets in the form of a cup-shaped flower, also of fine linen.
- Shoes. In all their acts of ministration the priests were to be bare footed.

9. The priest had specific duties to maintain.

- The priests were to watch over the fire on the altar of burnt offering, and to keep it burning evermore both by day and night.

*Leviticus 6:12 And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings.*

*2 Chronicles 13:11 And they burn unto the Lord every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the Lord our God; but ye have forsaken him.*

- The priests were to feed the golden lamp outside the vail with oil.

*Exodus 27:20 And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always. 21 In the tabernacle of the congregation without the vail, which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the Lord: it shall be a statute for ever unto their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel.*

*Leviticus 24:2 Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually.*

- The priests were to offer the morning and evening sacrifices, each accompanied with a meet offering and a drink offering, at the door of the tabernacle.

*Exodus 29:38 Now this is that which thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually. 39 The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even: 40 And with the one lamb a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil; and the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering. 41 And the other lamb thou shalt offer at even, and shalt do thereto according to the meat offering of the morning, and according to the drink offering thereof, for a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the Lord. 42 This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. 43 And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory. 44 And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office.*

- They were also to teach the children of Israel the statutes of the Lord.

*Leviticus 10:11 And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.*

*Deuteronomy 33:10 They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.*

*2 Chronicles 15:3 Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.*

*Ezekiel 44:23 And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. 24 And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; and they shall judge it according to my judgments: and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall hallow my Sabbaths.*

- During the journeys in the wilderness the priests were to cover the ark and all the vessels of the sanctuary with a purple or scarlet cloth before the Levites might approach them.

*Numbers 4:5 And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering vail, and cover the ark of testimony with it: 6 And shall put thereon the covering of badgers' skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof. 7 And upon the table of shewbread they shall spread a cloth of blue, and put thereon the dishes, and the spoons, and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon: 8 And they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet, and cover the same with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put in the staves thereof. 9 And they shall take a cloth of blue, and cover the candlestick of the light, and his lamps, and his tongs, and his snuff dishes, and all the oil vessels thereof, wherewith they minister unto it: 10 And they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put it upon a bar. 11 And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof: 12 And they shall take all the instruments of ministry, wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put them on a bar: 13 And they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon: 14 And they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the fleshhooks, and the shovels, and the basons, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it. 15 And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation.*

- As the people started on each days march the priests were to blow "an alarm" with long silver trumpets.

*Numbers 10:1 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. 3 And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 4 And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee. 5 When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward.*

*6 When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey: they shall blow an alarm for their journeys. 7 But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm. 8 And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance for ever throughout your generations.*

Other instruments of music might be used by the more highly-trained Levites and the schools of the prophets, but the trumpets belonged only to the priests,

- During times of military conflict the priests were to be present on the field of battle.

*1 Chronicles 12:23 And these are the numbers of the bands that were ready armed to the war, and came to David to Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the Lord.*

*1 Chronicles 12:27 And Jehoiada was the leader of the Aaronites, and with him were three thousand and seven hundred;*

*2 Chronicles 20:21 And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever. 22 And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.*

In later periods of Jewish history, there was a special appointment to a war priest.

- Other functions were hinted at in Deuteronomy which might have given them greater influence as the educators and civilizers of the people.
- They were to act (whether individually or collectively does not distinctly appear) as a court of appeal in the more difficult controversies in criminal or civil cases.

*Deuteronomy 17:8 If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose; 9 And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: 10 And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: 11 According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. 12 And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. 13 And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.*

10. Generous provisions were made for the support of the priests.

- The priests were to receive one per cent of one tenth of the tithes the nation as a whole paid. *Numbers 18:26 Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe. 27 And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshing floor, and as the fullness of the winepress. 28 Thus ye also shall offer an heave offering unto the Lord of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the Lord's heave offering to Aaron the priest.*
- Every third year a special tithe was taken. *Deuteronomy 14:28 At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: Deuteronomy 26:12 When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled;*

11. In order to serve the priests had to be without physical defects.

- *Leviticus 21:17 Speak unto Aaron, saying, Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. 18 For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous, 19 Or a man that is broken footed, or broken handed, 20 Or crookback, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken; 21 No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God.*

12. There office of a priest ended only with death.

- *Hebrews 7:16 Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.*
- *Hebrews 7:23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:*