

The Office of High Priest in the Bible

By James Moriello, Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket RI, 2023

Originally, in the Law of Moses, from the 15th Century B.C., beginning with Aaron, the High Priesthood was hereditary and for life (Numbers 20:23-28). There were times of interruption of this priesthood throughout the history of Israel, notably in the days of Judges. We find the active priesthood of Zadok (of the line of Aaron) in the days of King David (2 Samuel 8:15-17; 1 Chronicles 24:1-3) in the 10th Century B.C.. Then again, Ezra served as priest according to this lineage in the 5th Century B.C. (Ezra 7:1-6). After this time, in which Israel was in captivity under the authority Greece, and Rome, it eventually came to pass that the Sanhedrin affirmed its authority to appoint the High Priest. By the time we get to Jesus' day, Rome wished to put the Jews in their place, and the High Priest came to be appointed by the Roman prefect (governor). Both Annas and Caiaphas, who presided over the trials of Jesus Christ, were appointed after this manner (Josephus' Antiquities 18:2). Although Annas (also called Ananus) had been replaced in the office, he wielded the power of the office behind the scenes, and nothing big happened in the Sanhedrin of Israel without his approval (John 18:12-13). Ironically, the One placed on trial before the high priest is our Divine High Priest, Jesus the Messiah of Israel, who is also called Christ (Hebrews 3:1).