

Within global and continental motivation, there is a need for African Christians to understand the sanctions and ordinances of God concerning the Levitical priesthood and the eternal priesthood which our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated through His death and resurrection. This means we, African Christians, have great roles to play in the maintenance, preservation and restoration of this priesthood. This book is an assessment of biblical priestly thoughts in the light of African Christian thoughts. It is more a guidebook that would be used by teachers, prophets, apostles, pastors and evangelists and Christians generally for the underscoring of priestly thoughts and dispositions. It stands in a long line of critical investigations that focus on the ways in which certain teachings, institutions and practices concerning the priesthood have come to be embedded in the African church.

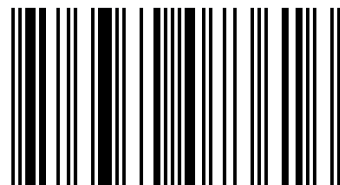
Priesthood & African Christian Thoughts



Gideon Y. Tambiyi

Priesthood and African Christian Thoughts

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**PRIESTHOOD AND AFRICAN
CHRISTIAN THOUGHTS**

Gideon Y. Tambiyi

In
honour of
Prof. Danny & Mary McCain,
a Professor of Biblical Studies for
their priestly service (teaching, preaching
and mentoring) in Nigeria (1988 to the present)

Preface

For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction — because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty (Mal. 2:7).

This book is a product of a project commissioned by the Visioneer of Throneroom Trust Ministry (TTM), Apostle Emmanuel N. Kure on the 5th of January, 2014 under the title “Levitical Priesthood: A Biblio-Contextual Appraisal with Implications to African Christianity.” It was a work birthed from the concern to enlighten, remind and restore the sanity and sanctity of Throneroom Trust Ministry and the Church at large in the forgetfulness and lack of knowledge of the vision of Throneroom Trust Ministry in view of generational dynamism. It was clear that the “younger generation” did not underscore the fundamentals of the Ministry and the vision was not properly envisaged. It was necessary that the Visioneer called on us (particularly the “younger generation”) to reflect on the vision and reinstate our priestly positions in the Lord and in His service.

The central vision of Throneroom Trust Ministry is clear as being a “prophetic prayer and watchman ministry.” The leadership of the Ministry has been working hard to pattern our duties as subordinates in the pathway of the overall motto “Raising a Nation of Priests for Jesus” which has kept us all these while.¹ This zeal to restoring the prophetic prayer’s gap

¹ The motto of Throneroom Trust Ministry has been so captured to define and regulate the *ultimatum* and *status quo* of the Ministry. It is the driving-belt and it speaks of the sincerity and focus of the entire

in this twenty-first century in the Ministry resulted to the tendency of turning some academics to become intercessors. I would like to say to my fellow workers in TTM that we should consider it a pleasure to have many of us spend years working in the different arms within various capacities for many years under the umbrella of Apostle Emmanuel Kure and Pastor (Mrs) Martha Kure and recently at the feet of Apostle Ofofiele Nzimiro, who is currently the Vision Coordinator of Throneroom Trust Ministry.

The initial research took six month of intense study and reconstruction and it was presented in July, 2014 during our Staff Leadership/Accountability Meeting. Since then, the work has undergone moments of reconstruction to this time of publication. I have used a biblical theology approach to document using word studies that the proper concept of priesthood is fully gotten from a biblical perspective.

It is clear to state that it is not only Throneroom Trust Ministry that craves to pattern its life into the concept of priesthood as found in the Bible but the whole African society particularly African Christianity and global Christianity. Also, since it has been prophesied that 2015 into 2016 (ayin waw in the Jewish calendar, 5776) is a priestly year of the Messiah by many men of/from God, it means that the year

Ministry. This motto is classified and should prick us workers of the Ministry into finest and spiritual intensities in all dimensions as prophetic midwives for the Church and the nations of the earth. See Testimonial of International School of Prophecy and Biblical Studies, Throneroom Trust Ministry.

5776 was an opening year for the saints which ushers us into 5777. To understand and key into the prophetic spirit of the year, it becomes necessary that the book is published in the spirit of the year. Within this understanding, this book is a call to echo and usher the priestly agenda and reconsider our place as African Christians (priests) in the total agenda of God as the wind of the Holy Spirit has been blowing towards Africa since the last part of the twentieth century.

This book underscores that accepting Jesus opens the gate of priesthood to everybody as long as we are Christians. It also clears the modern hitches and affirms that the priests (Christians) are messengers and prophetic midwives of the Lord almighty (Mal. 2:7) and they are the custodians of the knowledge and instructions of God (Mal. 2:7) not in the order of Aaron but in the order of Jesus Christ. Of course, people should come to the priests for wholesome teaching and knowledge. In Africa, the priests today should stand for the truth and declare the ways of the Lord and make them known to the people in line with African Christian thoughts.

Within this global and continental motivation, there is a need for African Christians to understand the sanctions and ordinances of God concerning the Levitical priesthood and the eternal priesthood which our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated through His death and resurrection. This means we, African Christians, have great roles to play in the maintenance, preservation and restoration of this priesthood.

Since Africa is deciding for the globe in terms of Christian values,² understanding the eternal priesthood, in the new covenant as the old fashion is gone and applying its principles for spiritual database, is not optional for African Christians to enable the African Church sets the proper pattern for global Christianity. It is within this concern to apologetically defend and enlighten African Christians on the current priestly developments that this book was rearranged and researched beyond its initial stage.

The book is an assessment of biblical priestly thoughts in the light of African Christian thoughts. It is more a guidebook that would be used by teachers, prophets, apostles, pastors and evangelists and Christians generally for the underscoring of priestly thoughts and dispositions. Teachers, pastors, apostles, evangelists and Christians should use the contents of this book to expand their dimensions as the Holy Spirit directs for it is a collection of information from the scriptures and the African identity.

Thanks to my parents Mr and Mrs Yohanna Tambiyi for training me academically and spiritually. Special appreciation to Apostle Emmanuel N. Kure and his wife Pastor (Mrs) Martha Kure (courageous warriors and pace setters in the faith) whom God has used to establish Throneroom Trust Ministry for the past 25 years and for receiving from the Lord the command to have this book documented in its early stage. Bulk of gratitude to Apostle

² Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, *African Church Under Fire: Problems and Prospects* (Kaduna: Tubase Prints, 2014), 389-492.

Ofofile Nzimiro, the Vision Coordinator of Throneroom Trust Ministry, for the foresight God has given him to govern and develop the priestly life among the workers. I may not have the chance to say it: in terms of priesthood, Apostle Nzimiro is a father, a soft-hearted shepherd with “excellent pastoral character”, and a prophesying priest. Sir, may you walk and serve perfectly in the priestly oil of Zadok, Elijah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Thanks to all staff and students of Throneroom Apokalupsis International Bible Institute, Kaduna, Nigeria (the then International School of Prophecy and Biblical Studies) from 2nd January 2013 to the present for making me keep focus as a teaching priest. Thanks to Mr & Mrs Justice Mallai for friendship and parenting. I know that God allows people to meet at a certain time and season. Meeting Pastor Philip K. Ayuba (International Administrator of TTM), Pst (Mrs) Naomi Aruwa, Apostle Gbolahan Olayomi, Mr Chike Nsofor, Apostle Stanford Tassie, Pst Joshua Adamu, Apostle Katongo Kapaya (Zambia), Prophetess Melissa Simon (Antigua), Pst Ayuba Bature, and Rev. Dr Nuhu Musa became a light to my feet; all of you have been my strength and encouragements each time I needed help, thank you. Thanks to all who have written before me as acknowledged in the footnotes and bibliography.

Thanks to Prof. Danny McCain (for whom this book is dedicated) and Dr Robert Lillo all of the University of Jos, Jos; Prof. Scott Carroll of the Manuscript Research Group, USA; Prof. J. D. Gwamna and Assoc. Prof. Matthew Michael all of

Nasarawa State University, Keffi; Prof. Zamani B. Kafang of Kaduna State University, Kaduna; Assoc. Prof. Momolu A. Massaquoi of Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary, Liberia. Thanks to Abraham Paul of ECWA Theological College, Gure for reading through parts of the manuscripts and making some observations.

Tambiyi, G. Y.
Jan., 2017

Contents

Dedication	ii
Preface	iii
Contents	ix
Introduction	1

Chapter One

Priesthood in Ancient Near East..... 12

1. The Origin and Early Developments of Priesthood
2. The Worship and the Inauguration of Priesthood
3. The Babylonians and Ancient Priestly Traditions
4. Innovative Worship and Dialection of Languages
5. Priests in Egypt
6. The Priests in the Greek World
7. Priesthood in Islam
8. Priesthood in African Traditional Cultures
9. Summative Statements

Chapter Two

Biblical Historical Weaving of Levitical Priesthood..... 38

1. The Days of the Patriarchs
2. The Mosaic Period
3. The Priesthood before the Exile
4. The Exilic Period
5. The Post-Exilic Period
6. In the Days of Malachi

Chapter Three

The Focal Points of the Priesthood.....92

1. Anointing and Ordination
2. Qualifications for Priesthood
3. People's Roles towards the Priests
4. Consecration of Priests
5. Requirements for the Priesthood
6. Priestly Garments and the High Priest
7. Priestly Ranking and Succession
8. Priestly Sacrificial Portions
9. Age and Gender in Priesthood
10. The Lord Decrees to Priests
11. Priestly Appointments
12. Priestly Division
13. Priestly Land Allocations

Chapter Four

Priestly-Levitical Duties and Responsibilities112

1. Duties and Responsibilities of Priests
2. Duties and Responsibilities of Levites

Chapter Five

Misunderstandings and Errors of Priesthood.....137

1. Misunderstood Priestly Roles
2. Disobedience and Failure to teach the Truth
3. Priesthood as means of Survival
4. Fear of Men than God and Despise the Name of God
5. Insubordination and slander
6. Priestly Conspiracy and Ordered Persecution

7. Levites Despised
8. Failed to Rely of God and Despising the Glory of the Priesthood
9. Priestly Laxity and Failure to Repair the Temple
10. Unfaithfulness and Intermarriage
11. Serving other Gods and Profane the Temple
12. Drunkenness and Murder
13. Selfishness and Abandoned the Poor
14. Indignant and Jealous
15. Self-priesthood and Self-glorification

Chapter Six

The Divine Priesthood Inaugurated 158

1. The Merging of Priesthood and Kingship
2. The Roman Destruction of the Levitical Priesthood
3. Advent of Eternal Priesthood
4. Jesus the High Priest
5. Melchizedekian Priesthood
6. The Continuous Combat against the Eternal Priesthood
7. The Priesthood in Hebrews: Jesus and the Priests

Chapter Seven

Priestly Offices as Reflected in Spiritual Gifts.....188

1. Door watchers
2. Altar Priests
3. The High Priest
4. Priestly Assistants
5. Sanctuary Priests
6. Temple Singers

- 7. Administrative Priests
- 8. Temple Sweepers
- 9. Teaching Priests
- 10. Prophesying Priests
- 11. Collectors of Offerings
- 12. Temple Guards
- 13. Temple Builders
- 14. Shop and Store Rooms' Keepers
- 15. Temple Servants

Chapter Eight

African Christians and the Priesthood..... 210

- 1. The Cross and the Eternal Priesthood
- 2. True Christians as Priests
- 3. Priesthood and Bond Service
- 4. A Call to Revisit the Eternal Priestly Framework

Epilogue: The Future of Priesthood in Africa..... 230

Bibliography..... 238

INTRODUCTION

Since the closing part of the twentieth century, the African Church has witnessed an unprecedented shift in the aspect of Christian values as the Holy Spirit has been moving upon the African soil. This is the product of the early missionary activities upon the African continent.³ Such a development has paraded the church into greatness although with some issues surrounding its frontiers.

In the early three centuries AD, Christianity was rooted in North Africa⁴ but later got invaded by Arab crusaders predominantly in the 6th and 7th centuries. The Gospel revisited the African continent in the nineteenth century when the Portuguese missionaries brought the Gospel on the

³ Africans also have been so involved in the ministration of the Word to unreached areas and locations within the continent and beyond the African borders. There are also missionary and evangelistic activities within the continent. For example, in Nigeria, we have the Taraba missionary activities. See Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, “The Work is Enormous but the Workers are Few: African Missionary Activities in Gankita, Taraba State” <http://gideonyohanna.wordpress.com/2014/08/20/the-workk-is-enormous-but-the-workers-are-few-african-missionary-activities-in-gankita-taraba-state/> Posted 20th August, 2014 and accessed 25th December, 2014.

⁴ For more analysis see John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Heinemann, 1969 reprint, 1974), 229. Benjamin B. Warfield, “Africa and Christian Latin Literature” *Benjamin B. Warfield: Selected Writings* vol. 2 (John E. Meeter ed., New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2001), 518.

African soil.⁵ I used the word 'revisited' because Northern part of Africa (as state above) was known even in the days of the apostles during the first century AD⁶ to be a centre of Christian religious activities with ministerial integrity and extensive Christian thoughts. There were strong churches which existed in Egypt, Carthage, Abyssinia, Ethiopia and Nubia etc.⁷ within North and East Africa.

The readjustment and disappearance of these churches in these African kingdoms were triggered by the Islamic conquest in the seven century AD; although the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt and the church in Ethiopia are still making the continent proud, even though the minority. P. J. Vatikiotis revealed the ideal state of Egyptian dwellers as being villagers in ancient days which made it easier for the Coptic Church to expand their boundaries; hence they concentrated on reaching the poor and the peasants with the Gospel. Vatikiotis properly captured the storyline of the Islamic conquest of Egypt in AD 641 and implantation of new

⁵ For an elaborative study see Musa A. B. Gaiya, *Christianity in Africa* (Jos: Ade Printing Press, 2002), 5-57. Pauline Lere, *The Church in West Africa* (Jos: Deka Publication, 2001), 1-5; 49-62.

⁶ The acronym AD is not "after death" as many people are presuming but an abbreviation of the Latin words, *Anno Domini* meaning "in the day of the Lord."

⁷ For an understanding see Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003). Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2008). Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions* (Kaduna: Yuty Graphics, 2011), 5-8.

faith, Islam and a new language, Arabic.⁸ He bluntly asserted that “The natives relinquished Coptic and Greek in favour of Arabic; they abandoned Christianity for the faith of Allah”⁹ instead of “some natives” for not all natives adopted the new faith and language in Egypt.

In enlightening the situation of the Copts in Egypt and the surviving nature of Coptic Christianity, Maurice A. Robinson,

Islam was not as totally destructive to Christianity or the New Testament manuscripts as has been claimed. Monasteries and the Coptic Church continued to survive and maintain literary activity under Islam. Communications and travel were maintained between churches and monasteries in Islamic regions and the Byzantine East.¹⁰

It is clear within historical interlude that not all the monasteries and churches were destroyed and not all natives abandoned their faith and language. Coptic still remain the language of Egypt and Coptic Christianity is still a surviving faith of the Copts; though, today, we have few Christians, who are still surviving the dominant influence of Islam as reflected in the Egyptian brotherhood. Philip Jenkins added

⁸ P. J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 7, 11.

⁹ Vatikiotis, 11.

¹⁰ Maurice A. Robinson, “The Case for Byzantine Priority” *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* (David Alan Black ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 138.

that the Copts maintained, by the fifteenth century, the minority status and constitute 10 percent of Egyptian population.¹¹

It is also clear from the above historical facets that even when the Church in North Africa was invaded by the Islamic forces and crusaders dominantly in the seven century, the Coptic Church and the church in Ethiopia survived through the centuries to the present time. With this, one can say that ecclesiastical rites and priestly activities have been very common among the Coptic Christians, Ethiopian Christians and the disappeared Christian kingdoms in North Africa.

Africa got to hear the Gospel message for the second time through the “faithful mouths” of Europeans who have sacrificed their time, energy and lives for the salvation of the African continent. During this second hearing, ecclesiastical rites and priestly dispositions were all designed to fit European priestly portraits since Christianity was not indigenous as a modern African Christian would expect. The Europeans taught our fore-fathers the “basics” of priesthood which ended up, in my opinion, becoming an adaptation of Western priestly enforcements.

Despite that Africa had a pattern of priestly activities in the traditional sense, the Europeans made void such traditional priestly involvements and relegated the tendencies of such African traditional services at the expense of foreign priestly innovations which became the product of

¹¹ Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 128.

Western Christian priestly thoughts under the guise of biblical or Levitical priesthood. They made Africans adopt Western priestly practices as biblical priestly thoughts.

Within this understanding of the priestly backgrounds, I would like to say that to jump into the waters of the priesthood in the Bible is like putting a row-boat into the Atlantic. This makes the questions concerning the priesthood, like ocean waves, to keep coming, begging for more research and scrutiny. Much within the Western context have already been written about the priesthood, but in many ways, more questions arise, and the priesthood has not received attention it deserves in recent scholarship particularly within the African biblical research. Though few works, which are critical examinations in a variety of different areas are undergone with passion, could be seen to be putting their heads high since discussions of the priesthood are uncommon and marginalized, upholding health and wealth gospels, by many academic and biblical authorities, pastors and biblical students in Africa. Within these writings (both Western and African), many puzzle pieces have been identified, yet other priestly pieces of the puzzle can be discovered, reconstructed and will be connected to one another to view the full priestly picture more clearly.

Within African Christian thoughts, despite that much have been written in the West and since Western Christianity is witnessing a deterioration of priestly values, what would be the stand of Africans in restoring and curbing the priesthood to prevent it from being contaminated with strange priestly

ideologies in the name of adaptation? What does the twenty-first century African priesthood hold for the global Church since African Christianity is deciding the state of the Church of Jesus Christ as the wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing from Africa? Do Africans really underscore the biblical stand on priesthood as practices witnessed today in our denominations and ministries?

As stated above in the preface, 2015 to the present has been declared a priestly moment in God's divine agenda. For this, it becomes necessary for African Christianity to define her priestly frontiers as a covenant people with the Jewish people as Levitical priesthood has been one of the basic theological principles of ancient Israel was that the Jews were in a covenantal relationship with their God. This covenant relationship was conditional and reciprocal. God was viewed as being holy, and He expected the people also to be holy (Lev. 11:44) as the idea of the holiness of God is clearly developed in all biblical pages.

The prophets, priests, and kings were corporately responsible for maintaining the unique relationship between God and the people. Among the threefold responsibility, the Israelite priesthood (*cohen*) survived in this capacity for the whole of the biblical period, outlasting both the prophetic office and the kingship.¹²

¹² This is on the basis of viewing the period of prophecy with John the Baptist as the last prophetic voice and Jesus as belonging to the Old Testament. Although there were prophets in the New Testament but their significance is not clearly configured as those in the Old Testament.

This Jewish priesthood is called Levitical priesthood. The Bible has only one reference to these words “Levitical priesthood” (Heb. 7:11 NIV) although the concept started with Aaron (in clear terms) and “ended” during the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in AD 70. The Levitical priesthood cannot survive without the Temple. It could not remain because the Temple was destroyed. This priesthood underwent different stages of development; from the Tabernacle age to Solomon, Zerubbabel and the renovated Temple by Herod the Great. With the effort by modern Jews trying to build the Temple, what is the theological significance of the priesthood? What happens to the statement of Jesus? What happens to the sacrificial mandate of Jesus in the holy of holies? What happens to the offering of sacrifices and altars?

However, it is evident that the concept of priesthood did not begin with Israel as a nation because other nations¹³

But one thing that needs to be said is that the New Testament prophets functioned in the eternal covenant of Christ rather than that of Moses. They functioned in the sanctified body in the Spirit of Jesus rather than those of Moses, Elijah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah who had prophetic and priestly callings yet they were all shadows. Jesus fits into all cadres and is superior to all of them as fulfillment of their roles exposed by the author of Hebrews. He makes us superior in our priesthood under the New Covenant.

¹³ The word “nations” is used in this book to underscore the ancient classification of nations. Israel was separated and all other nations besides Israel were called the nations. These are the surrounding nations or

experienced advanced priesthood in some forms as discussed in chapter one of this book.

The Levitical priesthood, to clearly state, was a shadow and a symbol of the eternal priesthood in Christ Jesus. The new and eternal priesthood in Jesus does not need the Temple since worship and service are now universal and are to be done in the Spirit and truth (Jn 4:4) as Jesus revealed in His conversation with the Samaritan woman. This period was the opener to the age of the Spirit as fulfilled in Acts 2. Also, the destruction of the Temple opened the gate for the eternal priesthood of Jesus. The eternal priesthood was instated and inaugurated by Jesus when He offered Himself as a sacrificial eternal lamb without defeat for the souls of men.

It can be stated that becoming a Christian genuinely means becoming a priest, not in the old fashion, but in the eternal covenant and priesthood which Christ inaugurated. This is a fact that every Christian needs to know and key into for better reshaping of thoughts for an enhanced attitudes towards service unto the Master. It means that as a Christian, working everywhere is a service unto the Master not a job.

A priest is a servant and not the master as many ministers today are conceiving themselves. He/she is to serve the people and God whether in the old or new fashions of priesthood. He/she is to consider the interest of others first before his or hers (Phil. 2:1-5). That is why we are all to consider ourselves as servants rather than masters.

Gentiles or heathens; those who the Jews did not consider as covenant people, since Israel was considered the people and eye of God.

Also, priesthood does not need to be hereditary in the case of the sons of Aaron for Jesus, who was from the tribe of Judah, broke the priestly protocols to usher African Christians and all Christians in without being accused as not being biological descendants of Aaron.

With this, to argue whether women could be priests would be an old fashion argument for new insights concerning gender equality in Christ does not need to be overemphasized. Women ordination into the priesthood has been debatable among many people. Understanding being a Christian, who is given gifts and filled with the Spirit, and the divine ordination which is recognized by heaven could help make us think better when discussing women ordination into priesthood in whether orthodox or Pentecostal circles. Whether unmarried people could be priests is subject to the significance of the death of Christ and the inauguration of new trends in sensible Christian thoughts. Some denominations deny unmarried people ordination and urge them to marry as a mark to enter into the priesthood. The Catholic priests are known to remain celibates for the kingdom¹⁴ though the priests of the eastern Catholics marry.

This book surveys the overall concept of Levitical priesthood from inception with Aaron to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. It has considered the various aspects of the priesthood with emphasis on the eternal priesthood which Christ inaugurated and encapsulated us into the New

¹⁴ Timothy Barga, *Things that Matter to African Theology* (Jos: Fab Educational Books, 2016), 129-209.

Covenant. It has given us (Christians) the impetus to understand that any spiritual gift for ecclesiastical service within the eternal priesthood is unto the Lord as we are now expected to present living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-3) as Christ did on the cross of Calvary. I. M. Haldeman added, "There is no warrant for any special class of priests in the church. All Christians as priests. They are spiritual priests. As priests all Christians as on a level with each other, no one Christian has a right to special prominence as a priest." Christians as a family of priests, each having the same function as the other, and that is: 'to offer up spiritual sacrifices.'¹⁵ I have taken time to streamline the relevance of the whole concepts to African Christianity and to reveal the place of the priesthood for the growth of the Church in Africa.

Chapterization

The book is classified into eight chapters. Chapter one surveys the various concepts of priesthood in Ancient Near East and the African Continent. Chapter two considers the Biblical historical weaving of the Levitical priesthood from the patriarchal period to the days of Malachi. Chapter three unveils some focal points in the weaving of Levitical priesthood. Chapter four reveals the duties and responsibilities of the priests and Levites. Chapter five exposes the misunderstandings and errors committed by the priests in the Old Covenant.

¹⁵ I. M. Haldeman, *The Tabernacle, Priesthood and Offerings* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, MCMXXV), 265.

Chapter six discusses the inauguration of the divine or eternal priesthood in Christ Jesus. It reveals the superiority of eternal priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. Chapter seven considers the various priestly offices as being shadows of the various spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to New Testament's priests. It also argues that every Christian is a priest, not in the pattern of Aaron but in the fashion of Jesus Christ and that eternal priesthood leads to service for the Lord.

Chapter eight finds relevance of priesthood within the African soil. It emphasizes that because every believer is a priest, he or she is required to serve faithfully using his or her spiritual gift(s) for the purpose of edifying the whole Church. The chapter also calls on us to revisit our priestly understanding in the African Church. Lastly, the book calls on African Christians to consider the future hope which is in-store for successful priestly endeavours.

Understanding Concepts

The comprehensive usage of the word "priest(s)" in this book refers to Christian(s) who have been given gifts for ecclesiastical purposes. It is sometimes used to refer to pastor(s) in the traditional sense of priestly disposition. I have used it as applied to the Levitical priesthood particularly in the Old Testament and the Gospels.

CHAPTER ONE PRIESTHOOD IN ANCIENT NEAR EAST

1. The Origin and Early Development of Priesthood

The Bible (Old Testament), as a Jewish sacred document, cannot be the first to mention the idea of priesthood for there are other sources particularly the Babylonian epic and other ancient documents that state the idea of priesthood as practiced in their pagan context.

Israel as a nation did not begin it either. Before the call of Abraham, the father of Judaism (although some people believed is Moses), priesthood had been in existence as evidence in the book of Job when the Lord said He will lead away their priests stripped and overthrow men long established (Job 12:19).¹⁶ Note the usage of “their priests” and “long established” in the above scripture. It can be argued as evident from the Bible that priesthood mentality was gotten from other nations.

¹⁶ Beginning with Job, in this book, recognizes the theological proposition that Job lived within the primeval period in between Genesis 1 and 11. Gideon Y. Tambiyi stated that “The book appears to be the 18th book of the English arrangement of the Old Testament. Detractors and experts have criticized the contents and deciphered that the book fits in the primeval history than its present position in our biblical arrangement, though arguments are still springing up. This is brought here having these criticisms in mind. This is a wisdom book which presents the catastrophe that befell a righteous man named Job.” *The African Church Under Fire*, 46.

Consequently, it can also be argued that almost everything about Israel as a nation was imitated. The idea of the Jewish nation was borrowed from other nations who were already established as city states in view that the Lord said, in early history, that He will overthrow them (Job 12:19). God took the Israelites and gave them a land (snatched from other nations) so that they can also own a land just like other nations of the earth (Gentile nations). Also, God has always been their King. But the Jewish idea of kingship was adapted as the Israelites rejected God as their king and requested for a human succession as king in place of God as evident in other nations (1 Sam. 8:5).

In the ancient days, kings served as priests¹⁷ but it was never so with the people of Israel. The office of the kings became separate office to that of the priests not until the period between the testaments (between Malachi and the Gospels) where kings adopted the title 'priests' during the Hellenistic rule and the early Roman Empire.

In the traditional African society, religious institutions were related to the traditional politico-structural ideologies. It was this traditional understanding that could account for the subsequent merging of some aspects of traditional African religions with African leadership in the immediate post-colonial context, in the case of President Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo, President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi and

¹⁷ See John Bowle, *Western Political Thought: From the Origins to Rousseau* (London: Methuen, 1947), 3-14. Also, see A. Appadorai, *The Substance of Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 36-38.

Francisco Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, who claimed mystical authorities to accentuate their continuous stay in leadership¹⁸ and the queens of England who have been claiming ecclesiastical and political authority.

Sacrificial temples were important religious institutions in the ancient world that usually accommodated the activities of a special group in the society –the priests. According to Robert Anderson, “The pagan priest bars approach to the shrine and claims to be endowed with mystical powers which enable him to dispense to his dupes the benefits his god is willing to bestow.”¹⁹ It is with this priestly claim that people, particularly the Jews, tended to fear the pagan priests extremely beyond imagination rather than the priests of the God of heavens. Clear example is seen as the Jews respected the priests of the gods and made the priests of Yahweh to be wetting their beds with tears in search for loyalty to Yahweh throughout biblical history in the land by the people. This claim paved the way for the worship of foreign gods and made it rampant in the land of Israel as evident throughout biblical history. It is also common even in our days when people prefer to bow and revere the priests of shrines rather than listen to the pastors, apostles, teachers and prophets who are serving and are the voices of the Lord Jesus Christ within varied leadership capacities.

¹⁸ See Elizabeth Iseichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 339-350.

¹⁹ Robert Anderson, *Types in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publication, 1984), 28.

There are differences between altars and temples in the ancient world. Altars consisted were open-structures meant for sacrifices for both priests and non-priests. But temples were closed structures meant for the priests to offer sacrifices. Each Temple had an adjoining altar but not every altar was attached to a temple in the ancient world. The same can be said of the Temple of Jerusalem which so many altars for different purposes.

The temples had priests who worked on the large altars called the high priests. In Amon, the high priest stood next to the king in terms of power and influence in the society. The king and the priest had a close relationship in terms of discharging of duties. The king would appoint the high priest for service. In Egyptian temples, services were conducted by and for the king as regulatory acts for maintaining the king's long life, health and power. Everything priestly act was done to meet the desires and needs of the king.²⁰

Kingship and priesthood were also closely associated to each other and conferred on the same person in Mesopotamia. The Hittite temples were the environments of the deities and people of higher class in the society. Worship was carried by ordained priests and led by the chief priest. The masses were not involved. Ugaritic and Phoenician inscriptions referred to a chief priest at the top of a structured priesthood. This act of the chief priest leading the worship

²⁰ W. O. McCready, "Priests and Levites" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition, Copyright © 1979 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. All rights reserved. *PC Study Bible V5*.

and sacrifices was a very common act in the ancient Near East revealing the lines associated between the king and the high priest. The involvement of the priest in the ancient world was seen to be act of willful and vibrant service to the gods as such sacrificial duties were offered in the temples for the deities. It was only through the sacrifices that the deities were accessed. It was more a means to appease them. One might see it as a means to bribe the gods.

In view of the biblical reference as considered above (Job 12:19), it is quite clear that priesthood got established in the other nations before Israel during the time of Moses. It might have started with the sons of Adam but there is no evidence to trace them as Jews. In terms of sacrifice which is the dominant duty of the priests, Cain and Abel could be seen as the first priests since they offered offerings to the Lord, one of such kind, in history (Gen. 4:3-5). But whether priestly duties are defined in terms of only sacrifices cannot be clinically argued in view of the revealed biblical priestly duties. But a clear-cut example is the father-in-law of Joseph, Potiphera, who was known as a pagan priest of On (Gen. 41:45, 50; 46:20). The nature of the priesthood might not be clear but I am sure it involved the offering of sacrifices and hearing from the gods.

Another pagan priest mentioned is Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, who was a priest of Midian (Exo. 2:16; 3:1; 18:1). It has been speculated that he was a High Priest of Midian and participated in the founding and establishing of an ecclesiastical system for ancient Israel. This would have been

natural and proper to institute a priestly system with a High Priest as the head in those days.

Moses married the daughter of Jethro, a heathen priest. It seemed reasonable to inquire; why was Moses or other people interested in marrying the daughters of priests in those days? It seemed there was a crave for decency from the girls for the priests would watch over their daughters in the fear of the gods and it could be the search for material blessings since the gods would always favour their priests and such deictic blessings would follow the families and descendants. It is a common thing in our days when people from the wider society always want to marry pastors' daughters, though to some, on the negative in view that many pastors' daughters today are wayward and lack the essential concept of morality. Some of them are becoming problems to their families and to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to their parents.

Before the Israelites went to the Promised Land, there were nations of the Canaanites that were already established with their priestly systems. Those nations had their gods and Yahweh has been against such gods as it reflected as earlier as the Ten Commandments, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exo. 20:3). Yahweh knew there were other gods in the land of the Canaanites where the Israelites were occupying. You cannot have a god without a shrine and a priest. God warned them not to make for themselves gods of any kind (Exo. 20:23). God had been in constant struggle with the gods and the priests of other nations (Deut. 13:1-18). Such

understanding has made some scholars to think of God as being a political being since He was interested in the politics of Israel and the world, amending and structuring the nation of Israel against the will of the gods.²¹ This was re-established in the time of Joshua when Joshua renewed the covenant with God and the people when they promised to serve the Lord only for He is God above the other gods (Josh. 24:18).

During the time of the judges, there were challenges of foreign gods. Some of the judges stood their grounds and fought against the gods which were foreign to the people of Israel. God still had issues against them and warned them not to worship other gods (Judges 6:10). Gideon was appointed by God to destroy the hands of the Midianites on Israel and to restore sanity in the camp of Israel. Gideon's father was a priest of Baal and had an altar in his house. God commanded Gideon to tear down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah pole which was a symbol of goddess Asherah (Judges 6:25-26). Some people appeared to contend for Baal. Why such loyalty? We see Gideon to have earned the name "Jerub-baal" (Baal strife) because he stood against the temple of Baal of his days and the priests of Baal (Judges 6:32).

The dominant challenge that faced the Israelites was the priesthood of the nations such as Assyrian, Babylonian,

²¹ For an elaborative insight see Matthew Michael, "Pastor and Politics: A Philosophical and Theological Foundations for Pastoral Political Participation" (A Theological Paper presented at the Pastoral Department's Week 2005 at ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro on 24th October, 2015), 11-17.

Persians, Greeks and the Romans as we see Yahweh and the Israelites struggled with them in the wheel-rolling of biblical history. All the gods had priests who were ministering at their designated altars. Their priests offered sacrifices and taught the adherents the ways of the gods, a task Yahweh expected His priests to perform.

During the reigns of the kings, the Bible talks about the priests of Dagon at Ashdod in Philistine (1 Sam. 5:5) and how the Ark was a tragedy to their god, Dagon, in his temple (1 Sam. 5:1-4). There were priests in the land of the Philistines when the Ark of the Lord was captured.²² These were service priests in Dagon's temple. Even when the disaster came upon them, the people called their priests and diviners to decide what to do with the Ark of the Lord (1 Sam. 6:2). The priests were the holy ones that could decide the future of the people and read the mind of the gods on behalf of the people. Having the Spirit of God in us should enable us read the minds of the people entrusted under our care by the Lord as leaders in the priesthood of Jesus, a task our spiritual leaders should do.

At the time of Jehu, there were also priests who were working in the temples of Baal. Jeroboam drove the priests of the Lord and carved golden calves making them gods as in the days of Aaron and Miriam in Exodus 32. Jeroboam

²² When the Ark was captured, it led to the death of Eli and that day, Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife to Phinehas delivered and named the boy Ichabod meaning "the glory of the Lord has departed from Israel" (1 Sam. 4:19-22). The Ark was the symbol of the presence of the Lord among the Israelites and today, the Spirit indwells us.

appointed and installed priests of his wish as it has been with other nations (2 Chron. 13:9). But it was Jehu who killed everyone that belonged to the family of Ahab in Jezreel including the priests that were serving at their altars (2 Kgs 10:11, 19). To this, the Lord promised to cut the remnant of Baal, the names of the pagans and the adulterous priests in the land of Israel who were deceiving the people (Zeph. 1:4).

It can be said that the exile came as a result of the disobedience of Israel. The Lord warned on several occasions but they would not listen. They were still serving foreign gods. The Lord through Jeremiah revealed that Chemosh and the priests will be taken captive (Jer. 48:7). Similar words were said concerning Molech. He (Molech) will go to exile with his priests (Jer. 49:3) to enable the people of Israel return from their evil ways.

Seeing how loyal the priests of Baal were, I can say that those priests who worked for those gods discharged their duties with much enthusiasm more than the priests of the Lord. It is clear even in our days that some of the priests in shrines of the gods and those of the temples and altars of other gods within the African traditional society have been working and winning the hearts of men. They have had many followers over the years.

In Islam, the Sheiks and the Imams are busy setting standards of Islam in many territories.²³ But many priests

²³ Islam has its good sides and also challenges or issues. Dominant issue is the recent discovery of the fragment of the Koran which pre-dates Prophet Mohammed.

(pastors, teachers, prophets etc.) of the Lord are busy pertaining themselves with the things of the world and imperilling the lives of members in search for raising above socio-economic instability that jeopardizes the African continent (2 Tim. 3:1-4). With this, such priests have become enemies of God whom they are serving (James 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15). This is a challenge and we need to revisit our priestly mentality.

2. The Worship and the Inauguration of Priesthood

The concept of worship started in the Garden of Eden. Adam was the first created being to have fellowship and worship God. In a study, Ali A. Mazrui, a Professor of Political Science at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, has underscored the Garden of Eden to be situated in Africa and that Africa is probably the first home of mankind but it is the last to be made truly habitable.²⁴ Mazrui revealed the effort put by the archaeologists and depicted the Garden of Eden to be in Africa in the literal sense not metaphorical and that the first man was Black which is a view shared among Black American Muslims in the United States and that there were increasing evidences to vindicate the claim that the first man was an African.²⁵

Adams' children (Cain and Abel) got also the concept of worship and added a dimension to it. This dimension was in

²⁴ Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Condition* (London: Heinemann, 1980), 2.

²⁵ Mazrui, 11-12.

the aspect of offering to God. In his book, Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi stated that Genesis 4 reveals “the first act of worship in history...Cain and Abel appeared to engage in worship to the Most High which was an initial act of priesthood. They brought offerings and offered to the Lord”²⁶ but “we do not know how they got the initiative of making this offering.”²⁷

Within such African reasoning underscored by Mazrui concerning the origin of mankind and Tambiyi on Cain and Abel’s act of worship, it would appear that priesthood has African origin and maintained its consistent place in the early days until the days of Nimrod. Worship was inaugurated in the Ancient Near East in the Garden of Eden. God deserves the worship of His creatures and puts worship thoughts in man and it has overwhelmed the hearts of men throughout the history of the world. No wonder man wants to worship anything, everywhere and all the time. It does not matter what is worshipped. Africans are said to be notoriously religious.

Today, people worship different gods; Buddha, Confucius, Allah and spirits are also being worshipped. There was angelic worship even in the Bible (Col. 2:18). The God of heaven has also been worshipped through the offering of

²⁶ Tambiyi, *The African Church Under Fire*, 17.

²⁷ Tambiyi, *The African Church Under Fire*, 17. For more on the story and the offerings see Bruce K. Walke, “Cain and His Offering” *Westminster Theological Journal* (48, 1986), 363-372. Zamani B. Kafang, “An Exegesis of Genesis 4:1-26” (A Paper presented at ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro, 2006), 6-7.

animal sacrifices and now through offering our bodies to the Lord as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1) as Jesus did.

3. The Babylonians and Ancient Priestly Traditions

The recorded act of worship which was first started by Cain and Abel was adopted by the Babylonians; although they might have emulated worship from their parents. Worship among the Babylonians is as old as the origin of Shinar and Assyria (Gen. 10:8-11). Nimrod built those cities. The name “Nimrod” is from *marad* meaning ‘he rebelled.’ Rebellion is a dangerous sin. It is a conspiracy. It is as witchcraft. We see Nimrod dragged people into other practices rather than the ways of God in the ancient days.

According to Ralph Edward Woodrow,

Much of the Babylonian worship was carried on through mysterious symbols –it was a ‘mystery’ religion. Since the deified Nimrod was believed to be the sun god, fire was considered his earthly representation. Thus, as we shall see, candles and ritual fires were lighted in his honour. In other forms, he was symbolized by sun images, fish, trees, pillars and animals.²⁸

Nimrod was considered a god and many forms of worship attached to him.

In the same line of reasoning, according to Arno Froese,

²⁸ Ralph Edward Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion: Ancient and Modern* (California: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1990), 4.

Mystery religion is the religious power of the last world empire, and for the first time in history, it can be realized. It is not a power, however, that is based on a brutal oppressive military force. It is a system that is supported voluntarily by people the world over.²⁹

Danny McCain, a professor of Biblical Theology, University of Jos, has also conducted a study on mystery religions. McCain stated that,

...in the centuries immediately preceding and following the coming of Christ there was a growing breakdown and distrust of the old local and national deities. Therefore, a vacuum was created which was eventually filled by what is known as the 'mystery religions.'³⁰

McCain stated that the mystery religions are usually centered on some strange mystery legions of the various gods and goddesses.³¹ He discussed Greek mystery religions with consideration to *Dionysos* and *Orpheus*, *Pluto*, *Zeus* and also the oriental religions (Isis and Osiris, Attis and Cybele, Ishtar and Tammuz, Adonis and Aphrodite and Mithraism).³²

²⁹ Arno Froese, *How Democracy will Elect the Antichrist* (South Carolina: The Olive Press, 1997), 105.

³⁰ Danny McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction 2nd ed.* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2005), 23.

³¹ McCain, 23.

³² McCain, 23-25.

Such Babylonian priestly tradition started with Nimrod and expanded into reaching the peak of the Babylonian priestly practices which have paved the way into the understanding of the ways in which the ancient Babylonians engaged their priests and deities.

4. Innovative Worship and Dialection of Languages

The worship of the mother and the child (Samiramis and Tammuz) was also initiated. Woodrow stated that the “story of the mother and child was widely known in ancient Babylon and developed into an established worship. Numerous monuments of Babylon show the goddess mother Samiramis with her child Tammuz in her arm.”³³ Woodrow added, “When the people of Babylon were scattered to the various parts of the earth, they carried the worship of the divine mother and her child with them.”³⁴ The scattering into various languages at Babel (Gen. 11) made the people to call the mother and child in different languages and inaugurated different forms of the worship of the mother and child in different places as they migrated. Woodrow captured the various names and their depictions for the mother and son worship in different geographical cities:

The Chinese has a mother goddess called *Shingmoo* or the ‘Holy Mother.’ She is pictured with child in her arms and rays of glory around her head. The ancient Germans worshipped the

³³ Woodrow, 7.

³⁴ Woodrow, 7.

virgin Hertha with child in arm. The Scandinavians called her Disa who was also pictured with a child. The Etruscans called her Nutria, and among the Druids the Virgo-Patitura was worshipped as the 'Mother of God.' In India, she was known as Indrani, who was also represented with child in arms. The mother goddess was known as Aphodite or Ceres to the Greeks; Nana to the Sumerians; and as Venus or Fortuna to her devotees in the olden days of Rome and her child as Jupiter.³⁵

In Asia, the mother was known as Cybele and the child as Deoius who was known as the wife of Baal but never conceived. Woodrow added, "For ages, Isi, the 'Great Goddess' and her child Iswara, have been worshipped in India where Temples were erected for their worship."³⁶ Those who forgot the Lord in Israel knew her with Ashtoroth or Ashtoreth (Judg. 2:13). Woodrow also added that "In Ephesus, the great mother was known as Diana. The temple dedicated to her in that city was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Throughout Asia, the goddess was worshipped (Acts 19:27)."³⁷ Woodrow has a clear thought and revealed that "In Egypt, the mother was known as Isis and her child Horus. It is very common for the religious monuments of Egypt to show the

³⁵ Woodrow, 7-8.

³⁶ Woodrow, 8.

³⁷ Woodrow, 9.

infant Horus seated on the lap of his mother.”³⁸ This mother worship brought the worship of Virgin Mary by the Roman Catholic which is being practiced till date.³⁹

Among the Romans was the emperor worship where Ceaser Augustus was considered a mighty man in Rome like Nimrod and was worshipped in all Roman provinces. The worship of Caesar rivalled the worship of Jesus. Calling Jesus Lord was an ancient practice which was inherited in the ancestral worship of humans (Nimrod, Horus, Caesar etc.). It was a practised that dominated the first century AD and led to the persecution of Christians in the days of Apostle John; hence, Christians considered Jesus as Lord rather than Ceaser whom the Roman leadership and people considered as lord and must be worshipped.

5. Priesthood in Egypt

Priests played an important role in ancient Egypt. The priesthood was responsible for ensuring the earth and heavens remained as the gods created them. Priests accomplished this through a series of rituals they performed each day in the temple. Members of the priesthood performed these ceremonies in the name of the king.

Many people served as part-time priests in their local temples and were rewarded for their service with a share of the food and drink offered to the gods. The king may have been involved in the naming of some high-ranking priests,

³⁸ Woodrow, 9.

³⁹ See Woodrow, 10-22.

especially to politically powerful positions. Many priestly positions were passed down from father to son.

Priests in ancient Egypt differed with our modern idea of priesthood for theirs focused on specific temple tasks and many of them did not serve as spiritual advisers to the people. The priesthood grew larger as the temples also grew in size and rituals also increased. The growth in the priesthood came up with priestly ranking and the roles of individual priests became more specialized and rationed. Positions were held by many people and they would serve for a month and get back to the corrupt world to live their lives and show again for service when it is their turn to work again. Altogether, a person work for three months in a year.

As temples became more and more powerful, priestly positions were purchased because a great value of wealth and power was attached to the position during the Middle Kingdom (2055 to 1650 B.C.). People were trained to priestly offices. This training was followed with purification and initiation rituals. Like Jewish priesthood, the Egyptians required to follow strictly the regulations during the period of the year in which they were serving in the temple.

The power of the priest was connected to the power behind the Egyptian cult of the god. They most times served the physical needs of the deity and many of them had some non-religious offices hence; it was more quarterly duty. Jewish priesthood was not like that. It was for life.

Other priests had technical roles in temple; such as caring for clothing on the gods' statues and other cult objects. Some

were responsible for reading the ritual texts aloud on a daily basis. They were masters of hieroglyphs and other forms of Egyptian writing. They worked in the temple library and cared for books on medicine herbs, magic, and theology.

Another set of priests focused on astronomy. They were in charge of determining when each religious act would occur. They wrote horoscopes and calendars of lucky and unlucky days, which were very popular among the Egyptian people.

Priests were not the only participants in temple rituals. Singers, musicians and dancers all played a role. Music and dancing were intended to ward off evil and bad luck. Members of this group of priests were frequently women. Although women had held positions in the priesthood since the Old Kingdom, (2686 - 2160 B.C.), their roles had become more specialized and limited over time.

The lowest ranking priests were those who carried out the everyday tasks necessary for maintaining the temple. Butchers, porters, and doorkeepers were all considered priests and were needed to keep the temple running each day. This group seemed to have the most limited access to the inner parts of the temple.

No matter their level, all temple priests were involved in an important ceremony performed every morning before dawn: the ritual re-enactment of the creation of the cosmos. The ceremony began with a ritual called "Lighting the Fire." This ritual was held in the most sacred room of the temple and was performed by the high ranking members of the

priesthood in the name of the king. It was a reenactment of the first appearance, and daily reappearance, of the sun's fire, which was thought to repel forces hostile to the sun god.

Next, they performed a ritual known as "Drawing the Bolt." During this rite, the priests opened the door to the shrine where the main cult statue stood. The statue's clothing was removed; and underwent ritual purification, dressing, and feeding. The lower ranking priests were responsible for preparing the ceremony and disposing of the food and water.

Simpler ceremonies were held throughout the day. At midday, the ceremony involved a ritual purification by water and incense and focused on the lesser gods and deified kings and queens. During the evening, a ceremony similar to the morning ceremony was also held.

The temple rituals were only opened to the priests. Throughout the year, common people attended festivals where the image of the temple god was removed from the temple and taken to visit with the god of other temples. During these parades, people could directly address the god with questions, complaints, or request. Because the Egyptians are known to be concerned with gods of all kinds, the complexity of the priesthood increased and priestly activities became popular among the Egyptians.

6. The Priests in the Greek World

The Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes, were respected throughout the ancient Greek cities and in Asia Minor. In the Bible, Paul and Barnabas happened to heal a man in Lystra and the people exclaimed that the gods have come down to

us (Acts 14:11). A priest of Zeus, whose temple was outside the city, brought sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:13). The priest and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. He brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates to sacrifice to Paul. This priest was a faithful priest who was devoted to his master, Hermes; for it was difficult for Paul and Barnabas to stop him and the people (Acts 14:18). I wish the priests of the Lord are as zealous in their service to the Lord Jesus Christ and the people as this pagan priest.

It could be said that priesthood is a vocation. Some of the priestly functions were hereditary within the aristocratic families and some were allotted by selection, lots, and some purchased the positions. The office of the priest was for a tenure. Plato allots to *ton hieron genos* i.e. the task of offering sacrifices and prayers. These sacrifices and prayers characterized the life of the Greeks particularly their political framework.

The word “Hierus” is reflected in Homer and it is used as a synonym of “mantis”. This has a strong religious history among the Greeks as the Greek world considered the original idea that, by virtue of a specific indwelling power, seers and priests are specially equipped to mediate intercourse with deity. This created the idea of priesthood in order to have men draw closer to God in sacrifice and prayer among the Jews and Christians.

The Greek practice demanded an official priesthood where a man can be the priest of a particular sanctuary and would be in-charge of all the sacrifices and priestly duties in

that sanctuary as we are already reading of the priests of a specific deity of Zeus (Acts 14:13).

A Stoic definition of the priest by Zeno⁴⁰ is connected to his cultic knowledge and experience as we read of ethical qualities of the piety required. One of such qualities would be that the priest needs to be connected and live within divine nature and must possess the powers to work in all spheres. According to Antonía Tripolitis, “the Stoics claimed that the universe is a single ordered whole, a perfect organism that unites within itself all that exists in the world. It is ruled by a supreme cosmic power, a fiery substance that the Stoics called Logos, Divine Reason, or God.”⁴¹ The Stoic ascribed each and everything to the sage, and denies them all to the *thaulos*. The sage alone is the true king, ruler, administrator, judge, orator, official, business-man and subject. He alone has the power to lead the people before the gods and to relate the information from the gods to humans.

Such a clear reflections are found in Hellenistic Judaism. *Hiereus* was also considered as a symbol of the logos or reason in the works of Philo.⁴² The temple of the soul, the true man reigned as priest, i.e., what Philo elsewhere called the “man in us,” or the reflective divine power of the soul. This

⁴⁰ For a clearer understanding see Joseph I. Omoregbe, *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy* (Lagos: Joja, 1991), 72-78.

⁴¹ Antonía Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 37.

⁴² Tripolitis, 39.

idea was configured and related to the Christian understanding of the nature of man in the body.

For Philo, the priestly office was supreme and this has characterized his philosophical ideologies and ascetic concept in understanding the Levites and priests. The priest must live above his body i.e. he must be blameless and be free from physical blemish as a symbol of spiritual perfection, keep themselves from impurity and avoid entanglement with the sensual world and the passions and fix their regard on God. He must stay away from sin and be willing to resist sin in the society.

This understanding of priesthood and the sage created some national traits. The Jews had priestly ranks and hierarchies which relied on virtue, purification and consecration according to the Law; hence, the giving of the Law was a preliminary institute for the priesthood yet the true priesthood was accorded to the sage rather than the Jew. Such ideology prompted the understanding of Jesus as a sage within the confine of his priestly duties by J. D. Crossan.

It is clear that other nations began priestly systems and the Israelites copied and adopted such mentality from those nations. That means before the setting of the nation Israel, those nations have been practicing their priesthoods as their gods demanded.

7. Priesthood in Islam

In a survey of priesthood in Islam, Lois F. Fuller stated that “Islam does not have priests.”⁴³ Theoretically, Islam believes that all men are equal but in practice, some are considered to be endowed with God’s special abilities and supernatural powers. They are the “Mallams”, “sheiks” and “Imams” who are consulted by men of various cadres for blessings. Some of them practice magical acts and oversee the future of men and casting divination to the earth in order to get what they want within the spirit realms.

Blood sacrifices are common among adherents of Islam. According to Fuller,

Some Muslims see the ram slaughtered during the great feast at the end of the Hajj as a sacrifice. Abraham’s son was supposed to be sacrificed but God provided a substitute. The Quran says that he was *ransomed with a tremendous victim* (XXXVII:107). Christians sometimes use this verse to show Muslims that there is the need for a substitute to save us. This leads us to our need for the death of Jesus.⁴⁴

Such sacrifices are considered sacrifices since even the Quran says, *Their flesh and blood reach not to God, but your devotion reaches to him*. Islam does not prescribe sacrifices. To Muslims, God decides to forgive just if he wants to. He does not need any sacrifices to pay for sin. We have also seen

⁴³ Lois F. Fuller, *The Pentateuch* (Bukuru: ACTS, 1996), 96.

⁴⁴ Fuller, 96.

that the Quran has eliminated both the positive death of Jesus from its account. Muslims say the name of God over an animal being slaughtered and pour out its blood. They do not eat an animal that dies with its blood in it. It is *haram* for Muslims to eat blood.⁴⁵ In all their festivals, rams are slaughtered and sacrifices are offered to *Allah*.

8. Priesthood in the African Traditional Cultures

The concept of priesthood and sacrifices is common in the African traditional and cultural heritage. Priests are known to be intermediaries between men and the spirit world. They are appointed by inheritance or through dreams or other supernatural means. People believed that ordinary people in the society need the help of the priests to make sacrifices for them to excel in life. They believe that the spirits or gods need to be appeased through offering of sacrifices.

Spirits in African traditional religions are considered to be in two categories; the good and the bad spirits.⁴⁶ These are impersonal beings who scout the world to affect the lives of people positively or negatively. The good ones are believed to bring help and prosperity to people⁴⁷ while the evil ones bring disaster and calamity to human beings.⁴⁸ Kings would give sacrifices to the priests (eyes of the gods or the wise one) for

⁴⁵ Fuller, 97.

⁴⁶ For more analysis see Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Kenya: WorldAlive/HippoBooks, 2012), 53-63.

⁴⁷ See Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions* (Kaduna: Yuty Graphics, 2011), 294-295.

⁴⁸ See Michael, 155-157.

the success of their lands. "Ezemoah," as called by the Igbo people in Nigeria, relates the information and stands in the gap between the gods and the people of the land. He is the eye of the gods to the king.

Animal sacrifices are common and the usage of blood is quite understandable. In some traditional African societies, child or adults sacrifices were very common, a forbidden act or practice among the Jews. The priest or the worshipper would eat the meat. It is the blood that is offered just like in the Levitical priesthood. The offering is seen as food or fragrance to the gods or ancestors in order to appease them when there is calamity or to invoke them to act in the quest for prosperity in various ways. It is more a bribery to the gods. Some offerings are meant to thank the gods or to beg the gods for forgiveness and to restore sanity or harmony for the land or the lives of the individuals.⁴⁹

9. Summative Statements

Of all these forms of worships from Babylon, Egypt and Greece and, in fact, the entire Ancient Near East and in different religions, it is worth noting that there were priestly activities attached. These people had temples where their gods and goddesses were worshipped. Worship was carried out in a worship place or sanctuary. Specific places were set for people to come and meet with their deities. This involved the sacrificial aspects and offerings. There were priests

⁴⁹ Fuller, 97-98.

attached to these places of worship or altars. They were the custodians and managers of the total reverence to the deities.

It is only in Christianity that Christ came and made worship a universal thing when he was conversing with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus stated that the Jews believe worship must be in the Temple and the Samaritan consider mount Gerizim sacred for their worship where the Jewish fore-fathers also worshipped. Jesus said that the "... true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Old fashion of priestly patterns were substituted with new ones in Christ. The pattern of the priesthood of Aaron was changed to the eternal priesthood of Jesus inaugurated at His death on the cross. Worship can be everywhere and must be from the heart. Priestly duties must not be discharged in a particular environment, place or terrain. It is the activity of the heart and we must be priests whether in the Church or within the society. It is good to have a particular place of covenant with the Lord as an altar to commune and relate with him daily.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL HISTORICAL WEAVING OF LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD

The word “priest,” in its singular form, appears in the English NIV Bible 478 times while the plural form of the word, “priests” appears 424 times. That means there are 902 references to priest or priests in the Bible. With such occurrences, it is clear that these words, like others, made up dominant words in the Bible with absolute relationship between God and the people in the aspects of sanctity and sanity. Their significance is clearly witnessed as it is linked with the holiness of the nation of Israel.

1. The Days of the Patriarchs

In the Patriarchal period, there is a need to begin with a biblical reference to the word “priest” in the first book of the Bible, the book of beginnings, Genesis. As one would expect from a nomadic community, during the early patriarchal period, the Hebrews would appear not to have had temples. Thus the Hebrew Bible lacks reference to a priesthood in the early stages of the Hebrew religion (as Genesis does not mention priests except in reference to foreign nations, e.g., Egyptian priests, 41:45; Genesis 47:42; and Melchizedek, the king-priest of Salem 14:18). This lack of references does not necessarily exclude the presence of a priesthood, but the period of the temples in Israel began after the conquest of Canaan (ca. 1250 B.C.), and the profile of the Israelite priesthood emerged at the same time.

In early Jewish history, sacrifices were meant to remember past activities of God to the people and expect further encounters with Him in the society. The priest was highly responsible for determining whether a sacrifice was appropriate or not and whether the attitude of the offerer was right with God or not. In Deuteronomy 33:8-11, it is stated that Levi had three functions; discerning oracles (v. 8), teaching (v. 10a), and sacrificing (v. 10b).⁵⁰ These reflected in refining the moral and ethical life of the Jews. The priest was rewarded for his service by giving him a portion of the sacrifice (cf. Mari during the period of Hammurabi). Consequently, the priest ultimately became the master of sacred knowledge and exercised such a knowledge on behalf of the community. He was a figure in the political, social, and religious areas and helped with the maintenance of sacred system among the people.

It has been argued theologically that the book of Job falls within the primeval period (somewhere in between Genesis 1-11). If this hypothesis is considered appropriate, then priesthood did not begin with the Israelites as I have argued above in the introduction. It began before the time of Abraham.

A biblical reference is in the book of Job when Job was expressing the greatness of God in his anguish. Job brought the case of the Lord with the nations. Despite that these nations were already established and had their own systems,

⁵⁰ For more understanding see E. W. Heaton, *Everyday Life in Old Testament Times* (London: Carousel Books, 1974), 217-221.

the Lord had power and authority over them and their priests. “The Lord leads the priests away stripped and overthrows men long established” (Job 12:19).

The next reference is a man Melchizedek who, the Bible reveals, was a king of Salem and a priest of the Most High (Gen. 14:18-19). The name means “king of righteousness” (Heb. 7:2). Melchizedek was without a father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life like Jesus (Heb. 7:3). That means he was somehow eternal. This eternal priest performed the duties of priesthood for he brought bread and wine and blessed Abraham in the name of the Most High. He said, “Blessed be Abraham by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand” (Gen. 14:19-20; Heb. 7:2). Melchizedek collected the tenth (tithe) of everything they brought from battle. Many scholars consider him to be a figure of Christ in the priesthood. Anderson is with the view “that Melchizedek was a type of the Messiah the Jews themselves admitted; and his priesthood had to do not with offering sacrifices for sins, but with ministering blessing and succour and sustenance.”⁵¹ What happened next after this priestly act of Melchizedek cannot be feasibly explained.

We can say that priests were known to engage in the task of offering sacrifices before the Lord and blessing the people at that time. From such understanding of sacrifices, I can argue that Cain and Abel were the first recorded priests since

⁵¹ Anderson, 29.

they offered offerings to the Lord; one of such kind in history (Gen. 4:3-5).

Abraham was asked by the Lord to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord (Gen. 22). He went to discharge priestly duties unto the Lord. With this, it is clear that sacrifices were commonly given by Abraham; they characterized his life since he had the intention to engage in such sacrificial prerogatives. At the long run of events, the Lord provided a replacement and Abraham discharged priestly duties unto the Lord (vv.13-14).

2. The Mosaic Period

The traditional reconstruction of Levitical priesthood goes back to Israel wanderings in the desert under the leadership of Moses. From the earliest times, the priesthood was tied to the tribe of Levi, and although some evidence points to priests from other families (e.g. Judg. 17:5). It is clear that a priest who was a Levite was preferred (Judg. 17:7-13). During the wilderness wanderings, the Levites distinguished themselves as loyal followers of Moses in the episode of the golden calf. They supported Moses, and as a reward for their faithfulness to him and to God, they were authorized to the priesthood (Exo. 32:26-29; cf. Deut. 10:8) which became a rededication of eternal priestly covenant.

Although we cannot say the office of the priest is a new one considering Exodus 32, we can say the adoption of the Levites as assistants was new and an added concept. Much of the information on the Levites came from a later period when

they had sustained a prominent position for a long time. The wilderness account serves to highlight this tradition, which gave a sense of authority to the priestly office and the priestly duties among the Jews.

The Hebrew term for “Levite” (*lēwī*) reveals a descendant of Levi, the third son of Jacob by Leah. The Levites were not foreigners who joined the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings and helped support and define the emerging priestly order within the religion of ancient Israel. The Levites were a people from the tribe of Levi (Gen. 34:25-30; 49:5). Although Levi was the smallest tribe in the clan alliance and the clan was singled out for service of the tabernacle⁵² that included carrying the Ark of the Covenant and attending to the duties of the portable sanctuary (Num. 8:24-26; Deut. 10:8). At the settlement in Canaan, the Levites were not allocated a field but as “ministers of God,” it could be that they did not possess any land as an inheritance.

At the time of the monarchy, the Levites were at the gates of the cities; thus they still did not possess their own territory. The sources explain this lack of land possession as a sign of superior status -“the Lord is their portion” (Deut. 10:9; 18:2).

⁵² The Tabernacle was built by Moses and lasted to the time of Solomon. It was damaged by the Philistines. The instructions for the Tabernacle are clearly stated in Exodus 25-40. The central focuses were to reveal access to God was not free without atoning sacrifices (Heb. 9:8). The gifts and sacrifices were to cleanse people from sins but pointed to Christ (Heb. 9:9-10) and the Holy of Holies represented heaven, the dwelling place of God (Heb. 9:11, 24). For a detail study see Lois K. Fuller, *The Pentateuch* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2001), 84-86.

But this special status may have been obvious to everyone; many times, the Levites were categorized with other disenfranchised groups - such as the stranger, the orphan, and the widow - that needed the support of the community in order to survive (Deut. 14:29; 16:11,14; 26:11-13). According to Numbers 35:1-8, the Israelites were commanded to set aside forty-eight towns from their territory for the Levites (cf. Josh. 21:4, 13-19). It would appear that these Levitical cities were not exclusively inhabited by Levites, but were cities that contained Levitical families.

We can now see that of all the 478 usages of the word "priest", 406 of such usages are dominantly in the Old Testament. Of the 424 pluralistic usages in the Bible, 342 of such appearances of the word are in the Old Testament. Of the 902 usages of priest or priests, 748 word occurrences are in the Old Testament. The word used for priests of the Lord in Hebrew language is *kōhēn* although the word is also often used for priests of other gods. The word is translated as appoint or consecrate, and it refers to the making of priests. It literally means to "fill the hand." It probably originates in the fact that Moses put parts of sacrifices into the hands of Aaron and his sons.⁵³

The Hebrew *kōmer* is used of "idolatrous priests" in 2 Kings 23:5, Hosea 10:5 and Zephaniah 1:4. But the usual Hebrew term for priest is *kōhēn*, which has cognates in Ugaritic, Phoenician-Punic, and Aramaic. *Kōhēn* was not

⁵³ Dave Cave, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Nottingham: Crossroad Books, 1993), 27.

limited to Hebrew priests only; the Hebrew Bible uses the same term to refer to Melchizedek, a Canaanite priest (Gen. 12:18), Egyptian priests (Gen. 41:45, 50; 46:20; 47:26), Philistine priests (1 Sam. 6:2), priests of Dagon (1 Sam. 5:5), priests of Baal (2 Kings 10:19), priests of Chemosh (Jer. 48:7), and priests of Baalim and Asherim (2 Chron. 34:5). *Kōhēn* has no feminine form; the "daughter of a priest" (*baṭ-kōhēn*) refers to a woman of a priestly family (cf. Lev 21:9; 22:12).

Some scholars see parallels between early Hebrew priests and the ancient Near Eastern custom of the *sadin*, the "guardian" of the temple. The guardian looked after the sanctuary and the sacrifices, receiving the worshipers and assisting them with their offerings. Frequently the *sadin* became attached to the place of sacrifice; when his fellow clansmen moved on in their nomadic patterns the *sadin* would remain behind to serve in the sanctuary. The responsibility of the *sadin* would be passed on to his sons and a hereditary line would be established (cf. Judg. 17-18; 1 Sam. 1-2).

However, Israel did not begin the concept of priesthood as argued above that the concept of priest(s) had been before Abraham and that Cain and Abel were not absolutely Jews. Before Aaron, the nations were much familiar with the concept of priesthood for they had gods that needed sacrifices which only the priests could offer to the gods.

a. Moses and Aaron

The whole Levitical system of priesthood was established in the time of Moses. The system was not clearly known for it

has been among the Nations. It was Moses who inaugurated and shaped the priesthood. Before the priestly ordination, Moses had some young men to sacrifice unto the Lord (Exo. 24:8; 39-40). According to Lois K. Fuller, “these were the firstborns who had been redeemed at Passover, and for whom the Levites later became the substitutes.”⁵⁴

It is clear that Moses was a priest and his brother Aaron (Exo. 4:14). The legal and reasonable priests ordained in the Law of Moses were Aaron and his four sons (Exo. 32:27-29). The ordination and designation were set as a result of the battle against fellow Israelites. Their obedience warranted the setting-apart of the tribe of Levi and consecrated as priests of the Lord.

Anderson gave an understanding that “Until after the Exodus, no sacrificing priest had ever been officially appointed, and yet throughout proceeding ages holy men had offer gifts and sacrifices.”⁵⁵ Within this line of reasoning, all biblical sources agree that the priesthood was originally given to the tribe of Levi. The sources disagree, however, as to how the priesthood was constituted within the tribe. One possibility is that the priesthood was made up exclusively of one family within the Levite tribe, the family of Aaron (Exo. 28:1; 30:26-30; 49:9-15). Other tribe supported Aaron in the work. The Levites only assisted the tribe of Aaron in disposing priestly duties.

⁵⁴ Fuller, 89.

⁵⁵ Anderson, 36.

The firstborn in the priestly clan was made the high priest. Although the tradition of this division was difficult to classify for the title "High Priest" (*hakkohen haggadol*) occurs only twice in the Pentateuch (Num. 35:25, 28) and once in Joshua (20:6). Also, there are variant references to this position, such as "the priest who is chief among his brethren" (Lev. 21:10) and the "anointed priest" (Lev 4:3,5,16; 6:22; cf. the later title "chief priest" 2 Kings 25:18; Jer. 52:24; 2 Chron. 19:11; 24:11; 26:20; 31:10; Ezra 7:5). The high priest maintained a high office and the ritual for consecration was unique compared to other priests as it involved the pouring of oil on the head of the priest similar to that of royalty (1 Sam. 10:1; 2 Kings 9:6).

b. Heads of Clans

But before the time Aaron was consecrated, there were people who have been offering sacrifices in the Land. These are the firstborns of every clan and heads of the clans (Gen. 22; 31:54; 46:1). Moses and Aaron were priests who called on the Lord and He answered them (Ps. 99:6). Priests were to be clothed with righteousness (Ps 132:9) and salvation (Ps 132:16).

The Lord declared Aaron to be consecrated so that he can serve as priest (Exo. 28:3).⁵⁶ The consecration was for seven

⁵⁶ Aaron, the brother of Moses, had been traditionally called the first High Priest (Lev 21:10; Num. 35:25, 28; Ezra 7:1-5). Only those of the line of the eldest descendants of Aaron could serve as High Priest, and a man's position in the hierarchy of holiness and cult was determined from birth. In Numbers 25:10-13, the descendants of Phinehas (Aaron's grandson) are promised a "covenant of eternal

days (Exo. 40:13). He had garments which were consecrated for use. The sacred garments will be for his descendants for their anointing and ordination (Exo. 29:29). The garments for Aaron and his sons were for them to serve as priest (Exo. 31:10). Priests were meant to put on linen garments and undergarments (Lev. 6:10). They had perfumes which are strictly for the priestly service (Exo. 30:33).

c. Ithamar

The son of Aaron was to succeed him as priest for service in the Holy of Holies (Exo. 29:30). It was on this note that Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest directed the work on the Tabernacle (Exo.39:41). Ithamar son of Aaron directed the clans of the Gerhonicite and Merarite (Num. 4:28; 7:8). The succession was not that Aaron was not to work anymore but was more of mentorship, training his sons in the fear of the Lord and to stand before the Lord in all purity and to serve. All of them were to put fire on the altar and arrange the wood (Lev. 1:7).

During offerings, Aaron was to wash the offering with the legs and burn all of it to the Lord (Lev. 1:12). He was to cut the animal into pieces and arrange them including the fats on the wood (Lev. 1:12). Animal and grain offerings were to be burnt on the altar (Lev. 1:15, 17). Handful of flour and oil and the incense were to be burned as memorial portion to the Lord (Lev. 2:2, 16; 3:11, 16; 6:15). All the offerings were to be

priesthood," which apparently refers to a right to the office of High Priest.

brought to the priest who will take them to the altar (Lev. 2:8; 6:6).

Concerning the altar of the Lord, the priest was to add firewood every morning to keep the fire burning (Lev. 6:12). He was to ensure that the fire burns continuously. The fire symbolized the presence of the Lord. When it quenched, the presence of the Lord was witnessed in single major. For this, it was necessary for the fire to keep burning.

Everybody has sinful tendencies. The priest was not exempted. When a priest sinned, he was to offer a young bull as sin offering for his sins (Lev. 4:3). The sin of the priest would bring grief on the people (Lev. 4:3). He would take his bull to the altar (Lev. 4:7). He would take the blood and sprinkle it on the horns of the altar before the Lord (Lev. 4:10, 25; 4:30, 31, 34, 35; 5:6) and burn them on the altar (Lev. 4:10).

The priests were the Levites (Deut. 17:9, 18; 18:1). The Levites were to be assistants to Aaron (Num. 3:6). It was not every Levite that was to serve as a priest. Only the anointed ones (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22) were to be consecrated for service. The priests were to make atonement and the Lord will hear (Lev. 4:20, 26; 5:8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18; 6:6). There were priests who will stay at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Lev. 12:6).

The offering of the sacrifices was to be done by the priests. The son that succeeded him shall prepare the offering (Lev. 6:22). Grain offering of a priest was to be burnt completely (Lev. 6:23). The priest was to burn them before the Lord (Lev. 7:5).

There were portions of the offerings that belonged to the priests. The serving priest would eat the remaining in the holy place in the Tent of Meeting (Lev. 6:26). The covering of the liver and the kidney belonged to the serving priest (Lev. 7:7, 14). The serving priest would keep the hide for himself (Lev. 7:8). Every grain offering, which was baked or cooked or on a griddle, was for the priest (Lev. 7:9). The breast and the right thigh belonged to Aaron and his sons (Lev. 7:31, 32-34).

However, no one outside a priest's family or a guest or hired worker should eat the selected parts of the offering (Lev. 22:10). Only the priests were allowed to eat parts of the offerings which have been dedicated to the Lord. The shoulders, the jowls and the inner parts belonged to the priests when people offered a bull or sheep (Deut. 18:3). A slave purchased or born slave may eat (Lev. 22:11). A priest daughter who married outside may eat (Lev. 22:12).

During child's birth, the mother must offer sacrifices for her purity. The lost blood made her unclean so she must purify herself of uncleanness. For a female child, she was to bring a year old lamb and a young pigeon or dove for sin offering (Lev. 12:7). For male child, she could give doves or young pigeons if she cannot afford the bull. It was the duty of the priest to make atonement for her (Lev. 12:8).

In the aspect of skin diseases, Aaron or his son, who was a priest, was to examine the skin diseases (Lev. 13:2, 3). He pronounced the person ceremonial clean (Lev. 13:3). The priest put the person outside the community for seven days and re-examined him (Lev. 13:6). People must reappear

before the priest when the rashes spread (Lev. 13:7). The priest examined the infections (Lev. 13:17, 20, 25, 26, 30, 36, 39, 55). In the case of a house, the priest examined people's houses but the houses must be emptied (Lev. 14:36). Priests were obeyed as the Lord during examination of leprosy (Deut. 27:9).

Of course, some priests were to serve higher roles. One of them was the High Priest who was appointed every year. Only anointed and ordained priest was to be made High Priest (Lev. 16:32). The High Priest must not allow his hair unkempt or tear his garments (Lev. 21:10).

There were some regulations for the priests. A priest must not touch a corpse or become unclean (Lev. 21:1). A priest must not have defect (Lev. 21:21). A priest who was defect must not go to offer sacrifice before the Lord (Lev. 21:21).

d. Eleazar

The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest (Num. 4:16). He was a leader appointed over those who take care of the sanctuary. He was in charge of the oil, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering, the anointing oil, entire Tabernacle and the holy furnishings and articles.

Moses and Eleazar, the priest, took census (Num. 26:1, 3, 63). Priest proclaimed the ways of the Lord to the people (Num. 31:21). Tribute of the plunder was given to Eleazar the priest (Num. 31:29). Moses and Eleazar obeyed the instruction of the Lord and did as the Lord wanted (Num. 31:31).

Nobody showed contempt to a ministering priest (Deut. 17:12). The priest will address the army before battle (Deut.

20:2). He shall encourage the people not to be angry. Priests had offices and stayed in the office during duties (Deut. 26:3). In the early days, priests had land allocated to them (Gen. 47:22). This land was not seized by Pharaoh (Gen. 47:26).

e. Phinehas

He was an unknown priest not the contemporary of Moses. He was a grandson of Aaron. He had zeal and atoned for the people. He was given the covenant of peace and everlasting priesthood. It was Phinehas who took a spear against an Israelite and a Midianite woman who were committing adultery. He was zealous and turned the anger of the Lord from the people of Israel (Num. 25:7-11). Priests contributed to the leadership of Moses (Num. 26:2, 19, 21, 22). The priests inquired of the Urim of the Lord (Num. 27:19) and they could commission leaders (Num. 27:22). Phinehas held the articles from the sanctuary and the trumpets for signalling (Num. 31:6).

Israel was to be a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exo. 19:6). In the midst of this search for holiness, the priests were to consecrate themselves or the Lord will strike against them (Ex. 19:22; 28:41; 29:1, 44; 30:30). Priests should not force themselves to come up to the Lord or He will strike them (Exo. 19:24). The High Priest would make atonement for all the priests and the people (Lev. 16:33).

Priests must not shave their heads or their beards or their bodies (Lev. 21:5). They must not marry defiled women for they were holy before the Lord (Lev. 21:7). Priests were expected to keep requirements or they will die of being guilty

to the laws (Lev. 22:9). They must not desecrate the sacred offerings the Israelites were bringing before the Lord (Lev. 22:15). The released fields will become holy and dedicated to the Lord and will become the property of the priests (Lev. 27:21).

In sum, Aaron's sons were anointed priests for God's service (Num. 3:3). Eleazar and Ithamar served because Nadab and Abihu had no children (Num. 3:4). The Lord allowed the priests to be put to the sword (Ps. 78:64). These fellows failed the standard of the Lord. Of course, Eleazar and Ithamar took over because those disrespectful priests had no children to succeed them. Aaron and his sons must be appointed apart from them, no one goes to the sanctuary or he be put to death (Num. 3:10). The priests were to blow the trumpets (Num. 10:8).

Only Aaron and his sons were to serve as priests (Num. 18:7). Many people wanted to be of service even when the Lord had not chosen them. Such people the Lord said they shall be put to death. Priests could pass verdict according the Lord (Deut. 17:9). The king will make for himself a scroll from that of the priests (Deut. 17:8). At this time, priests had no land allocation (Deut. 18:1). Their survivals centred on the offerings.

3. The Priesthood before the Exile

The pre-exilic period covered from the time of Joshua to time of the exile, when Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar came and invaded Judah. It told us what the priests accomplished and their weaknesses which led to the exile. The priests had the

following duties; they were to carry the Ark of the Covenant (Deut. 31:9; Josh. 4:18; Josh. 6:8; 8:33) and were to carry trumpets and blow them (Josh. 6:4). This period showed the implementation of the Law in the life of the Israelites.

During the time of Moses, Phinehas was an unknown figure in the priesthood. He was a grandchild of Aaron (Num. 25:7) but he served with Joshua and was sent as representatives over land matters (Josh. 22:12, 31, 32).

It is clear that after the death of Moses, Joshua and Eleazar allocated the land to the people (Num. 34:17; Josh. 14:1). During this time, the Levites approached Eleazar concerning their allocations (Josh. 21:1). The land of Hebron a city of refuge was given to the sons of Aaron (Josh. 21:13). The priests and Levites were allocated thirteen towns of inheritance from Judah, Simeon and Benjamin (Josh. 21:4, 19); though the Lord initially said no allocation was to be given them. But what made the priests to demand for their land portions even when God said they were not to be allocated any land? This request from the priests gave birth to corruption and defilements among the priests. It is the beginning of the sin that led to the exile. It is from this time that the priesthood began to lose its power, control and dignity among the people. It started relying on human beings and earthly things rather than on God who provides for all his creatures. When men began to think they need job security, God removes his concern upon the things we do for him. He allows us operate by ourselves and his stamp and endorsement are scrambled up. This human attitude results

to self-struggle and toiling without results because God is not involved in what we do.

During the Judges, the glory of the priesthood started diminishing because the priests wanted to provide for themselves. Sin came into the camp of the Israelites. Israel was not organized and everybody was on his own. Israel was ruled by certain set of Judges whom the Lord set upon the people. Some of them were not set by the Lord. Democratic rule came into the camp of the Israelites. The priesthood engaged and was turned to be a means of survival instead of a service. The search for survival came up and self-struggle among the priests instead of relying on God for their provision. The focal point instead of being holiness became the search for what to eat, wear and where to lie their heads which Jesus said we should not bother about (Matt. 6:25-34).

Do not forget that in the division when the Israelites got into the Land, there was no priestly portion of the land. With the discarded tent and Tabernacle, the priests began to struggle for their survival. Priestly allocated lands seemed to become a source for the falling of the glory of the priesthood. Also, there were no portions of sacrifice again. Food was a problem for many of them. The situation became horrible and can be compared with the African priestly experience when many pastors began to search for means of survival in the society. With this attitude, Tambiyi observed concerning the state of the present pastors and ministers toward starting churches in contemporary African Church. He lamented:

It should be observed that starting a Church is one of the leading businesses in Africa particularly Nigeria today. The agenda has been to meet the 'need of the hour' which makes many pastors forget the ideal message of the Church and her purpose of existence on earth.⁵⁷

Tambiwi went on with the lamentation:

Establishing a Church in Africa is considered one of the fastest means for making money. It does not matter what is preached or taught. People troop into those churches without considering the philosophies such churches were founded on. They fail to consider the history of those churches. Their concern is mostly rising above the poor socio-economic and political context that characterized their existential milieu. The ministers are equally on the same range with the members when it comes to the quest to rise above certain living standards. With this, one sees the Church to be on fire when weighed in the aspect of false ideas and practices. It has been on a levelled ground with the Early Church in terms of the struggle to rise above socio-economic challenges as exposed by the Bible writers.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Tambiwi, *The African Church Under Fire*, 2.

⁵⁸ Tambiwi, *The African Church Under Fire*, 2.

This priestly struggle for survival continued even into the Temple era. The influence of the days of the Judges influenced the days of the Temple. Some of the priests continued to worship in some shrines just as some of their ancestors who neglected the ways of the Lord. David F. Hinson clearly stated, “The traditional priests continued to carry on their work in other parts of the territory, because even when the Temple was built in Jerusalem, some people continued to worship at the old shrines.”⁵⁹

One sees all the disobedience to be associated with the need for material things among the priests as sometimes serving in the shrines provides one’s needs better than serving at the altar of the Lord. Many of the priests found the allegiance to the gods to be profitable and they neglected the ways of the Lord because people were patronizing the shrines of the gods. They disregarded the priestly covenant and instructions which the Lord had given to their fathers who served as priests before them.

a. Micah and the Levite

It was within this note that a man called Micah installed a Levite as his priest in his house (Jdg. 17:5). Micah hired him to serve as his personal priest (Jdg. 18:4). The Levites had no job and no inheritance. Micah was paying him. The period of the judges introduced what I call ‘house priesthood’ which has been become common in our days where some families have family pastors. Some of these family pastors pay close

⁵⁹ David F. Hinson, *History of Israel* (London: SPCK, 1990), 103.

attention to these families which they watch-over and neglecting the poor in the congregation.

Instead of serving in the Temple or the altars of the Lord, the priests became beggars in the streets and engaged in daily wages from certain individuals. Micah felt secured because of the priest or Levite who was dining and serving in his house (Jdg. 17:13). Having a priest in his house was like having the presence of the Lord securing his household. He forgot that the Lord was angry with such alternative priesthood.

It is clear that this priest discharged his duties in Micah's house. He wished the family well over the journey (Jdg. 18:6). He challenged the Danites to protect his job (Jdg. 18:17-18) what we see Amaziah did to prophet Amos. The Levite was persuaded to work for a clan than an individual (Jdg. 18:19). I see this more of a priestly conspiracy for a bigger pay and opportunities. It was a better alternative compared to his present employment in Micah's house. This time, he would serve a clan rather than an individual, a bigger privilege of service and a bigger pay.

There are Christians today who have adopted pastors or have some pastors serving for their homes. The pastors are responsible for pronouncing blessings and ensuring that it is well with those families and giving them much attention We have so many who have commercialize the priesthood and have given into the ways of wicked men. Many pastors have become commercial men in the Church and used religion and the Church to gain material things for their survival. Is-haq O. Oloyede lamented:

Rather than preaching the mind of God to people, some religious leaders have commercialized religion using the congregation as source of money and other financial benefits. What we are trying to emphasize here is that spiritualism has been downplayed to materialism in the contemporary Nigeria to the extent that the General Overseer of a particular church publicly declared that ‘true religion of the Lord is not complete if it has not touched our pockets’.⁶⁰

No wonder some pastors cannot rebuke some members in the Church when they sin against God and the people. Some of them cannot look at some of their members in their eyes and preach righteousness and justice in the church today. Messages against sin have been substituted with alternative and prosperity messages. The church needs a rethink on these issues surrounding her frontiers.

b. Eli at Shiloh

The inauguration of priesthood during the Temple at Shiloh gave Israel her place of glory and reinstated the lost glory of the priesthood during the judges. This came under the reign of Eli who was the priest of the Lord and had his children as assistants. Eli was chosen by the Lord to be priest (1 Sam.

⁶⁰ Is-haq O. Oloyede, “The Use and Abuse of Religion in Nigeria” *Religion and Nigeria Today* (Onah A. Odey chief ed., Ilorin: Decency Printers & Stationeries Ltd., 2010), 6-7.

2:28). Usually, Eli the priest would sit at the doorpost of the Temple at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:9). He was a supervising priest to Samuel as he ministered before the Lord (1 Sam. 2:11). He was to ensure that Samuel discharged the duties pertaining the altar of the Lord appropriately. Hophni and Phinehas were also priests of the Lord at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3).

During that time when sacrifices were being cooked, the servicing priest would come with three-pronged fork and dip into the pan. It was a practice that whatever came out was for the priest (1 Sam. 2:14-15). This was how priests got their share of the sacrifices presented before the Lord.

A notable shift in the importance of the Levitical priesthood occurred at the beginning of the monarchical period. The family of Eli lost its importance and its place was taken by the family of Zadok. This family served the priesthood in the central Temple in Jerusalem.

During this time, priests had servants (1 Sam. 2:14-15). Priests would request for meat from the person who was sacrificing (1 Sam. 2:15). When the priesthood was in demise as Eli's children violated the ways of the Lord and the Lord rejected them, the Lord promised to raise for Himself a faithful priest who will stand and performed before Him in the presence of the people (1 Sam. 2:35).

c. Ahijah

Ahijah was a priest, son of Ichabod's brother to Ahitub son of Phinehas. He was the one who was wearing the Ephod (1 Sam. 14:3). He was with the Ark of God and it confused the Philistines camp (1 Sam. 14:20). He was in-charge of the camp

during battles. The Ark was the symbol of the Lord during battles. The presence of the Ark on the battle fields would symbolize victory and conquest over the enemies. The priest would inquire of the Lord (1 Sam. 14:36) and to know the mind of God concerning every situation, particularly during wars.

d. Ahimelech

Ahimelech ministered during the time of Saul. During the reign of Saul kingship, there was hatred and struggles between Saul against David. David and his men were hungry and went into the house of God where Ahimelech was ministering. David and his men needed food. When Ahimelech saw them, he trembled before David (1 Sam. 21:1). The priest gave consecrated bread to David and his men (1 Sam. 21:4-6; Matthew 12:1-7); bread that only the priests were allowed to eat. This was the shrewd bread on the table before the Lord. Jesus mentioned this incidence but did not tell us whether God was angry with Ahimelech (Mk 2:24). The priest gave the sword of Goliath to David (1 Sam. 21:9). Ahimelech the priest was highly involved in David's leadership (1 Sam. 22:11) and participated in the decisions for a successful leadership.

Priest Ahimelech and his father's family at Nob were called by the king (1 Sam. 22:11). Saul ordered to kill the priests of the Lord for he felt they have sided David (1 Sam. 22:17). However, none of the guards raised his hands against the priests. Saul ordered Doeg the Edomite to kill the priests and eighty-five priests were put to death (1 Sam. 22:18). Saul

also ordered the destruction of Nob, the town of the priests but Abiathar escaped and fled to David (1 Sam. 22:19).

Ahimelech's son was Abiathar. He took over the service from his father. During this time, David had nice moments of rulership in Israel. David ordered Abiathar to bring the Ephod (1 Sam. 23:9; 30:7).

Zadok and Ahimelech were priests of the Lord (2 Sam. 8:17; 19:11; 20:25; 1 Kgs 4:4). Zadok the priest was a seer (2 Sam. 15:27). Zadok and Nathan anointed Solomon as king (1 Kgs 1:32-34). Priest Zadok was also serving as a prophet of the Lord with Nathan who was a dominant prophet of the Lord during this time. Political reports came to the priests (2 Sam. 17:15; 19:11). Ira the Jairite was David's priest (2 Sam. 20:26). During that time, the glory of the Lord prevented the priests from performing their duties in the Temple (1 Kgs 8:4, 6, 10, 11).

During the reign of Jeroboam, he appointed priests from all sorts of people who were not Levites (1 Kgs 12:31). Anybody who wanted to become priest was given opportunity (1 Kgs 13:33). Jeroboam asked those priests to offer sacrifices on the altar in those shrines during a festival (1 Kgs 12:32). It was this time that a man of God went before Jeroboam at his altar and prophesied the birth of Josiah (1 Kgs 13:2).

Jeroboam ordered the collection of money for offering unto the Lord and the priests were to collect all the money for the offerings (2 Kgs 12:4). Jehoiada the priest and the priests delayed the repair of the Temple (2 Kgs 12:6). When they could not proceed with the work, the priests at the

entrance were giving the mandate to collect the money (2 Kgs 12:9). Jehoiada took a chest with a lid and placed it and the secretary and the High Priest could gather all the money and put them into the bags (2 Sam. 12:7-10) for the treasury. Money for sin and guilt offerings, that was not taken to the Temple, belonged to the priests (2 Kgs 12:16).

The king of Assyria ordered that a priest go to Samaria to teach the people the requirements of God (2 Kgs 17:27) and one returned to Bethel to teach them how to worship the Lord (2 Kgs 17:28). At that time, the priests removed all the articles of Baal in the house of the Lord (2 Kgs 23:4). They fought against the force of foreign gods in the land. Pagan priests were discarded in the land (2 Kgs 23:5).

A further change in the condition of the priesthood took place in the time of Josiah. After Josiah introduced the cultic reforms, a substantial endorsement of the Jerusalem priesthood meant a major purging of idolatry that included the destruction of high places and altars outside the central Jerusalem Temple. All the priests in the towns of Judah were brought to Jerusalem, and this probably indicated the beginning of the view that sacrifices were to be made only at the central Temple of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:8).

This act of cleansing the camp of the Lord continued during the reign of Josiah. Josiah brought all the pagan priests and broke down all the shrines and altar of incense (2 Kgs 23:8, 20) and the priests of the Lord ate unleavened bread at the altar in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:9).

People had expectations and performed certain functions for the priests. Adonijah expected Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest to tell him good news (1 Kgs 1:42). Jehoiada the priest supervised the people (2 Kgs 11:9-15). The people disobeyed the word of the priest and put a woman to death (2 Kgs 11:15). The priest Jehoiada stationed men to the Temple of the Lord (2 Kgs 11:18). Jehoiada instructed Joash in the counsel of the Lord (2 Kgs 12:2).

e. Uriah and Hilkiah

Uriah the priest was given the task to get the sketch of altar from Damascus and he built it for the Lord (2 Kgs 16:10-15). Uriah the priest obeyed King Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:16). Uriah served the priesthood and had great zeal for the work and reconstructed work during his days.

Hilkiah the priest was asked to submit the daily money collected at the entrance (2 Kgs 22:4). It was Hilkiah who found the book of the Law in the Temple of the Lord (2 Kgs 22:10). He was in-charge of the daily contributions in the Temple of the Lord. He was an expert in the Law and had zeal for the Law of God.

At this moment, the priesthood engaged in the worship of idols. They burnt incense to other gods and the Lord was angry with them according to prophetess Huldah (2 Kgs 22:16-17). The priests refused to collect the money and abandoned the repair of the Temple (2 Kgs 12:8). Some people were appointed to serve as priests agreed to serve the people in their shrines (2 Kgs 17:32) even though they were not Levites.

At this time, the chief priest was Amaziah. Israel for a long time stayed with God in order that the priests would teach them the Law (2 Chron. 15:3). Jehoshaphat ordered Israel to listen to Amaziah the chief priest on the things of the Lord (2 Chron. 19:11).

Priests have years of service (2 Chron. 24:2). Jehoiada was the chief priest (2 Chron. 24:6, 11). Azariah also became the chief priest (2 Chron. 26:20; 30:10). He confronted Uzziah and eighty others for burning incense to the Lord (2 Chron. 26:18).

In the reign of Hezekiah and during feast of unleavened bread, the Levites and the priests would sing every day for the Lord (2 Chron. 30:21). The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people and the Lord heard their prayers from heaven (2 Chron. 30:27). Priests were assigned by Hezekiah to perform their duties; to burn offerings, to minister, to give thanks and to sing praises before the Lord (2 Chron. 31:2). They were to be given their portions so they can devote themselves to the study of the Law (2 Chron. 31:4).

During those days, there were high expectations towards them. They were to be faithful in the distribution of the towns for both young and old alike (2 Chron. 31:15). Yet the leaders of the priests became more and more unfaithful and followed the detestable ways of the nations and defiled the Temple (2 Chron. 36:14).

It was also clear that the priests were the first to settle in their own land (1 Chron. 9:2). The priests who were heads of 1,760 members were able men to minister before the Lord (1

Chron. 9:13). Some priests were serving the Lord at the place where the spices were being mixed (1 Chron. 9:30).

It was very necessary for the priests and Levites to consecrate themselves in order to bring back the Ark of the Covenant of God (1 Chron. 15:14). Some priests were to blow the trumpets and some to be doorkeepers of the ark (1 Chron. 15:24). The Lord gave instruction for the division of the priests and how they will minister (1 Chron. 28:13). The priests could not enter the Temple because the glory of the Lord filled it (2 Chron. 5:11; 7:2).

The Levites were to assist the priests in the service (2 Chron. 8:14). The Levites kept watch at the door of the Temple (2 Chron. 23:4). Even the leading priests went with the leader to Isaiah wearing sackcloth (2 Kgs 19:2) and could purify the sanctuary (2 Chron. 29:16)

f. The Early Prophets

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel (Hos. 1:1) was very precise and insightful. The Lord through Hosea spoke against the wicked deeds of the priests and the people during the reign of these kings. This was to be the practice that the prophets were the right people to rebuke the priests unlike in the days of Jeremiah when the prophets conspired with the wicked priests.

The sins of the priests were exposed by the Lord through prophet Hosea who spoke about the priests and the Israelites as they have been snares at Mizpah and had nets spread out

at Tabor (Hos. 5:1). The priests murdered people on the road to Shekem and committed shameful crimes (Hos. 6:9). The priests ignored the Law and the Lord rejected them (Hos. 4:6). They refused to teach the people and caused them to perish for lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). The priests were adulterous (Hos. 10:5). No one dare to bring any charges against a priest in those days (Hos. 4:4) because they were considered so sacred and the people feared them. These were some of the sins committed by some of the priests in those days.

The people were aware of the wicked deeds of the priests yet no one brought charges against any of them (Hos. 4:4). It was possible that there was fear that they were the anointed of the Lord as in our days between the pastors and the members. Hosea prophesied against them and said, “like people, like priests.” Hosea stood the test of the generation and was never defiled. His ways were righteous and as a prophets, he challenged the governing systems; both religious and political. Through him, the Lord promised to punish and repay them for their wicked ways (Hos. 4:9).

Similarly, Amos was another prophet who ministered during the same period with Hosea. Amaziah the priest of Bethel conspired against Amos the prophet (Am. 7:10). The priesthood at that time had gone rotten to a mere profession to earn bread in Bethel just like in the days of the judges and our days today. Amaziah thought the ministry was all about earning bread⁶¹ as some pastors are in the habit of doing.

⁶¹ For an adequate study of the attitude of Amaziah see Tambiyi, *The African Church Under Fire*, 50-51.

Isaiah also ministered during the same reigns of kings with his contemporaries, Micah, Hosea, and Amos in the 8th century. Isaiah also prophesied against the priests and prophets at that time who staggered from beer and vine. They staggered when seeing visions and rendering decisions (Isa. 28:7). God called on them to repent and when they returned to the Lord, they will be adorned (Isa. 61:10). It is when they returned that they will be called priests of the Lord (Isa. 61:6). It was the duty of the Lord at that time to select men to be priests and Levites (Isa. 66:21) but men were engaged in the selection into priesthood.

And during the days of Micah the prophet, the priests taught the people for a price (Mic. 3:11). The priests were mourning because the grain and drink offerings were cut off from the house of the Lord (Joel 1:9, 13). Of course, they were to put on sack-clothes, wail and spent the night before the Lord in hunger and fast. They were to weep between the porch and the altar and ask the Lord to spare his people (Joel 2:17). God was not happy with the attitude of the priests because they neglected their duties.

g. Shortly before the exile

Shortly before the exile, the priesthood was not satisfying the Lord. The Lord was not happy with the priesthood, hence; the priests mismanaged the place the Lord had given them. Most of them neglected their duties and followed the ways of men. With this attitude, people conspired against the priests (Jer. 18:18; 20:1) although the conspirators knew that the word of the priests will not be lost (Jer. 18:18).

In the early days of Jeremiah, the priests that year abandoned the ways of the Lord. There were priests who were in-charge of the Temple before the exile. The chief priest was Seraiah and Zephaniah the priest was next in rank (Jer. 52:24). There were also some priests who were serving as doorkeepers (Jer. 52:24). It was during the priestly reign of Seraiah that Israel lost the Temple, the sacred vessels of the Temple and they went to exile. Those leaders of the priests and the people were radically unfaithful and were engaged in the worship of other gods of other nations (Chemosh and Molech, Jer. 48:7; 49:3) and were defiling the Temple of the Lord which had been consecrated in the Holy City, Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:14).

It is clear that the exile came as a result of the sins of the people, the prophets and the ever engrossed iniquities of the priests who shed blood of the righteous (Lam. 4:13). Most of them became blood suckers instead of blood sprinklers on behalf of the people. The priests abandoned the work of God and went to work for other gods in search for food. The Lord said the priests must bear the shame of their detestable practices (Ezek. 44:13). This is why both Israel, Chemosh and the priests were taken captive (Jer. 48:7). The Lord exiled Molech and his priests and officials (Jer. 49:3). Words of warnings came from Jeremiah and Ezekiel and other prophets but the priests mocked at them and despised the words of the Lord (2 Chron. 36:16).

The Lord promised to punish those false prophets and the priests for false proclamations (Jer. 23:33-34; 29:25). Despite

their sins, the Lord promised to satisfy the priests with abundance (Jer. 31:14) and to be their possession (Ezek. 44:28). Yet they refused to harken to the words of the Lord.

4. The Exilic Period

During the exile, the history and duties of the priests could be said to have vanished. This was so expressed since the Babylonians destroyed the Temple (the centre of priestly activities) and took all the Temple's vessels with them to Babylon. Being exiles, they didn't not have access to those holy vessels. The deportation to Babylon contained all Israel's nobles and leaders, the rich and the entire priestly descents. The Temple was destroyed and all the Temple leaders and assistants were no more in Israel. The priests were deported as well.

Before the Babylonians took power, the Assyrians were the world's super-power. Adequate study of the period between the testaments should begin with the Babylonian invasion. It was during this time that Nebuchadnezzar exiled Judah (2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36:11-19). He took the royal members, nobles, offices, landowners, priests and the prophets (2 Chron. 36). Zamani B. Kafang, a professor of Old Testament, wrote that "for those of us who are non-Jews, exile probably means just deportation. For the Jews, exile meant death, destruction and devastation. Exile also meant a host of physical and socio-economic problems."⁶² And this was a

⁶² Zamani B. Kafang, *An Introduction to the Intertestamental Period* (Jos: Sele Computers, 2001), 16.

great lost to the southern kingdom of Israel for the deportees were all of leadership class (2 Kgs 25:18-21). People like Daniel and Ezekiel (who was a prophet and a priest, Ezek. 1:2) were also taken. With this, John C. Whitcomb Jr stated:

Among the captives taken to Babylon at this time was a young priest named Ezekiel. Five years later at the age thirty, he began to prophesy to the exiles in Babylon, explaining why Jerusalem was doomed to destruction and why the Shekinah Glory had departed from the Temple (Ezek. 1-33). Ezekiel continued to date his own ministry in terms of Jehoiachin's reign (Ezek. 1:2), because as long as Jehoiachin lived he (not his uncle Zedekiah) was Judah's legitimate king. However, Jeremiah made it clear that Jehoiachin was the last legitimate king of Judah, 'for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah' (Jer. 22:30).⁶³

It is clear that only the poor and the helpless were left in the land (2 Kgs 25:12). Most of the people also fled to Egypt because Ishmael killed Gedeliah who was a Babylonian representative (2 Kgs 25:26).

The Temple was burned and also the good vessels of the Temple were taken to Babylon. But whether the priests who were taken to exile used those vessels in Babylon is not clearly

⁶³ John C. Whitcomb Jr, *Solomon to the Exile* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1971), 148.

defined. The 70 years of exile (605-535BC) gave birth to Orthodox Judaism which was practiced in the Synagogues. This period of exile was meant to worship God and studying of the Torah and having fellowship. It also saw the rise of the scribes (dominantly priests) since the priests were taken and they were the teachers of the Law to the people. Also, during this time, the Jews enjoyed and experienced spirituality, change in language, literary production and the Psalms (74; 79; 85; 102 etc.).⁶⁴ However, idolatry to the exiles was central.

The exile brought about many challenges in the life of the people of Israel.

1. The first is in the aspect of foreign gods.
2. There is the destruction of the Temple [the Temple of Solomon; the Temple was viewed as the footstool of God (Lam. 2:1)]
3. Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7)
4. Promised land
5. Decimation of the priesthood by the exile
6. Cessation of sacrifices posed a theological problem because there was no Temple.⁶⁵
7. The exile brought about the emergence of synagogue worship among the Jews with the priests as teachers of the Law.
8. The study of the Law became a substitute for animal sacrifices and ethical observances took the

⁶⁴ The Psalms are individual songs in the Psalter. These are songs and they don't have chapters. For example, "Psalm six verse 3."

⁶⁵ Kafang, 16-19.

place of rituals. Intertestamental Judaism was legalistic in practice.

There are good books that give us glimpse into the priesthood when the Israelites went to captivity. It is evident in Jeremiah and Ezekiel who were priests (Jer. 1:1; Ezek. 1:3). A survey of their prophecies would reveal the place of priesthood during the exile.

Jeremiah was a priest from Anathoth (Jer. 1:1). The people and prophets set Jeremiah against even the priests (Jer. 1:18). It is quite embarrassing that the priests failed to ask from the Lord and to know God through the Law (Jer. 2:8). They were the custodians of the Law but they failed to inquire the mind of God at that time. The priests and the prophets disgraced the house of the Lord (Jer. 2:26). The Lord said the priests will be horrified (Jer. 4:9) for they ruled with their own authority (Jer. 5:31). The priests were greedy for gain (Jer. 8:10). The Lord will make the priests to be filled with drunkenness (Jer. 13:13).

When they heard Jeremiah prophesying concerning their fate, the priests and the prophets seized Jeremiah that he must die (Jer. 26:8, 11, 16). Those priests who were with the Lord and had the leadership of the Lord were convinced by Jeremiah according to the Lord not to listen to the prophets (Jer. 27:16). It was Jeremiah who sent a letter to the exiles (Jer. 29:1) as some scholars believe he might have returned to Judah, sent this letter and later went back again to Babylon.

Priests were killed and Jeremiah lamented on the death of priests and kings on the altar of the Lord (Lam. 2:20). The

Lord had said they will perished (Lam. 1:19) for the Lord had spurred out kings and priests (Lam. 2:6). The Lord did not show them honour anymore (Lam. 4:16). The priests died and were humiliated because of their disobedience.

It is clear that it was in exile that the priests under the leadership of Ezra started the synagogue worship. A synagogue was made up of about nine to twelve people mainly to study the Law and the prophets in view of their situation as exiles. With this Robert G. Gromacki elaborated:

The seventy years of exile (605-535 BC) gave birth to Orthodox Judaism. Since the Temple and the sacrificial system had been destroyed, the exiles congregated themselves into assemblies or synagogues for the worship of God, the study of the Old Testament, and fellowship. In the centuries that followed, synagogues sprouted throughout the Mediterranean world whenever the Jews emigrated. They were never designed to become a substitute for the Temple. Sacrifices were never offered in them because Jerusalem was the only God-appointed place of sacrifices.⁶⁶

It is also right to say that sacrifices were not offered since the Jews believed that only Jerusalem was designated for offering of sacrifices and worship. Jerusalem, to the Jews, was

⁶⁶ Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 2. The synagogues became the center for missionary activities during the days of the apostles and out of them came the first Christian converts, believers who were Jews and Gentiles proselytes to Judaism.

the seat of God and for the Temple to be destroyed it was like hell to them. The destruction of the Temple was like the glory of God has departed from Jerusalem. The priesthood at that time in exile might not have involved sacrifices but involved other possible works which the priests could do with much zeal and interest on the recopying, studying and teaching of the Torah.

The priests and the people engaged in an in-depth copying of the Torah which inaugurated the period to be called modern Judaism with Ezra as the father of such a Modern Judaism. Similarly, Gromacki stated:

The captivity also saw the rise of the scribe. Since the priests could not practice their ministry, they undertook a serious study and copying of the Old Testament scriptures. The more they copied, the more they learned. Soon they became the 'theologians' of orthodox Judaism.⁶⁷

Prophet Ezekiel was more an interpreter of prophecy to the house of Israel. He explained the intention of God concerning the tragic situation and fate of Israel. Concerning the priesthood, Ezekiel shared the view that the priesthood was made up exclusively of one family within the Levitical tribe, but he substituted the sons of Zadok (a priest during David's reign whose descendants gained control of the priesthood of the Jerusalem Temple) for the sons of Aaron (Ezek. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11). He stipulated that the priests were obligated to refrain from touching ordinary people

⁶⁷ Gromacki, 2.

while officiating in the Temple (Ezek. 42:13; 44:19; 46:2, 19). Although the Levites could never attain the office of priests, they served as important blocks between the priestly family and the congregation (Ezek. 44:13).

Priests were to teach the holy and common people the Law and how to distinguish between the clean and the unclean (Ezek. 44:23). They were to decide disputes in accordance to God's ordinance, to keep the Lord's laws and decrees for appointed feasts and keep the Sabbath (Ezek. 44:24).

The Lord declared that, "The priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them" (Ezek. 22:26).

Within this, the Lord sought for a man that will stand at the gap on behalf of the people and God. It was the duty of the priests to stand between God and the people. But the priests failed to ask from the Lord and to know God through the Law (Jer. 2:8). Prophets and priests were godless and their wickedness were even in the Temple (Jer. 23:11, 33). They exchanged their glory with something disgraceful. They sinned as they were increasing in number (Ezek. 4:9). The priests ignored the Law and the Lord rejected them (Hos. 4:6). The Lord declared that the teaching of the priest will be lost (Ezek. 7:26).

The priests were to minister before the Lord. Some of them were faithful in their service to the Lord (Jer. 33:21) and the Lord promised to hear them when they cry (Ezek. 44:15). God would do as the faithful ones ask Him for anything.

Since the morality of the nation of Israel rested on the shoulder of the priests and the prophets, it was necessary for the Lord to give certain instructions which He expected them to heed. The works of the priests were dominantly in the Temple. They were responsible for the up-keep of the Temple yet they profaned it.

It was their duties to teach the people and to offer sacrifices in the Temple. Whenever the people sinned, they were to take young bulls as sin offering to the priests (Ezek. 43:19) and the priests would offer those offerings for the forgiveness of the sins of the people. The Lord showed the priests where to cook the sin and guilt offerings and to bake the grain offerings (Ezek. 46:20). It was the priests who could offer the sacrifices on behalf of the people. Also, the priests could take blood of the sin offerings and put on the doorpost (Ezek. 45:19). The priests must have a man who will stand before the Lord to burn sacrifices, offer grain offerings and to offer sacrifices (Jer. 33:18). The Lord gave the room facing the south to the priests who were in charge of the Temple (Ezek. 40:45).

Certain instructions were passed down to them and the Lord expected them to keep. Before they entered to perform a function, no priest would drink wine when he would enter the inner room (Ezek. 44:25). The priests must not marry

widows or divorced women, only virgins of Israelite descent or widows of priests (Ezek. 44:21). The priests must not eat anything, bird or animal that is dead or torn by wild animal (Ezek. 44:31). The best of first-fruits and all special offerings belonged to the priests (Ezek. 44:30). But most of them profaned the instructions of the Lord and it led to the exile for they were to be righteous figures to the people and defend the testimony of God before the people.

5. Post Exilic Period

The Persians became the super-power under the reign of King Coresh (Cyrus)⁶⁸ (2 Chron. 36:20) by defeating the Babylonians. King Coresh defeated the Assyria, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor. Let me say that Cyrus was a humanitarian, and thus, encouraged all exiled people to return to their homelands. This policy led to the return to Palestine of a representative remnant of Jews who had been scattered throughout the world many years before by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Since exiles were subject to the superpower, Cyrus, in line with the prophecy of Jeremiah (2 Chron. 36:22), permitted the exiles to return to their lands and to rebuild the Temple (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:4). The Jews during this time enjoyed observance of Sabbath rests. With this, according to Kafang, the phrase “ten lost tribes” has no effect for the northerners under the Assyrians

⁶⁸ Kafang, 27.

came back to the land of Israel. He argued that the phrase “ten lost tribes” is “only theoretical and not practical.”⁶⁹

The history of the priesthood continued after the exile. This is clearly evident in the works of Ezra, Nehemiah, Prophet Haggai and Prophet Zechariah. These Bible books tell us about the priesthood in the exile and after the exile. The books tell and retell the stories that pertained the priests and the people of Israel when they returned from Babylon.

After the Babylonian exile during the Persian reign, a decisive action took place to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem as a sign of the reaffirmation of national and religious identity for ancient Judaism. This meant a rebirth of the supremacy of the priesthood and it appears that within this period, the priesthood was clearly established that only those who were considered to be descendants of Aaron could serve in the priesthood. The Levites served beside them as lower class in the priestly structure. The number of the priests increased; and in some cases, the priests worked various parts of the land (Neh. 13:10; 10:35). This allowed for a decreased dependence on the priestly gifts. It is probably at this period that the priestly services and divisions (1 Chron. 24:3-19) became regulated.

The people of Israel returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel (538-515BC) with 50,000 people purposefully to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1-6; Haggai; Zechariah; this is the Temple of Zerubbabel). The name “Zerubbabel” means “seed of Babylon” or “born in Babylon”

⁶⁹ Kafang, 28.

and he was the grandson of Jehoiachin (Ezra 3:2). The first project to be embarked on, as stated above, was the rebuilding of the Temple. The Temple destroyed by their former masters was the Temple of Solomon. This present Temple was built by Zerubbabel commonly known as Zerubbabel's Temple which was renovated and moderated by Herod the Great before the coming of Jesus.⁷⁰ To Israel, the Temple had been a centre of their national life. It has been the place the people would come to meet with God (cf. Jn 4:20). It has been the symbol of the presence of God. No wonder the destruction of the Temple became a challenge to the Jews.

In Ezra 1:5, after the presentation of the letter of release to return, the need of the hour was the rebuilding of the Temple for which many of the heads of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and Levites and everyone whose heart had moved (Ezra 1:5) returned to rebuild. True spirituality is witnessed when we are moved by God not by our emotions and zeal. True spirituality means obedience to the move of God and doing His will.

Right from the exile, the Jews needed to maintain the priesthood. It is clear that many priests returned from the exile. There were people from the descendants of Levi who were numbered after they returned from exile (Ezra 2:36; 7:7,

⁷⁰ One must be able to figure out the period when talking about Temple in Israel. Temple in the Bible does not necessarily mean the Temple of Solomon. We need to know that there were also Temple periods besides that of Solomon which was destroyed by the Babylonians and led to the exile. We have the Temple of Zerubbabel and of Herod.

13). It is clear from Ezra 2:36 that a good number of people who returned were priests and Levites and all the people who would work on the Temple; hence, the focus of the return was to rebuild the Temple.

It is clear that the lines between the priests and Levites were firmly drawn and established. The Levites acquired an honoured status (although the Bible does not refer to any particular robe of the office of the Levites). Levitical singers were granted the privilege of wearing priestly linen robes and their small numbers in comparison to the priests added to their importance (Ezra 2:40-42).

a. Jeshua the Priest

The leading priest after the exile was Jeshua (Ezra 2:2; 3:2; 4:3). The name Jeshua is a variant of Joshua, an Aramaic name for a savior. It is the name for Jesus and Judah. Because of the exile and the scattering of the people, there was no priestly family record. Food was gathered for the priests but the governor ordered that the sacred food must not be eaten until there was a priest ministering with the Urim and Tummin (Ezra 2:63). The priests, the Levites and the singers and Temple servants all settled in their own land which was allocated to them (Ezra 2:70) after the exile.

In the seventh month, Jeshua and his fellows began to build the altar of the Lord (Ezra 3:2). Having the altar meant the restoration of forgiveness and restitution to the people of Israel. The Israelites after the exile had the Law and everything was done according to the Law. The priests and the Levites became the custodians of the Law after the exile.

In the second month of the second year, they laid the foundation for the building of the Temple. To my amazement contrary to the Law, Levites at age 20 and abit older were given the privilege to serve in the priesthood (Ezra 3:8). The Law required 30 years of age (1 Chron. 23:3). This could be that there was shortage of manpower for maintaining the priesthood. When the foundation was laid, the priests and the Levites took their places to praise the Lord (Ezra 3:10).

At the completion of the Temple and in view of the nature of the Temple, the older priests wept aloud while the younger ones were rejoicing at the beauty of the Temple (Ezra 3:12). While the younger ones were happy because of the magnificent nature of the Temple, the elderly ones were mourning because the beauty cannot be compared with the former Temple which Solomon built. The rebuilding of the Temple was to restore Jewish life, priestly order and holiness which have been witnessing sorrow since the Babylonians destroyed the Temple and caused the cessation of the sacrifices. Zerubbabel made the work comfortable for them and made them to stand for the Lord in the land. He ordered that whatever the priests requested for the work of the Lord should be given to them without reservation (Ezra 6:9).

Despite those privileges, the rebuilding of the Temple faced challenges during the Persian kings (Cyrus, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes). It was in the reign of Darius that the rebuilding was completed (Ezra 6:1-15) on the third day of the month of Adar in the sixth year of the reign of the king Darius (Ezra 6:15). Darius issued a decree for the completion so that the

Israelites can have a place to offer sacrifices (Ezra 6:3). The people worked on the Temple of the Lord (Hag. 2:2). The Lord encouraged Zerubbabel and Jeshua son of Jehozadak the High Priest to be strong and be courageous (Hag. 2:4).

The priests and Levites and the rest of the people finished building and celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy (Ezra 6:16). They offered sacrifices and reinstalled the priests in their divisions to work in the Temple according to the Law (Ezra 6:17-18). When the Passover came, the priests and Levites purified themselves and offered sacrifices for themselves and their fellow priests; cleansing themselves from the foreign strings of the nations (Babylon and Persia) (Ezra 6:20).

b. Ezra the Priest

Besides the return of Zerubbabel with some Jews to rebuild the Temple, the second of the returnees was Ezra with a group of Jews dominantly of Levi descent. For Ezra to return to Jerusalem with all the priests and the Levites in the land showed that there was a high demand for capability and manpower to maintain the priesthood. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, it was necessary to bring Levites from the rural areas of Palestine and from the exile to have enough staff in the Temple of Jerusalem. There was need for the people to be taught the Law and to understand the ways of God with Ezra as a leading priest who was also a scribe at that time (Ezra 7:11, 12, 21).

Being a priest and a scribe and a father of modern Judaism, Ezra became an expert in the Law. Of course, priests

should be asked what the Law says concerning consecrated meat and defilement (Hag. 2:11, 12). They were to be asked concerning fasting (Zech. 7:3-5). That was why Ezra returned to teach the people the Law. Ezra came back in 458 BC because the Temple was rebuilt but there was no one to teach the people the Law. Ezra might have contributed in starting the Orthodox Judaism in the exile. He devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord and to the teaching of its decrees and laws in Israel (Ezra 7:10). Ezra enjoyed favour from the side of the king of Persia and all he asked for was granted to him and even some people to return together with him to Jerusalem.

However, Ezra was banned the authority of imposing taxes, tributes on the priests and the people (Ezra 7:24) since they were mostly poor and needed to establish in the land. Unfortunately, among the people and the priests, there were no Levites (Ezra 8:15), although the Levites had been the assistants to the priests in Jewish history.

There were a number of priests who were working with Ezra. They were: Meremoth, son of Uriah, the priest; Eleazar son of Phinehas, the Levites Jozabed son of Joshua and Noadiah son of Binnui (Ezra 8:33). Despite the instability in the land, the returned exiles sacrificed unto the Lord according to the twelve tribes of Israel (Ezr. 8:35) and consecrated themselves to the Lord and twelve of the leading priests were set apart for the work of God (Ezra 8:29).

It is clear that the major challenge faced by the priesthood was in the aspect of marriage to foreign women and given

their daughters in marriage to foreign men (Neh. 10:28, 30). The mistake of the past witnessed resurgence. But it is clear that the poor served the Lord with sincerity of heart but those who were privileged seemed to have abandoned the ways of the Lord.

In Africa, and Nigeria in particular, because of the economic challenges, many people are becoming “faithful remnants of the Lord.” People are mostly concerned with God today in search for relief from socio-economic challenges. The Israelites had settled in the land but they revived their old practices and neglected the ways of God, the same sins that led their fathers to go to exile in Babylon.

The Israelites including the priests have not separated themselves from the neighbouring nations (Ezra 9:1). Sins caused them to be pillaged and humiliated before kings (Ezra 9:7; Neh. 9:32, 34). They forgot all the Lord had caused upon their forefathers for 70 years. They forgot what the Lord did to the Egyptians and the Passover in the days of Moses. Even the priests and the Levites married foreign women (Ezra 10:18-24) contrary to the decrees of the Lord. These made the Lord angry.

Ezra the priest confronted the people and appointed some to investigate the cases (Ezr. 10:10, 16). He put the leading priests under oaths to comply with the Word of God (Ezra 10:5). A clear verse is Ezra 10:19 which reveals that most of them were from the house of the High Priest Jeshua and they

vowed to dismiss their wives and to offer guilt offerings of a ram.⁷¹

To divorce has been unbiblical. God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). It contradicts the plans of God for marriage. This situation corresponded with what the Africans passed through when they were converted to Christianity by the white missionaries. It can be stated the missionaries were divided on this issues. While some missionaries allowed the polygamists to engage in the church, other missionaries disallowed. It was a division between the 'left wing' and 'right wing' missionaries. Many of our forefathers were asked by some 'left wing missionaries' to select one among the wives and dismissed the other women. Within this, Samuel W. Kunhiyop inquired, "Is it morally right to require that a man who has contracted marriage to more than one wife renounce them on conversion? Which is a greater evil; polygamy or divorce?"⁷² Kunhiyop concluded that "the past and present ecclesiastical perception and treatment of polygamists as adulterers is unbiblical, unethical and harmful."⁷³ Adrian Hasting has it that "to do so is frequently to cause very real injustice and misery to wives and children."⁷⁴ More so,

⁷¹ For an African thought on divorce and its biblical significance see Tambiyi, *African Church under Fire*, 37.

⁷² Samuel W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Kaduna: Baraka Press, 2004), 339.

⁷³ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics*, 342.

⁷⁴ Adrian Hasting, *Marriage in Africa* (London: 1973), 77.

O'Donovan rejected such conclusion and believed, "Only God can work out the problem in answer to prayer."⁷⁵

Cave has this to say concerning the decision to divorce those women in the days of Ezra.

The decision was a tough one for the nation of Israel but obedience was vital if they were to maintain their identity as God's covenant people. The alternative was to go the way of those who water down the will of God and lose their identity in Him ... whenever the Church of Jesus Christ has tried to act than in obedience to God's word it has declined to the point where it has become difficult to see where the ways of the world end and the position of the Church begins.⁷⁶

c. Eliashib the High Priest

At this time, news came from Jerusalem from Nehemiah's brother Hanani about the people and the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah prayed and won the favour of the king to return purposefully to "rebuild" the wall of Jerusalem. This was the third wave of the return from the exile. Despite that the priests were the leaders and were respected in the land, when Nehemiah went to the city, he did not tell even the priests about the work he came to do in Jerusalem (Neh. 2:16). These were those who were in-charge of the city and were

⁷⁵ Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in Modern Africa* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 29.

⁷⁶ Cave, 112.

controlling the religious life of Jerusalem, but he kept everything to himself and conducted a survey first. It is good to be focused on God's work for many will try to discourage the process.

Nehemiah in 444BC led the Jews to Jerusalem not only with the focus on rebuilding the wall of the city but to carry out other socio-economic and religious transformations particularly of oppression and intermarriages (Neh. 5; 13). Nehemiah prayed and fasted, asked for permission to return, inspected the wall by night and appointed builders for the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Let me observe that the idea of the rebuilding of the wall does not mean the wall was totally destroyed but it fits the idea of renovation of the broken wall particularly the door posts as fire was set on the gates and destroyed them (2 Kgs. 25:10). The inspection of the wall by Nehemiah showed that only parts of the wall were broken (Neh. 2:11-3:1ff).

The leading priest at that time who worked with Nehemiah was Eliashib. During the renovation of the wall, Eliashib and the priests went and rebuilt the sheep gate (Neh. 3:1). The sheep gate was the gate where people would bring all animals for sacrifices into the city. Since the priests were dealing with animals and sacrifices, it was necessary that they rebuilt the sheep gate. As a result, the priests repaired from the surrounding region of Eliashib's house (Neh. 3:22) and they repaired the wall close to their houses (Neh. 3:28).

One of the dominant reforms of Nehemiah was the recovery of possession of the poor. The priests were made

eyewitnesses to the nobles' promise not to exploit the people (Neh. 5:12). Nehemiah the Governor and the people gave money for priestly garments to enable them discharge their duties (Neh. 7:70-72) as unto the Lord.

After the completion of the wall of Jerusalem, the priests, the head of families and the Levites gathered to hear the Word of the Lord through Ezra (Neh. 7:73). This took place on the first day of the seventh month. Ezra the priest brought the Law of Moses and read before the people (Neh. 8:2). The Governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites instructed the people in the ways of the Lord (Neh. 8:9; 12:26). The priests and the Levites agreed to the terms of covenants (Neh. 9:38)⁷⁷ as expected. The priests and the people vowed to separate themselves and their families from the other nations (Neh. 10:38). The people also promised to bring their sacrifices to the priests (Neh. 10:37, 39). A priest from the descendant of Aaron was to accompany and bring a tenth of the crops (Neh. 10:38).

The priests too settled in the town in Jerusalem (Neh.11:3, 20). The people brought portions to the storerooms and for the priests (Neh. 12:30, 35, 41, 44; 13:5). It is good to read that certain men were trustworthy and were given responsibility. Nehemiah put trustworthy men Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, the Levite Pedaiah in-charge of the storehouse (Neh. 13:13).

⁷⁷ The major problem of Ezra was that he could read the Law for long hours without explanation (Neh. 8:18).

However, Eliashib the priest was selfish to have given Tobiah a space in the Temple (Neh. 13:13). One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the High Priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite who was one of those against the Jews (Neh. 13:28). Nehemiah chased them out and purified the priests and the Levites from anything foreign (Neh. 13:30).

d. Joshua the High Priest

With Joshua, the concept of High Priest was maintained. Although he was being accused by Satan but the Lord delivered him (Zech. 3:1). Satan has been the accuser of the brethren since the creation of man. One thing about Joshua was that the nature of his priesthood was associated with the priestly place of Jesus. Joshua became the symbol of the Branch to come (Zech. 3:8). The name Joshua and Jesus are from the same root word and meaning. The name carries the idea of an intense saviour who will deliver his people. The Lord delivered Joshua as a symbol of how Jesus would deliver His people. It was a new face of high and advance priesthood; a task Jesus embarked with His life. The Lord asked that a crown of gold and silver be brought for Joshua the priest (Zech. 6:11). This was an inauguration of an everlasting throne and priesthood (Zech. 6:13) which Jesus assumed for the sake of humanity.

6. In the Days of Malachi

The book of Malachi is a book that bridges the post-exilic period and the Gospels. The whole book of Malachi is about the role of the priesthood at that time. It revealed the sins of

the priests and how they have neglected the name of the Lord. It is clear that the priests showed contempt to the name of the Lord (Mal. 1:6).

The priests had these against them;

1. Disrespect to the name of God (1:6).
2. They called God a liar even when they were wrong (1:6).
3. Defilement of the altar of the Lord (1:7, 12).
4. They disobeyed the Lord by putting defiled food on the altar (1:7).
5. They brought blemished and blind animals to the altar (1:8, 13).
6. They brought crippled or diseased animals as sacrifices (1:8).
7. They preferred their leaders to God (1:8).

The Lord declares that He was not pleased with them and He will not accept any offering from them (1:10). The Lord promised to make His name known to the nations from sunrise and sunset. Other nations were given the privilege to burn incense and offer pure offerings to Him since His people are abandoning Him (1:11).

Because of such priestly attitude, the Lord admonished the priests (Mal. 2:1) to return to Him. This was mainly to maintain the covenant made with Levi, the Levitical priesthood. This Levitical covenant was of life and peace. It is known from scriptures that Levi stood before the Lord and revered the name of the Lord during his days. But these priests have profaned the name of the Lord. Accurate

instructions were found in his mouth contrary from the practices among the priests in the days of Malachi.

The Lord revealed that, because of the priestly duties, the lips of the priest ought to preserve knowledge and instruction (Mal. 2:7). People should come to the priests for wholesome teaching and knowledge. The priests should stand for the truth and declare the ways of the Lord and make them known to the people. The Priests were messengers and midwives of the Lord almighty (Mal. 2:7).

However, the Lord was not happy with many of them. They have turned from the ways of the Lord and have encouraged many to stumble and have violated the covenant made with Levi (2:8). This made men to despise them and humiliated them because they failed to recognize the glory of the name of the Lord (2:9). The priests have shown partiality and failed to follow the exact counsel of the Lord as expressed in the Law (2:9). The Lord asked them to return to Him and He will return to them.

CHAPTER THREE THE FOCAL POINTS OF THE PRIESTHOOD

1. Anointing and Ordination

The choosing of the tribe of Levi was an honourable thing to do. Not everybody was to be a priest among the Levites. There was a reference to an anointed priest (Lev. 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22) which reveals that one has to be anointed. The priests were to be anointed and ordained for the office of the priesthood. Aaron's sons were anointed priests for God's service (Num. 3:3). Aaron and his sons must be appointed and no one apart from them would go to the sanctuary or such a person be put to death (Num. 3:10). According to Anderson:

The priest was appointed in Israel to maintain the people in the enjoyment of the blessings thus secured to them by redemption. And his duties were of such a character that the humblest Israelite could have discharged them, had not God decreed that none but sons of Aaron should hold the office.⁷⁸

There was a priestly staff (Num. 17) which was to be with the High Priest, Aaron. The Levites were dedicated to the Lord (Num. 8:5-26) for service unto the Lord and the people.

It is clear that only Aaron and his sons may serve as priests for they have been chosen by the Lord (Num. 18:7). Many people wanted to be of service even when the Lord had not chosen them. Such people, the Lord said, shall be put to

⁷⁸ Anderson, 28.

death. To the family of Aaron and his sons, the priesthood was given to them as a gift (Num. 18:7). They didn't deserve it but God gave it to them as an extended favour.

Also, the Lord commanded the sewing of sacred garments for Aaron and his sons. The garments were to be for his descendants for their anointing and ordination (Exo. 29:29). It was within this that Eli was chosen by the Lord to be priest (1 Sam. 2:28) in those days.

To achieve these, emphasis was laid on holiness, obedience and consecrations. The High Priest was consecrated for seven days (Exo. 29:35; Lev. 8:33). He was washed and dressed in the priestly robes, anointed with oil and sprinkled with the sacrificial blood. He represented the people for he bore the name of the twelve tribes on his shoulders and breastplate.

Priests were to be clothed with righteousness (Ps. 132:9) and salvation (Ps. 132:16). They were to be called priests of the Lord (Isa. 61:6). During the 8th century BC, the Lord, through Isaiah, said He will select men to be priests and Levites (Isa. 66:21) and they were to stand for the Lord. In the days of Ezra after the exile, twelve of the leading priests were set apart (Ezra 8:29). In the New Testament, the chief priests in the days of Jesus also were appointed and ordained for the service unto the Lord and the people.

2. Qualifications for Priesthood

- a. He must be a male.
- b. He must be without deformity (Lev. 21:21).

- c. He must not perform duties when unclean, ceremonially and dietary.
- d. He must not stand before the Lord to perform a task when drinking alcohol or drunk with it.
- e. He must be from the tribe of Levi.
- f. He must be consecrated by the Lord.
- g. He must be willing to serve the Lord.
- h. He must not touch a corpse.
- i. He must wear the priestly garment correctly and make sure he puts on his tunic (undergarment) well.

3. People's Roles towards the Priests

There were specific roles that people were to play concerning the priests in those days. The people were to respect the priests and consider them viable representatives of God. Since they were standing for God in all matters of godliness, it was wrong for anyone to show contempt to a ministering priest (Deut. 17:12).

The craziness of Saul did not allow him stay above the line drawn by God. Saul ordered the killing of the priests of the Lord for he felt they have sided David (1 Sam. 22:17). But none of the guards raised his hands against the priests. However, he ordered Doeg the Edomite to kill the priests and eighty-five men were put to death (1 Sam. 22:18). He also ordered the destruction of Nob, the town of the priests but Abiathar the priest escaped and fled to David (1 Sam. 22:19). What actually brought such contempt on the priests and Nob? Was that the mind of God concerning Saul?

Despite that behaviour, the Lord urged that the priests be obeyed and considered and the people were directed not to disobey the words of the priests (2 Kgs 11:15). The words from the mouth of the priest were actually the words from God for he was speaking in the name of God. Even when the priests violated the ways of the Lord, no one brought charges against a priest (Hos. 4:4). Of course, the qualified fellows to speak against such evil priestly practices in the days of Hosea during the 8th century BC, were the prophets but none spoke against the priests' wicked ways and their abandonment of the people to derail from the ways of the Lord.

After the exile, Jehozadak the High Priest and the people obeyed the Word of the Lord through prophet Haggai (Hag. 1:1, 12). They accepted to work on the Temple of the Lord (Hag. 2:2).⁷⁹ The people in the days of Nehemiah also promised to bring their sacrifices to the priests (Neh. 10:37, 39).

4. Consecration of Priests

The ultimate command of the Lord concerning the priesthood was that the tribe of Levi was chosen by the Lord to serve as priests of the Lord. It was necessary that the people be consecrated by the Lord before they can stand before the Holy God and serve. Aaron and his sons were to serve as priests (Exo. 28:1) but Aaron was to be consecrated so that he can serve as priest (Exo. 28:3). The consecration was for seven

⁷⁹ See Zamani B. Kafang, *God's People, God's Projects and God's Promises: A Historical and Theological Reflection on the Book of Haggai* (Kaduna: Baraka Press and Publishers, 2016).

days (Exo. 40:13). The priest must consecrate themselves or the Lord will strike against them (Ex. 19:22; 28:41; 29:1, 44; 30:30). To carry the Ark of the Lord, there was need for the priests to consecrate themselves for such a task (1 Chron. 15:14).

When a priest sinned, he was to offer a young bull as sin offering for his sins (Lev. 4:3). Because the sin of the priest would bring grief on the people (Lev. 4:3), he was to take a bull to the altar and sacrificed it unto the Lord for the forgiveness of his sins (Lev. 4:7). It was even considered when someone sins but when a priest sinned, God was angry for the sins of the priests brought grief on God and the people. The same goes for the pastors in our days. Today, the Church suffers when the pastor is living in sin. Also when the prophets and teachers are swimming in sin, the Church suffers and experiences poor growth and becomes ineffective.

After the Babylonian exile, the priests and Levites purified themselves and offered sacrifices for themselves and their fellow priests (Ezra 6:20). It has been a practice since the days of Moses. There was need for purification before the priests could carry out a function for and before the Lord. In the days of Nehemiah, the priests and the Levites agreed to the terms of covenant of separation (Neh. 9:38). The priests and the people vowed to separate themselves and their families from the other nations (Neh. 10:38). It was within this that Nehemiah purified the priests and the Levites from anything foreign (Neh. 13:30). There was need for consecration before a priest appeared before the Lord even after the exile; hence,

the Law was properly understood during the exile. We need to do the same before standing before the Lord.

5. Requirements for the Priesthood

After being in the priesthood, there were some of the requirements to safeguard the purity of the priestly service. The followings are some of those requirements:

- a. Priests must not have defect (Lev. 21:21).
- b. Priests, who were with defect, must not go to offer sacrifice before the Lord (Lev. 21:21). When they did that, the Lord's anger will strike.
- c. Priests were to take their bath with water after performing function (Num. 19:7).
- d. They must not marry defiled women for they are holy before the Lord (Lev. 21:7).
- e. Priests must not touch a corpse or become unclean (Lev. 21:1).
- f. The priests must not eat anything, bird or animal that is dead or torn by wild animal (Ezek. 44:31).
- g. The priests must not marry widows or divorced women, only virgins of Israelite descent or widows of priests (Ezek. 44:21).
- h. Priests must not shave their heads or their beards or their bodies (Lev. 21:5).
- i. No priest should drink wine when he enters the inner room (Ezek. 44:25).
- j. The High Priest must not allow his hair unkempt or tear his garments (Lev. 21:10).

6. Priestly Garments and the High Priest

In the days of Moses, the Lord commanded the making of priestly garments for Aaron and his sons in order for them to serve as priests (Exo. 31:10). Of course, the garments for the priests were to be sacred (Exo. 28:4, 41; 29:1; 31:10; 35:19; 40:15). The priests would put on linen garments and undergarments (Lev. 6:10). These garments were meant for priestly service during duties. Priests who entered the holy precinct cannot go back to the courtyard until they left their garments behind (Ezek. 42:14).

The High Priest wore a mitre or elaborate headdress that showed his special status different from other priests which had the inscription "Holy to Yahweh" (Exo. 28:36-39; 29:6; 39:30; Lev. 8:9). He also wore the robe of the ephod, the Ephod, and the breastplate (Lev. 8:7-9). The robe of the ephod seems to have been a sleeveless tunic, made of blue material, fringed with alternate bells and pomegranates (Exo. 28:31-35; 39:22-26). The ephod had four colors as reflected in the sanctuary: blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen interwoven with gold (Exo. 28:6-8; 39:2-5). The breastplate had a pocket for keeping the Urim and Thummim (Exo. 28:15-30; 39:8-21). The High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies in his full regalia but would wear his priestly dress on ordinary duties.

The priest could wear the Ephod. Ahijah was a priest, son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub son of Phinehas. He was wearing the Ephod during the time of the kings (1 Sam. 14:3). It was clear concerning every nature of priesthood not just among the Israelites. The priests or ministers of Baal wore their

priestly garments when Jehu deceived them and wiped the worship of Baal at that time (2 Kgs. 10:22). Isaiah the prophet made it clear that the priests of God were adorned (Isa. 61:10). They were given the garments to enable them stand by in the presence of the Lord.

In 1 Samuel 2:18, the priests would wear special vestments. He wore a white cloak and a special turban (Exo. 28; 29:5-6). The Hebrew word for "turban" means "sign of consecration." The return from the exile gave the priesthood a better dimension for the Governor and the people gave money for priestly garments (Neh. 7:70-72). They contributed to enable the priests have their garments for service.

The primary function of the High Priest was to administer and direct the sacrificial system. The High Priest alone was allowed to go behind the veil of the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:2). He dealt with the sin offerings where blood was brought into the sanctuary of the Temple (Lev. 4:3-21). The High Priest's responsibilities included all the sacrificial activities that took place inside the Temple, either with his direct involvement or under his supervision.

The High Priest was to be more cautious on issues of ritual purity and marriage as he was not to marry a widow and he was admonished only to "take to wife a virgin of his own people" (i.e., Israel, Lev. 21:13-15) and never to observe the external signs of mourning (i.e., letting hair grow, rending clothes) for any person, and he could not leave the sanctuary when news came of death even of a parent. He could not defile himself by contact with any dead body,

including of a parent (vv. 10-12). If he should bring guilt upon the people, he had to present a special offering (Lev. 4:3). Sins affecting the priesthood in general had to be atoned by the other priests as well as himself (Num. 18:1).

7. Priestly Ranking and Succession

There was priestly ranking in the priesthood. There were priests who could wait for others before they were given full place of service. It had leadership tenure in terms of headship. Priests could wait for others on the throne to step down for them to climb the ladder. A clear example was Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the priest who was next in rank (Jer. 52:24). The ranking in priesthood (2 Kgs 25:18) was clear in the days of the kings.

Priestly succession was practised within the families that belonged to the clan of the Levi. It was allowed in ancient priesthood. A son of Aaron was to succeed him as priest for service in the Holy of Holies (Exo. 29:30) mostly as High Priest. He was to prepare and offer the offerings (Lev. 6:22). Such succession could be applied at all times. However, Eleazar and Ithamar served because Nadab and Abihu had no children (Num. 3:4). If Nadab and Abihu had sons who will succeed them, Eleazar and Ithamar would have taken the mandate of priestly leadership.

Priestly succession was also by lots (see 1 Chron. 24:1-19; Lk 1:8-12). In the office of the High Priest, it was rotated within years in Old Testament history. In the New Testament, it was more a yearly affair when a priest was selected to present the offerings on the Day of Atonement. The priests,

in those days, had years of service (2 Chron. 24:2). This is also similar to African concept of kingship appointment or serving as a village chief priest where the person has to come from a particular clan unless there was no a viable heir to succeed the throne or to assume the priestly position.

8. Priestly Sacrificial Portion

There were sacrificial portions of the offerings which were left for the priests (Num. 5:9-10). Only the priests were allowed to eat those sacred portions. The concept of sacrificial portions was understood even by the Babylonians as freewill donations were given by the Babylonians to the people of Israel and the priests to use as offering to God in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:16). The Babylonians, despite that they exiled the Israelites, knew that the Jews needed some gifts and offerings to appease Yahweh when they returned to the land of Israel.

These sacrificial portions were gotten during the offering periods. At the process of offering the sacrifices, the serving priest would eat the remaining in the Holy place in the Tent of Meeting (Lev. 6:26). He was not allowed to take it out of the Holy of Holies. It was stated that the breast belonged to Aaron and his sons (Lev. 7:31, 34). The right thigh of the offering was for the serving priest (Lev. 7:32, 34). The covering of the liver and the kidney belonged to the serving priest on the altar (Lev. 7:7, 14). The serving priest would keep the hide for himself (Lev. 7:8). In the case of grain offerings, every grain offering, which is baked or cooked or on a griddle, was for the priest (Lev. 7:9). It means that the priests were meant not to lack what to eat every day. It might also be that some of them

were expecting others to sin in order that such offerings would come in the days of hunger. Such a practice has been common among the pagan magicians or medicine man where many cast spells into the societies to cause sicknesses so that people would come to them for cure. But it might not be so with the priests of Yahweh, although one might not tell. It means that their livelihood depended on the sacrificial portions of the offerings.

It is clear no one was allowed to eat any sacred portion of the sacrifices outside a priest's family or a guest or hired worker (Lev. 22:10). A slave purchased or born slave may eat it (Lev. 22:11). A priest's daughter who married outside may eat it (Lev. 22:12). It was not meant for unauthorized persons.

Clear instructions are found in the wilderness wandering. The Lord's portion of the tithes was to be given to the Lord (Num. 18:28). Being that the priest represented God, the tribute of the plunder was given to Eleazar the priest (Num. 31:29). Priests ate unleavened bread at the altar in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:9). The shoulders, the jowls and the inner parts belonged to the priests when people offered a bull or sheep (Deut. 18:3). Money for sin and guilt offerings, that was not taken to the Temple, belonged to the priests (2 Kgs 12:16). Hence, it was the duty of the priests to collect all the money for the offerings (2 Kgs 12:4). There were also times where the priests would request for portions of the meat from the person sacrificing (1 Sam. 2:15).

In the post-exilic period, the Governor ordered that nobody should eat of the sacred food until there was a

ministering priest (Neh. 3:20). While such a position was in obedience to the word of the Lord, it cannot account for the wastage. What happened to the sacred food at that time? No one can tell since there was no service priest. Could it be that such became a waste when there were many poor people that still needed to be fed? However, we know Nehemiah fed many poor people among them (Neh. 5:17-18). In obedience, the people brought portions to the storerooms and for the priests (Neh. 12:30, 35, 41, 44; 13:5). However, food was gathered to the priest who was ministering with the Urim and Tummin (Ezr. 2:63).

In regard to the one-tenth, only a priest from the descendant of Aaron was to accompany and bring a tenth of the crops (Neh. 10:38). Nobody was allowed to collect the one-tenth of the crops besides the priests. Because some people became priests even when they were not descendants of Aaron, it was strictly the Aaronic clan that could engage in collecting the one-tenth.

9. Age and Gender for Priesthood

Priests were allowed to serve only at age 25 and above (Num. 8:24). The Old Testament priests entered the service of God at age 30. However, the priests and Levites 20 years of age and above were appointed to supervise the building of the house of the Lord in the days of Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:8). Jesus Himself followed the same pattern. Jesus knew He will become a High Priest of divine order and He started His ministry at age 30 (Lk 3:23).

It is clear that priests were purely masculine. We do not have evidence for female priests in the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. However, women were the embodiment of priesthood. They were the carriers of priesthood. The totality of the woman made up the totality of the priesthood. They were the midwives of the priesthood. Women were the priesthood themselves and gave birth to the priesthood. They defended and helped their husbands in the work of priesthood.

There were female leaders in ancient Israel and prophetesses but there was no reference of any woman who served as a priest. There was nothing like gender inequality or search for equality in the days of Levitical priesthood. Is it because Israel society was male dominated? What about our generation? Should we have female full-time priests? Is it wrong to have them serve as priests? What about the death and resurrection of Jesus which has initiated us into the pattern of divine priesthood and granted men and women the privilege to serve as priests as long as they all are genuine Christians?

Martha Kure clearly puts it when she argued the priesthood of the woman in the Bible. She stated that:

He rose from death and first appeared to a female; thereby established the priesthood of the female. He told her that we now have access and he is going to His father and her Father (see Mark 16, John 20:17-18). Before these incidents, the female had no reckoning. She was not

recognized by the world. She was only among the brethren, enjoying the Lord, but lost in the multitude. At the appointed time however, by the work of Christ beyond the cross, after Christ has appeared before the father and atoned for our sins and the heavens have accepted the sacrifices then the female was released into priesthood, because her priesthood is not in the outer courts. It took something beyond that to establish the priesthood of the woman.⁸⁰

Whether such words by Martha Kure are conducive to orthodox Christianity would be a matter of reconsidering the Bible and allowing it to reflect realities of life as the Holy Spirit takes charge of our worldview and mentality concerning biblical concepts. I believe the death and resurrection of Jesus has delivered men and women from sins and opened the gate for priesthood not in the order of Aaron which is male dominated and self-righteousness but in the pattern of Divine priesthood which is eternal, without gender barrier and gratifying the Spirit.

10. The Lord decrees to the Priests

There are many decrees to the priests in the Bible. The appointment of priests for the priesthood was an affair of the Lord. The Lord leads the priests away stripped (Job 12:19). That is to say that the concept of priesthood had been a

⁸⁰ Martha Kure, "Priesthood of Righteousness" *Prophetic Woman: Journal 3* (2009): 14.

common thing among other nations as argued before. Israel embraced it when the Lord introduced priesthood during the time of Moses. The Lord warned that priests should not force themselves to come up to Him or He will strike against them (Exo. 19:24).

Because of the dispensation of Law, to approach the Lord was a task that must be accomplished by the priests and Moses at that time. It was not easy to approach the Lord unlike the dispensation of grace today. During the time of kings, the glory of the Lord prevented even the priests from performing their duties in the Temple (1 Kgs 8:4, 6, 10, 11). But God promised to raise for Himself a faithful priest who will stand and fulfill the priestly task (1 Sam. 2:35), a promise fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Before the Babylonian exile, the Lord showed the priests where to cook the sin and guilt offerings and bake the grain offerings (Ezek. 46:20). Priests could still perform their duties since the Temple was visible. The priests have been faithful in their ministration before the Lord and He gave instructions for the division of the priests and how they will minister (1 Chron. 28:13).

The Lord promised to hear them when they cry to Him for help (Ezek. 44:15). The Lord will also be their possession (Ezek. 44:28). Because of the desecration by the Priests, the Lord admonished that the priests must bear the shame of their detestable practices (Ezek. 44:13) and the Lord will make the priests to be filled with drunkenness (Jer. 13:13).

Shortly before the exile, the Lord promised to satisfy the priests with abundance (Jer. 31:14). But during the exile, the Lord said He will punish prophets and priests for false proclamations (Jer. 23:33-34; 29:25). The Lord had spurred out kings and priests (Lam. 2:6) and so the Lord allowed the priests to be put to the sword (Ps. 78:64). He gave out His ultimate promises of abundance but He also wanted them to receive His grace with thanksgiving and a pure heart. And since they failed to do so, He punished them and sounded the warning to all men of all generations.

In the post-exilic period, God moved the hearts of priests to prepare and go up to Jerusalem to build the Temple (Ezra 1:5). They had to go to fulfil the mandate of the Lord concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. When they went to Jerusalem, there were oppositions during the rebuilding of the Temple. The Lord encouraged Zerubbabel and Joshua son of Jehozadak the High Priest to be strong and be courageous (Hag. 2:4). With this, the Lord admonished the priests because of how they have shown contempt to His name and for desecrating His name and the Temple even before the people (Mal. 2:1).

11. Priestly Appointments

Priests were appointed and ordained by the Lord. It has been the practice according to the command of the Lord to Moses. However, Jeroboam rejected the priests of the Lord to serve as priests (2 Chron. 11:14) and appointed priests from all sorts of people who were not Levites (1 Kgs 12:31; 1 Kgs 13:33). People who were not qualified for the priesthood and were

not even Levites were all appointed to serve in the priesthood. Jeroboam even ordered the offering of sacrifices on the altar in those shrines during a festival (1 Kgs 12:32). To have men appointing people as priests to serve was not a decision of the Lord yet men ventured into the affairs of God and taking His place to appoint. Today, to serve in the priesthood, the higher seal must be put by the Master Himself and the greatest ordination would be that of the Lord not of man. Many people are sorting after the ordination of man; God must be given His part and must be robbed of His glory here. Some churches today must ordain you before you can serve as priest. Whether at all the time God approves of such appointment and ordination is a thing of concern.

12. Priestly Divisions

Priests were divided to serve in the Temple. They had priestly rotation. A clear passage that recorded this is 1 Chronicles 24. This classification for duties was prescribed by Aaron as the Lord had commanded (1 Chron. 24:19). There were 24 divisions of the priesthood as they ministered unto and before the Lord. This division came during the time of Zadok who was the High Priest and King David (1 Chron. 24:1-3). The division was through lots.⁸¹ It probably was impartial. These were the classification for their service;

⁸¹ Lots have been a method to inquire of the Lord and decide the destiny of people. The case of Jonah and the mariners with those in the ship on the way to Tarshish (Jonah 1:7). The soldiers cast lots upon the garment of Jesus in fulfillment of prophecy (Jn 19:24; Ps 22:18). The disciples cast lots and elected Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts

- a. The first lot fell to Jehoiarib
- b. the second to Jedaiah
- c. the third to Harim
- d. the fourth to Seorim
- e. the fifth to Malkijah
- f. the sixth to Mijamin,
- g. the seventh to Hakkoz
- h. the eighth to Abijah
- i. the ninth to Jeshua
- j. the tenth to Shecaniah
- k. the eleventh to Eliashib
- l. the twelfth to Jakim
- m. the thirteenth to Huppah
- n. the fourteenth to Jeshebeab
- o. the fifteenth to Bilgah
- p. the sixteenth to Immer
- q. the seventeenth to Hezir
- r. the eighteenth to Happizzез
- s. the nineteenth to Pethahiah
- t. the twentieth to Jehezkel
- u. the twenty-first to Jakin
- v. the twenty-second to Gamul
- w. the twenty-third to Delaiah
- x. and the twenty-fourth to Maaziah (1 Chron. 24:7-18).

1:26). But whether politics is not involved in the subsequent preparation of the lots is a thing that should be avoided.

This division continued to function even after the exile to the Greco-Roman period. In the account of Luke in the Gospel according to Luke, the birth of John the Baptist echoed the priestly divisions. Zechariah, John's father, was a priest who belonged to the 8th division of Abijah and his wife Elizabeth (Lk 1:5). Zechariah was serving as a priest before God (Lk 1:8) on the day the angel appeared. This inaugurated angelic visit is what we call the annunciation in the consideration of the Gospels. This became a practice in the Bible times.

13. Priestly Land Allocation

It was not the intent of God for priests to have allocated lands because God was to be their possession. But during the Patriarchal period as the Israelites mingled with the Egyptians, priests had land allocated to them (Gen. 47:22). This land was not seized by Pharaoh (Gen. 47:26). They enjoyed the beauty and fertility as men of God. The Egyptians had priests and they knew the significance of the priests; those who represented the people before the God/gods and God/gods before the people.

With the journey to the Promised Land, the priests were not given a land as their inheritance after the conquest of Canaan. They had no land allocation (Deut. 18:1). Their lives centred on the offerings, the Tabernacle and the Temple. The released fields will become holy and dedicated to the Lord and will become the property of the priests (Lev. 27:21). But what was the quantity of this land? It was nothing compared to the ones shared to the other tribes of Israel. Only the land

of Hebron, a city of refuge, was given to the descendants of Aaron (Josh. 21:13). We see the Levites were allocated thirteen towns from Judah, Simeon and Benjamin (Josh. 21:4) but the priests had thirteenth towns of inheritance (Josh. 21:19). The chronicler stated that the priests were the first to settle in their own land (1 Chron. 9:2). That means they had their portions contrary to the view hold by many people that the priests were not given any inheritance.

Before the exile, the Lord gave the rooms facing the south to the priests who were in charge of the Temple (Ezek. 40:45). Despite that the priests were given rooms in the Temple to signify the sacredness of their work, they despised the ways of the Lord and were cast to exile.

When they returned from exile, the priests, the Levites and the singers and Temple servants all settled in their own land (Ezra 2:70). The priests too settled in their town in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:3, 20). They too returned and located their land and settled in Jerusalem with the people and serving the Lord in His holy sanctuary.

CHAPTER FOUR PRIESTLY-LEVITICAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A survey of the Bible reveals a number of duties and responsibilities ascribed to the priests and the Levites. These were sacred roles which they played in the development of the nation of Israel. Their services were connected to developing the moral and spiritual life of the people in connection with the prophets and the kings.

1. Duties of the Priests

A careful examination of the Mosaic Law makes the activities and duties of the priests very clear (Ex 29; Lev 1-7; 16). As ones who made atonement for Israel, the priests stood between sinners and God, symbolically, bringing the two together in reconciliation. This was to reconcile God with the people and the people with God.

a. The Priests were responsible for the Holiness of the Temple.

The anointing of Aaron and his sons with the same oil as the Tabernacle's furniture implied that the priesthood shared the holiness of the Tabernacle (Ex. 30:22-29; 40:9-11; Lev. 8:10; Num. 7:1). It followed that a non-priest must not come into contact with a priest while he was anointed with holy oil or was officiating in sacrificial duties. The holiness of the priesthood was equated with the holiness of the house of God itself. Both were put on the same level of sanctity and this implied that the sacrificial activities of the priesthood were of

the highest rank in the ancient Israelite forms of worship. The biblical sources frequently indicate that during the ordination ceremonies of the priests, and especially of the High Priest, they were not to leave the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Lev. 8:33) or go out of the *miqdaš*, “the sacred area” of the Tabernacle, for fear of contaminating themselves (Lev. 21:10-12).

In order to maintain this holiness, especially during the services, the priests were subject to special obligations and restrictions. A blemished priest could not approach the altar or enter the Temple in order to serve in a sacrificial duty (Lev. 21:17-23). He must make special preparations to avoid contamination of either place or act (Lev. 10:9; 22:18-25; Ex. 30:18-21; Ezek. 44:21). This preparation included such stipulations as not defiling himself by contact with the dead, except in cases of the closest of family ties (Lev. 21:1-4; Ezek. 44:25), as well as restrictions of marriage. Leviticus 21:7 prohibits a priest from marrying a harlot or a woman who had been defiled; it further stipulates that he could not marry a divorced woman.

b. They offered Prayers and Offerings.

During the days of Moses, he and Aaron were priests who were selected by the Lord to call on the Lord and He answered them (Ps. 99:6). The priests were to offer offerings on behalf of the people. The patterns of the various offerings are spelt out in Leviticus 1-7 and 16. Priests were known to be actively involved in the offering of sacrifices as atonement for the sins of the people and his sins in case he sinned. It was the duty of

the priests to offer prayers for the people through the various sacrifices.

a). Burnt Offering (Lev. 1; 6:8-13; 8:18-21; 16:24): It was a bull, ram, or a dove for the masses and all without blemish. It was meant for worship, consecration, commitment, and surrendering to God, and atoning for unconditional sin. The animal was to be burnt completely and it was a voluntary offering.

b). Grain or Meal Offering (Lev. 2; 6:14-23; Num. 28:5; 15:4): It was for worship and revealed dedication to God. It was not a blood sacrifice. No honey and yeast could be used. It was offered with burnt and fellowship offerings and drink offering. Incense went with it. The priest would eat the remaining parts and it was voluntary.

c). Fellowship or Peace Offering (Lev. 3; 7:11-34; 19:5-8): It could be any animal of cattle, sheep or goats, male or female without defect. The fats and the kidneys were burned. The priest would take the breast and the thigh. The purpose was for thanksgiving, communion, and fellowship and for vows. The meat was to be eaten in two days and it was a voluntary offering.

d). Sin Offering (Lev. 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30; 8:14-17; 16:3-22): This was for unconditional sins which were committed by the priests and the people, leader or a common man. For priest or congregation, a bull was offered and the blood was sprinkled inside the Tabernacle. For a leader,

a ram was offered and for a common man, a female goat or lamb, a dove or pigeon or a small amount of flour depending on wealth. It was for forgiveness of sins of the offender. The person placed his hands on the animal and it must be killed before the person. The priest would eat the meat except the fats and kidneys which were burned. It was compulsory for sinners.

e). Guilt or Trespass Offering (Lev. 5:14-6:7; 7:1-6): It was intentional and unintentional sin requiring restitution. The offender had to pay a 20% fine and make restitution. The offering was a lamb or ram plus fine money. It was for forgiveness. The priest would eat the meat and would burn the fats. It was compulsory when necessary.⁸²

Because blood was involved in the sacrifices, God forbade the Israelites to eat blood. In obedience to the Word of God, the Jews were always very careful never to eat blood. We can imagine how strange it sounded to them when Jesus told them to drink His blood (Jn 6:53-56).⁸³ The Jews observed this even after the death of Christ and expected the Gentiles to do the same for their righteousness to be complete (Acts 15:20, 29).

Also, it was a practice to select a High Priest every year on the Day of Atonement (*yom kippur*) among the priests to represent God, offer sacrifices and offer gifts (Heb. 5:1). The

⁸² For an elaborate study see Fuller, *The Pentateuch*, 90-94.

⁸³ See Fuller, *The Pentateuch*, 93.

High Priest was a representative of men before God and God before men.

The act of Phinehas, when he took a spear against Zimri and Cobzi of the Midianite, was sacrificial and it pleased the Lord. Phinehas was zealous and turned the anger of the Lord (Num. 25:7-11) from the people. This act was of highly priestly significance and caused God to make a covenant with him and the fellow priests. Phinehas discharged high priesthood duties which moved the mind and hands of God towards everlasting covenant with the Levites.

The priests were to offer prayers for themselves and on behalf of the people. During child birth, the mother was to bring offerings and the priest would make atonement for her (Lev. 12:8). The leading priest joined the leader and they went to Isaiah wearing sackcloth and mourning (2 Kgs 19:2). During the time of Ezekiel, priests took blood of the sin offerings and put on the doorpost (Ezek. 45:19). Priests were to offer sacrifices and prayer of the people to God for the Lord has promised to answer them when they cry to Him.

c. They ensure the Observance of Religious Feasts (Lev. 23; Num. 28-29; Exo. 23)

There were types of Sabbath and seven annual feasts or remembrances. The priests were to remind the people concerning the festivals and Jewish religious feasts and also to serve during those festivals.

A. Sabbaths

1. Sabbath: once a week they rested.

2. Sabbatical Year: every seventh year the people were to let the land rest and not cultivate their fields. God was to give them double next year.
3. Jubilee Year: every 50th year and the people were not to farm. Lands were returned to the original owners and slaves and debts were released and cancelled. The actual Jubilee is the 49th year.
4. New Moons: The words "New moon" appear 17 times in the Bible. 16 of such references are in the Old Testament. Only in Colossians 2:16 that Paul made reference to the New Moon celebration for it was purely a Jewish practice. Whether a Christian is to observe the New moon or full moon will depend on re-evaluation of scriptures. During this celebration, trumpets were sounded over the burnt offerings (Num. 10:10). It was a time of worship (Ezek. 46:1, 6). Before the exile, the Lord hated their New Moon offerings (Isa. 1:14; Hos. 5:7) because the people abandoned the ways of God and were interested in New Moon celebrations (cf. Col. 2:16). The returnees from the exile also observed the New Moon festivals and engaged in the presentation of the sacrifices (Ezra 3:5; Neh. 10:33). In the New Testament, the Jews in Colossae were exhorted not to allow anybody judge them and the manner in which the celebrated the New Moon.

B. Annual Observances

1. Passover: fourteenth day of the first month to remember redemption by the blood of the lamb in Egypt. We celebrate the death of Jesus (1 Cor. 5:7).
2. Unleavened Bread: fifteenth to twenty-first day of first month. It was to remember their exodus from Egypt. It was a symbol of the life without sin of the believer in the New Covenant (1 Cor. 15:20).
3. First fruits: sixteenth day of the first month. It was to show gratitude for the new harvest. It was the day of Christ's resurrection, *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep* (1 Cor. 15:20).
4. Pentecost (also called Weeks or Harvest): sixth day of third month. It was the full harvest festival. The Holy Spirit came on this day and there was bountiful harvest of souls to the Kingdom of God (Acts 2:1).
5. Trumpets: first day of seventh month. This was the civil New Year. Israel would meet in solemn assembly.
6. Day of Atonement: Tenth day of the seventh month. This was a day of fasting and prayers, repentance and atonement of sin which only the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies once a year. It was necessary for the High Priest to first offer sacrifices for his sins and undergo purification and consecration for national repentance and restitution. Affirming this, Warren W. Wiersbe stated that:

...the High Priest first had to sacrifice for himself before he could sacrifice for the people (Lev. 16). There were also daily sacrifices offered as a part of the Temple ritual; and, if a priest had sinned, he had to bring a sacrifice for his own cleansing (Lev. 4:3ff; Exo. 29:38-46). But Jesus Christ offered just one sacrifice for our sins and settled the matter forever.⁸⁴

7. Tabernacle (Booth or Ingathering): twenty-second day of seventh month. This was thanksgiving for the fruit harvest. They would remember their wanderings in the wilderness.

d. The Priests also blessed the People in the Name of God (Deut. 10:8; 21:5).

Such responsibility was an important part of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. The blessing of God was a guarantee of reward and a validation of God's concern for Israel if they were faithful to the covenantal requirements. The priests were to pronounce all forms of blessings to the people (Num. 6:23-27; Deut. 21:5).⁸⁵ In the days of the kings, the priests and the Levites stood to bless the people and the Lord heard their prayers from heaven (2 Chron. 30:27). Of course, it was for this purpose they were chosen to minister,

⁸⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Confident* (Colorado Spring: Cook International, 2008), 81-82.

⁸⁵ Fuller, 89.

pronounced blessings and to decide all cases of assaults and disputes (Deut. 21:5).

In contemporary and traditional African society, it is the duty of the priests of the shrines to bless the people. In the Church, the pastors, who are the representatives of God to the people, are to make some priestly proclamations to the people for there is power in the tongues. The power of life and death is in the tongue (Prov. 18:21). This is clearly underscored by the Pentecostal pastors and it has been a practice to give the people hope and informing them of their kingship upon the face of the earth and having dominion over the earth. This forms the major cardinals of Pentecostal theology.

In the mainstream churches, when a pastor preaches like the Pentecostal pastors, he is being considered to be swept by the wing of Pentecostalism. This clearly affects the younger pastors who mingled with the Pentecostal pastors and are facing challenges with their members who go for weekly or monthly programmes in some of the Pentecostal churches and appear on Sunday morning for service in the mainstream churches. It is a good practice among the Pentecostals; to proclaim blessings and give the congregation hope in the midst of despair. There is a need for adoption by the mainstream pastors to restore the hope which Satan has stolen from the members. Pastors should learn to give members hope and bless them at all times for it is their duty to ensure that the members live in hope.

e. They had a Unique Function of Carrying the Ark of the Covenant.

The priests were responsible for carrying the Ark of the Lord (Deut. 10:8; 31:9, 25). During the conquest, the priests were the leading part of the Ark procession that led the people to victory (Josh. 3:3-17; 4:3, 9; 8:33). The priests were the ones carrying the Ark of the Covenant in the days of battles (Deut. 31:9; Josh. 4:18; Josh. 6:8; 8:33) and the Ark represented the power and presence of the Lord and it served as a powerful weapon of spiritual and physical warfare⁸⁶ against the enemies during Israel's wars. For example, Ahijah was with the Ark of God and it confused the Philistines camp (1 Sam. 14:20). The priests would always be at the fore-front during battle yet they were the last to die, should Israel would be captured. The Ark gave the people courage to concentrate in the battle believing that the Lord was in their midst and would win the battle for them.

f. The Priests were involved in the Treatment and Assessment of Impurity.

In the ancient Near Eastern world, disease was often viewed as an external and tangible embodiment of an impure spirit. The response to the presence of this impurity was both to wait until it left the body and to direct its departure through

⁸⁶ Among the Pentecostals particularly of the prophetic wing, there are many weapons for spiritual warfare. The stones, the wind, the shrubs, the vegetation, the soil, the rocks, the waters, the sun, the stars, the moon are all weapons used by the Pentecostals to mobilize the heavens and to invoke God to act and destroy wickedness on the face of the earth.

specific acts of purification. The priests dealt with impurities and diseases as a regular part of their profession, for the continued presence of impurity would eventually undermine their sacrificial system and the status of their holiness as representatives of the people. For example, Deuteronomy 24:8 admonishes the people to follow carefully the instructions of the priests in the case of leprosy (cf. Ezek. 44:23). This kind of activity eventually grew into a highly sophisticated system of judging and anticipating impurities of animals and carcasses, bodily disorders, etc., as well as impurity of corpses (Lev. 11; 15; Num. 19).

Aaron or his son, who was a priest, was to examine the skin diseases (Lev. 13:2, 3). After the examination, they would pronounce the person ceremonial clean (Lev. 13:3). They would examine the infections (Lev. 13:17, 20, 25, 26, 30, 36, 39, 55) and declare the person clean or not. Even houses, the priest would examine people's houses though the houses must be emptied (Lev. 14:36). The priest would put the person outside for seven days and re-examine him (Lev. 13:6). People must reappear before the priest when the rashes spread (Lev. 13:7).

When a member falls into sin, the pastor is to ensure that such a member is redeemed from that sin. It is within this that pastors administer Church discipline to fallen members⁸⁷ and

⁸⁷ Paul urged that such a person should undergo Church discipline –for the sake of the offender, the Church and for the sake of the society. For a discourse on Church discipline see Pandang Yamsat, *Church*

ensure that members understand and cooperate with the discipline for God to have mercy over their souls. They are to suspend and accept the person back to fellowship when there is sign of repentance and change. Pastors in the African Church should be faithful in exerting Church discipline without favouritism or ethnic differences. The discipline must not be on every kind of sin but sin which has been made public and affects the body of Christ directly. It must not be adultery alone which results to pregnancy as it is usually the case.

g. They judged difficult Cases.

The priests were to judge difficult cases such as accusation of adultery (Num. 5:11-13), unsolved murder (Deut. 21:5), and make final decisions on cases referred to them by the lower courts (Deut. 17:8-9). Most of them were judges who could stand for justice in the land.

The same role is bestowed on pastors these days. In terms of cases, the pastors have been enemies to the legal advocates in the judiciaries most times. The trained advocate is being paid for his defence in the court. Members these days do not like to carry cases of their disputes to the courts for they end up spending huge amount of money in search for justice. Pastors are now settling disputes among Christians as exhorted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1-5. Cases among

Discipline in the New Testament (Bukuru: TCNN Publications, 1997), 1-35.

Christians should be settled in the churches rather than in the courts.

h. They were Oracles to the People.

The priestly activities also included being oracles and serving and giving of oracles for a variety of purposes; from military advice to judging and instructing the people on matters of tribal customs and behaviour (Judg. 18:5; 1 Sam. 14:18, 41; 22:15; 23:16). The priests became experts on advising the people on God's will as expressed in Israelite customs and eventually expressed in the Torah.

The priestly oracle was connected to interpretation of the customs and laws given to the people (Deut. 17:11; 33:8, 10). In Deuteronomy 33:8-11, the sacrificial ministry of the priesthood is mentioned after teaching of the Law had been mentioned. Of course, we see the prophets to have accused the priests of neglecting their duties of teaching the people the Law and helping them to practice what it said (Hos. 4:4-10; cf. Mic. 3:11; Zeph. 3:4; Jer. 2:8; Ezek. 7:26); hence, the priests were not practicing the Law themselves. We see the prophets and priests to have stood against foreign ideological inclusion into the life-style of Israel, and the priests were frequently involved as judges of acceptable beliefs and practices (Deut. 17:8-13; 24:8; Lev. 10:10; 13). Their function as oracle givers eventually gave way and was replaced by that of a teacher and a judge.

i. They served as Kings' Assistants

In the early stages of Hebrew history, the priest probably functioned as king's assistant in the sacrificial system with the king taking a fairly active and predominant role (2 Sam. 6:14; 1 Kings 8; 9:25; 2 Kings 12:5,9; 16:14; 2 Chron. 4:1). Uriaah the priest obeyed King Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:16). The priest took over the control of the Temples as the concerns of the king multiplied and became more diversified. The priests engaged in the management of the Temple buildings and organizing of sacrificial systems. The priests remained and continued to influence the life of Israel in a very important way. Most of them served in the political decisions of the nation of Israel.

j. They were to Teach the Law to the People (Lev. 10:10-11).

The whole Bible reveals that the priests were the keepers and custodian of the Law until the Greco-Roman period when the Jewish sects (Pharisees and Sadducees) came up. This duty was adopted by the Pharisees up to the time of Jesus. The priests had copies of the Scroll which the king came and made a copy out of that copy (Deut. 17:8). During the wars with Assyria, it was necessary that someone go purposefully to teach the people the requirements of God in the Law in Samaria (2 Kgs 17:27). One priest also returned to Bethel to teach them how to worship the Lord (2 Kgs 17:28) and to fulfil the mandate of God as it was in the Law.

Before and during the exile, the priests were responsible for teaching the people. They were to teach the elites and common people on how to distinguish between clean and unclean (Ezek. 44:23), right and wrong. They were to decide disputes in accordance to God's ordinance, to keep the laws

and decrees of God for appointed feasts and keep the Sabbath (Ezek. 44:24).

Of course, the priests should be asked what the Law says concerning consecrated meat and defilement (Hag. 2:11, 12). Priests are to be asked concerning fasting (Zech. 7:3-5). They were supposed to be aware of the laws concerning life situations and be willing to relate them with the people for the fear of God. A good example is when Ezra returned from exile, the priests, the head of families and the Levites gathered to hear the Word of the Lord through Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law (Neh. 7:73).

The pastors have teaching responsibility attached to their shepherding task. They are to teach the people all that the Lord has commanded them (Matt. 28:20). They were to concentrate on teaching and the ministry of the Word as the apostles of old (Acts 6:4). An edified Church is a teachable Church. It is the duty of the pastors to teach the members the truth and all matters of godliness. The African Church is highly in need of accurate and divine counsel of God since teaching results to edification.⁸⁸

k. They Represented God in all Matters of Godliness.

The priests were representative of God to the people and also stand for the people before God. For that reason, they were to ensure godliness in the assembly of Israel. Priests were expected to keep requirements or they will die of being guilty to the laws (Lev. 22:9). They were to stand for truth and

⁸⁸ Tambiyi, *The African Church Under Fire*, 372-374.

represent God when a person gave a house for the Lord as a vow. The value of the house offered unto the Lord was to be decided by the priests (Lev. 27:12) in ancient Israel.

The most remarkable in the history of the priesthood is the place an unknown priest played concerning the anger of the Lord over the sin of the Israelites. Phinehas took a spear against Zimri and Cobzi of Midian. He was zealous and turned the anger of the Lord (Num. 25:7-11). Because of this, God made a covenant of peace with him and his descendants. Priests represented God to the people (Deut. 19:17).

Hophni and Phinehas were priests of the Lord at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3). Phinehas the priest was sent as representatives over land issues (Josh. 22:12, 31, 32). Despite that, the priests could not enter the Temple because the glory of the Lord filled it (2 Chron. 5:11; 7:2). The priest has been a messenger of the Lord almighty (Mal. 2:7). They stood for the Lord before the people and for the people before the Lord; a task pastors are given today.

1. The Priests were involved in the Leadership of Israel

Moses and Eleazar the priest took census of Israel (Num. 26:1, 3, 63). It is stated that priests contributed to the leadership of Moses (Num. 26:2, 19, 21, 22). Political reports would always come to the priests (2 Sam. 17:15; 19:11). The priests may have become state officials during the reigns of David and Solomon. The chronicler indicated that the Levites enjoyed a high status under David, even in the administration of the government (1 Chron. 23-27).

It is possible that the Levites were among those who helped the transfer of the monarchy to David at Hebron (1 Chron. 12:27). Their loyalty was rewarded when the cult itself was transformed into an instrument of the state at the establishment of Jerusalem as the political and religious centre of David's empire. The Levitical loyalty to the kings of the dynasty of David continued until the destruction of the Temple in 587 B.C. (2 Chron. 23:2-9, 18; 24:5-15). Some of the sources indicate that there was a migration of the Levites from the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Judah after the division of the old empire of David and Solomon (1 Kings 12:31; 13:33; cf. 2 Chron. 11:13-17; 13:9-12).

Once the Temple was built at Jerusalem, the Levites functioned as overseers in the house of the Lord (1 Chron. 23:4). Priest Ahimelech and his father's family, priests at Nob, were called by the king (1 Sam. 22:11). Priest Ahimelech got involved in David's leadership (1 Sam. 22:11). David ordered Abiathar to bring the Ephod (1 Sam. 23:9; 30:7). Ira the Jairite was David's priest (2 Sam. 20:26). Priests were choristers, musicians, gatekeepers, judges, craftsmen for the Temple, supervisors of chambers and courts, overseers of the Temple treasuries and officers in charge of the royal service (1 Chron. 9:22,26; 23:2-4, 28).

During the reign of Jehoshaphat the Levites were teachers of the Torah and judges in the towns of Judah, including Jerusalem (2 Chron. 19:8, 11). It is possible that in the Temple at Jerusalem the lines of demarcation between priests and Levites were not always clearly preserved; some passages

indicate that the Levites ministered alongside the priests (1 Chron. 6:13; 23:27-32). Possibly the Levitical family had a ranking system at that time.

m. They could inquire of the Lord.

Another duty of the priests was to inquire from the Lord concerning the society. They worked with the Urim and Thummin (Num. 27:19) in search for the mind of God to the people. The priests proclaimed the ways of the Lord to the people (Num. 31:21). Priests inquired of the Lord in the days of Samuel (1 Sam. 14:36).

During the post-exilic period, the practice of the priests inquiring of the Urim and Thummin continued.⁸⁹ They inquired the face of the Lord over issues (Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65). They were the people who were destined alongside the prophets to reveal the mind of God to the people. It is clear

⁸⁹ The interpretation of the Urim and Thummin has been a challenge over the years in biblical studies. From biblical references, we know they were kept in the breastplate, or ephod, of the garments of the High Priest (Exo. 28:6-30) and were used to discern God's will in times of uncertainty (Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 14:41-42; 23:9-12). One could get a yes, no, or neither. They were entrusted to the tribe of Levi (Deut. 33:8). After the time of David, there is evidence that they were used and people look to asking prophets or seers to discern the will of God for them. The only other mention is in this verse and Nehemiah 7:65 which revealed that there was no priest who was qualified to use them. It is possible they were some two flat stones, sticks or dice with one side white, the other black; so that, when thrown, if they handed both sides black the answer was no, both sides white the answer was yes and one displaying white and the other black would mean there was no specific answer.

that God has bestowed His mind to the hands of our ministers and pastors today. They are responsible for telling the people the mind of God. They are supposed to wait on God for revelation for the people in the Church today.

n. They played Supervisory Roles.

Most of the priests were engaged in supervising people for certain acts. Samuel ministered before the Lord under the supervision of Eli (1 Sam. 2:11). Jehoiada the priest supervised the people (2 Kgs 11:9-15). There were priests who were heads of some mini-priesthoods in those days particularly as we have chief priests in plural all through the Bible predominantly in the Gospels during the time of Jesus. They were to supervise the other priests in the service.

o. They gave Direction to the People of God.

Another work of the priests was to direct people in the right way of the Lord and to lead the people in a godly direction. During the building of the Tabernacle, Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest, directed the work on the Tabernacle (Exo.39:41). Ithamar ensured that the work was done appropriately. He also directed the clans of the Gerhonite and Merarite (Num. 4:28; 7:8).

It was the priest that used to give instructions during battles. The priest will address the army concerning the mind of God before battle (Deut. 20:2). He shall encourage the people not to be afraid but be courageous. He was to remove fear among them and caused their hearts to depend on the Lord. I wish our pastors would begin to engage in such a role

during battles with our religious adversaries in this twenty-first century. An example of a faithful Nigerian and a “High Priest” who served in the Nigerian Army was late Col. Hope Yakubu (late Brigadier General, the promotion came shortly during the period of missing in action). Brigadier General Yakubu was one of the army leaders who led the battle against Boko Haram in Michika, Adamawa State, Nigeria in the later part of 2014. It was reported that before the battle, the soldiers were afraid but because it was a pastor (Brigadier General Yakubu) who was leading, they gathered courage and face the enemies in battle. Even when he was shot, he moved ahead and gave courage to the boys.⁹⁰

However, because of anger, some of the pastors who have become victims of religious crisis, forget their roles and move forward to taking an offensive dimension rather than playing their priestly role. Loving our enemies would make a narrow way to become a high way as it changed the hearts of many including the son of Hamas’ leader, Mosab Hassan Yousef.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Col. Hope Yakubu loved the Lord with his family. His name cannot be forgotten like that for he was a dual soldier (for the military and the African Church). His testimony remains in the nation as being a hero of the nation (Nigeria) and for being a faithful patriot of this nation. We need more like him in this twenty-first century.

⁹¹ See Mosab Hassan Yousef, *The Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices* (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 122.

p. Their primary function was to offer sacrifices on the altars in the Temples.

This included the sprinkling of blood and burning portions of sacrifices (Lev. 1). Although this form of religious expression may be difficult for the modern person to comprehend, it should be recognized as an essential part of religious life in the ancient world particularly among Israel. The offerings and sacrifices were to be offered on the altars of the Lord in the Temple. I have discussed much about the offering of sacrifices since the beginning of this chapter.

The priests were primarily responsible for burning of sacrifices in the Temple for the Lord (Lev. 4:10). They must not desecrate the sacred offerings the Israelites would bring before the Lord (Lev. 22:15). The priest was to present wave offering to the Lord (Lev. 23:10, 11, 20) and to burn them before the Lord (Lev. 7:5).

He would take the blood and sprinkle it on the horns of the altar before the Lord (Lev. 4:10, 25; 4:30, 31, 34, 35; 5:6). The priests performed daily duties in the outer room (Heb. 9:6). During grain offering and when the priest committed an offense, he was to burn it completely (Lev. 6:23). A year old lamb and a young pigeon or dove were for sin offering (Lev. 12:7). They should put on sackclothes and wail and spend the night before the Lord.

In the days of Uzziah, Uzziah had some people burned offering before the Lord but Azariah the priest confronted them for engaging in such a priestly task (2 Chron. 26:18). During first-fruits, the best of first-fruits and all special

offerings belonged to the priests (Ezek. 44:30). However, there were others who burnt incense to other gods and the Lord was angry with them as inquired from prophetess Huldah (2 Kgs 22:16-17).

q. Priests could Pass Verdict according to the Lord.

There were places the Lord will choose for the people as courts when they get into the land. The priests were to serve as judges in the land (Deut. 17:9). Let me say that the duty of the judges as witnessed in the book of Judges could have been a task meant for the priesthood but the priesthood lost it and engaged in search for socio-economic stability as witnessed in our generation.

r. Priest commissioned leaders.

The office of the priest and that of the prophet were common offices in the Old Testament. Both offices engaged in anointing and commissioning people –kings and leaders for the service of the Lord among the people. For example, Eleazar the priest commissioned Joshua as Moses' successor as the Lord commanded (Num. 17:22-23). During the monarchs, Zadok and Nathan anointed Solomon and set him as king (1 Kgs 1:32-34). This was before the rebuilding of the Temple when Israel was worshipping God in the Tabernacle of the Lord. When the Israelites returned from exile, Ezra confronted the people and appointed some to investigate the cases (Ezr. 10:10, 16). Although prophets could also pour oil and commissioned people for positions, it was predominantly a priestly affair.

s. They served as Witnesses.

There were priests who served as witnesses on various occasions. Since they were involved in matters that pertained to the society, the priests became eyewitnesses to the nobles' promise, in the days of Nehemiah during the post-exilic period, not to exploit the people (Neh. 5:12). This happened during the reform on the poor which witnessed liberation of the oppressed in the society after the exile.

t. They presented People to the Lord.

Priests were known to present people before the Lord (Num. 5:15-30). The priests and Levites and the rest celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy (Ezra 6:16). They presented the house before the Lord and dedicated it joyfully to the Lord for glorious use.

u. They led the army.

Although priestly leading and service in the military was indirect, Benaiah son of Jehoiada served as a commander of the third army for the third month (1 Chron. 27:5). He participated in leading the army for battle not just praying for them to succeed or carrying the Ark to help them to succeed in the battle. He engaged in the battle and led an army for the glory of the name of the Lord.

2. Levitical Duties and Responsibilities

A drastic and clear-cut distinction was made between the sphere of the sacred and the rest of the community. The realm of the sacred grew stronger as one proceeded through the inside of the Tabernacle, until one reached the area that

was taboo even for the priests themselves, the Holy of Holies. The holiness of the area of sacrifice was conceived as being tangible, a physical entity that could be sensorially perceived. The “realm of contact with God” (the sacrificial places) had limited access and demanded skilled entrance. Only one group of people was permitted, by the grace and appointment of God, to come into contact with the holy areas –the priests and the Levites. The Levites had the following duties;

- a. They were to assist the priests (Num. 1:50; 3:6, 8; 16:9; 1 Chron. 23:28; Ezra 3:8) and to prepare the cereal offerings (1 Chron. 23:28-32). The Levites were to assist the priests in the service (2 Chron. 8:14).
- b. The Levites had duties connected with the service in the Tabernacle (Num. 3-4).
- c. They were to take care of the courts and the chambers of the sanctuary.
- d. Later, the Levites were apparently involved in interpreting the Law and thus functioned as teachers (2 Chron. 17:7-9; 35:3; Neh. 8:7, 9).
- e. The Levites were explicitly permitted to go near the sacred furniture, and this special privilege distinguished them from ordinary Israelites (Num. 8:19; 16:9; 18:22). By virtue of this responsibility, they were charged with the “work” of the tent of meeting (the Tabernacle) that included its dismantling, transportation, and reassembling at a new site (Num. 1:48-54; 4:3-15; 18:6). This was a requirement of all

Levites between the ages of twenty-five and fifty (Lev. 8:24-26).

- f. In regard to the accessibility to the sacred furniture, the Levites were allowed to approach the furniture only when it was covered (Num. 18:3).
- g. The Levites were inducted into their special role through a series of ceremonies that included lustrations, shaving the body, sacrifice, the laying on of hands, and a solemn presentation to God (Num. 8:5-13). They were to be supported by the tithes of the people (Lev. 27:32; Num. 18:21, 24), but a tenth of this tithe was to be given to the priests (Num. 18:26-28).
- h. Since priests had servants (1 Sam. 2:14-15), it could be the Levites. Caiaphas the High Priest had a servant (Matt. 26:51; Mk. 14:47). The High Priest had servant girls (Mk 14:66).
- i. The Levites kept watch at the door of the Temple (2 Chron. 23:4). Some of them were door watchers; ensuring the security of the Temple.
- j. Among the exiles, there were Levites who returned to contribute their quota in the building of the Temple in Israel in the days of Zerubbabel (Ezra 7:7, 13).
- k. The priests were the Levites (Deut. 17:9, 18; 18:1).

CHAPTER FIVE

PRIESTLY ERRORS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

1. Misunderstood Priestly Roles.

There has been a wrong perception of the priesthood particularly bridging the gap between the Law and grace. It happened because the priests and Levites of Jerusalem did not understand the personality of John the Baptist and Jesus (Jn 1:19). They miss-viewed the priesthood of Jesus and failed to consider its significance above the Levitical priesthood which they have been familiar with throughout generations.

The priests miss-viewed the mission of Jesus and were against Him in all matters. I do not consider such priestly acts to be intentional errors or mistakes since such acts were triggered by misunderstanding of duties in view of the coming and nature of Christ's coming and claims. I see them as misunderstandings. The priesthood was supposed to be familiar with the whole coming and mission of Christ but it failed in sincerity to consider the ideals of the Law and the spiritual message of the Law and the prophets rather than their Judaistic tendencies.

In the New Testament, the priests and the teachers of the Law were the ones who revealed the messianic birth place (Matt. 2:3-6). They recognized the humbleness of its reality. But when the fulfilment of such reality came, they were blind and deaf and could not discern the ideals of the Law and the prophets as fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus.

There were companies of chief priests before the destruction of the Temple. They were custodian of the law (Matt. 2:4). Jesus said the priests desecrated the Sabbath and remained innocent (Matt. 12:5). He stated that the chief priests and teachers of the Law will kill Him (Matt. 16:21; 20:18; Lk 9:22).

Despite that Jesus was against their practices, He recognized and respected them in matters of holiness when He asked the man to go show himself to the priests for examination (Lk 17:14). The chief priests were not satisfied with Him in most cases. For instance, as stated before, when Children were shouting the name of Jesus, the chief priests became indignant at Jesus (Matt. 21:23; Jn 11:47).

They were the same people who questioned Jesus' teaching authority (Matt. 21:23; Lk 20:1-2; Jn 18:19). They recognized Jesus was not a Levite but from Judah. This was a challenge of teaching qualifications in the Temple. Why would Jesus be teaching in the Temple when He was not a priest by descent?

The chief priests and elders began to plan to execute Jesus because the crowd were amazed at his teachings (Mk 11:18). Jesus taught with authority more than them in the Temple. He became the true priest of the Temple; though a descendant of David and not from the priestly lineage. It was an overthrow in the Temple leadership. No wonder they fought Him until they killed Him. They gave Judas Iscariot money for him to betray Jesus (Matt. 26:14; Mk 14:10; Lk 22:4). They declared Jesus a commodity and publicized Him

until He was killed (Jn 11:57). They planned and murdered Lazarus to discredit the works of Jesus (Jn 12:10).

When the time came for the arrest, they sent troop to arrest Jesus (Matt. 26:47; Mk 14:43; Lk 22:52; Jn 7:32; 18:3). Jesus was tortured in the courtroom of Caiaphas who was the High Priest of that year (Matt. 26:58; Mk 14:54; Lk 22:50). Jesus was sent to the High Priest (Jn 18:24). Jesus was struck in order to dignify the High Priest than the Son of God (Jn 18:22). It was the High Priest who questioned Jesus in the secret (Matt. 26:62; Mk 14:60) rather than the prosecutors in the public. He needed Jesus to break the law of oath (Matt. 26:63). Even when Jesus answered, the High Priest tore his clothe for he considered Jesus to be blasphemous (Matt. 26:65; Mk 14:63).

They looked for false evidence against Jesus that they will put Him to death (Matt. 26:59; Mk 11:18; 14:1, 55; Lk 19:47). The High Priest asked Jesus whether he is the Son of God, the Son of the Blessed One (Mk14:61). They took decision to put Jesus to death in the morning (Matt. 27:1; Mk 15:1; Lk 22:66). They accused Jesus of many things (Mk 15:3; Lk 23:10).

They rejected Jesus as King (Jn 19:15). They protested that Pilate should not write that Jesus is the king of the Jews but that He claimed to be King of the Jews (Jn 19:15). Even when Jesus was said to be innocent (Lk. 23:4), they protested. They handed over Jesus to be crucified and killed (Jn 19:6; Lk 24:20). This was out of envy (Mk 15:10). They persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas to be released rather than Jesus in

order to put an end to the ministry of Jesus (Matt. 27:20; Mk 15:11).

We see Judas to have returned the money to them (Matt. 27:3). In those days, confession was done to the priests. Judas returned the money and confessed before them. He didn't understand the proper concept of confession to God; hence, that was what he was familiar with. The priests were wanting in their teachings to the people in the Temple. They failed in their doctrine of confession to have caused Judas to take that direction. These were the ones who rejected the returned money not to get mixed up with the treasury since it was blood money (Matt. 27:12).

After the crucifixion of Jesus, the chief priests and elders mocked Jesus (Matt. 27:41; Mk 15:31). They went to instigate Pilate (Matt. 27:62). Some of the guards reported to the chief priests and elders about the events at the tomb (Matt. 28:11). They devised a way and bribed the guards to lie against the resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 28:12) which is the greatest miracle ever in the history of the world. Of all heads of religions, none has resurrected but Jesus did and He is still alive.

One can say that it is the priesthood that killed Jesus. The priesthood was behind every activity that resulted to the death of Jesus. The death of Jesus triggered many problems as Jesus had told the disciples concerning their situation in the world since they did not belong to the world (Jn 15:18-25). It was not easy facing the authorities after the resurrection of Jesus. The enmity between Jesus and the priests continued even after His

death. The priests and the captains of the Temple came up against Peter and John (Acts 4:1). Annas the High Priest and others met to decide Peter and John's case (Acts 4:6). They forbade the disciples from preaching the gospel (Acts 4:23). The High Priest and the members were filled with jealousy and arrested the apostles and imprisoned them (Acts 5:17). The High Priest questioned the apostles (Acts 5:27). It was Annas the High Priest who also asked Stephen whether the charges were true (Acts 7:1).

Annas the High Priest was the one who issued Saul a letter to the synagogues in Damascus to persecute the Christians (Acts 9:1, 14; 22:5; 26:12). He put many Christians to death (Acts 26:10). The priests were the same people who persecuted Paul (Acts 22:30). Some men reported to the chief priests and elders that they have taken an oath not to eat until Paul was put to death (Acts 23:14).

Despite these, the chief priests and elders were puzzled and wondered what have come up at the death of Ananias and Saphira his wife (Acts 5:24). A large number of priests became Christians as a result of the gospel message (Acts 6:7).

2. Disobedience and Failure to Teach the Truth.

- a. Aaron collaborated with the people and they built the Golden Calf (Exo. 32:1-33:6). This led to the priestly covenant after Moses had returned from the mountain. Aaron and Moses disobeyed the Lord by striking the rock for water to come forth (Num. 20).
- b. Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10) offered unauthorized fire before the Lord against the command of the Lord. The

Lord consumed them by His anger through His fire and they died.

Most of them failed to teach the truth of the message of God and have neglected the truth.

- a. The laxity of Eleazar (Num. 25). The derailment of the people was lack of proper teaching. Eleazar was to teach but allowed Balaam to succeed in planting seed of disobedience in the people (Rev. 2:14; Josh. 13:22). He failed to teach the people the ways of God that enabled Balaam to implant an evil seed in the minds of the people.
- b. The priests profaned the sanctuary and do violence to the Law (Zeph. 3:4). The priests were to be the custodian of the Law but they were the ones who profaned it. It is echoed in the prophecy of Ezekiel, “Her priests do violence to my Law and profane my holy things” (Ezek. 22:26).
- c. They did not distinguish between the holy and the common things (Ezek. 22:26).
- d. They taught that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean (Ezek. 22:26).
- e. They shut their eyes to the keeping of the Sabbaths so that the Lord is profaned among them (Ezek. 22:26).

For Jesus to be teaching with power would have been a thing of joy to them and to encourage Him in the ministry but they challenged Jesus’ authority to discredit Him before the people. They were against the things of God.

3. Priesthood as means of Survival.

The priesthood became a means of survival predominantly during the reign of the Judges when the Israelites settled in the Promised Land.

- a. Micah installed the Levite as his priest in his house (Jdg. 17:5). He was to be paying him. This was house priesthood. He felt secured because of the priest or Levite (Jdg. 17:13). This man was hired by Micah to serve as a priest (Jdg. 18:4). There were many priests who were looking for priestly jobs, moving in the streets and cities in search for opportunities. The priest wished them well over their journey (Jdg. 18:6). He challenged the Danites to protect his job (Jdg. 18:17-18). But later he was persuaded to work for a clan rather than an individual (18:19). This was some sort of higher calling and opportunity to serve a clan which will reward him trice rather than what Micah was paying him.
- b. People wanted to become priests and were ordained by Jeroboam (1 Kgs 13:33). Some people were appointed to serve as priests and they agreed to serve the people in their shrines (2 Kgs 17:32)
- c. The prophets emphasized this point when they wrote that the priests taught for a price (Mic. 3:11). The priests are greedy for gain (Jer. 8:10) and priests perished for searching for food (Lam. 1:19).

This is the attitude among many pastors today in the Church. We are concerned about what we will eat, wear and

to lay our heads. Jesus urges that we should seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, then these things will be added unto us (Matt. 6:33). We have abandoned the ways of God and are chasing the wind of materialism. There is need to return to the Lord.

4. Fear of Men rather than God and Despised the Name of God.

Some of the priest were afraid of men rather God who will destroy both the body and the soul. Priest Ahimelech trembled before David (1 Sam. 21:1) and gave the sword of Goliath to David (1 Sam. 21:9). The Bible says God has not given us the spirit of fear but of a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Tim. 1:9).

Priests showed contempt to the name of the Lord (Mal. 1:6). They defiled the altar of the Lord by offering detestable and blemish sacrifices and food on the altar. The Lord was not pleased with them and promised not to accept any offering from them. They caused many to stumble and violated the covenant of Levi (Mal. 2:8-9). They did not respect and fear the name of the Lord among the people.

5. Insubordination and slander.

- a. Aaron and Miriam (Num. 12) complained and slandered Moses (a prophet) because he married a Cushite woman. This was an African woman from the sub-Sahara, possibly an Egyptian woman. They brought accusation against Moses and the Lord was angry with them and caused leprosy to attack them.

- b. The Korahites (Num. 16:1-11) and others were insolent towards Moses and rose against him. They mobilized others and came against Moses and Aaron. It was because of this that the ground opened and swallowed them for the Lord was against them also; 250 men were killed (Num. 11:31, 35).

6. Priestly Conspiracy and Ordered Persecution.

Amaziah the priest of Bethel conspired against Amos the prophet (Amos 7:10). This conspiracy was because of the food Amaziah was earning at the king's table at Bethel. Shortly before the exile, the prophets and priests were telling the people that it was well when the Lord through Jeremiah was declaring disaster to the land. The priests and the prophets seized Jeremiah that he must die (Jer. 26:8, 11, 16).

Pashhur son of Imer, the chief officer in the Temple of the Lord heard the prophet and priest Jeremiah declaring the mind of God. He mobilized people and had Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the Temple (Jer. 18:18; 20:1). The Temple, which was the house of God, became a cell or jail which they used to imprison men of God; attempting to imprison God Himself and His word if it were possible. The Temple became a prison where the priests have used to have inmates instead of accomplishing the will of God and serving God in worship.

Annas the High Priest issued Saul a letter to the synagogues in Damascus for persecution (Acts 9:1). Annas authorized the killing and persecution of Christians ("fellow priests") in those days. This persecution helped triggered the

growth of the Church as expected by Jesus in Acts 1:8. It should be noted that when believers reject Acts 1:8, the Lord would send Acts 8:1. We need to be obedient to the will of God.

7. Levites Despised.

Before the exile, the Levites have been assistants to the priests. But during the exile and the return to Jerusalem under Ezra, it was unfortunate that among those who returned, there were no Levites to assist with the work in the Temple (Ezra 8:15). But didn't they know that there were no Levites (Temple assistants) among the people who were set to return? It is clear that the Levites were despised even by Ezra the scribe, priest and teachers of the Law and the rest of the community. This was a major oversight in the priesthood. As Christians in the body, we are all important as we work differently to edify the body of Christ.

8. Failed to Rely on God and Despised the Glory of the Priesthood.

Some priests refused to rely on God. Most of them relied on their strength and abilities. They thought they do not need God and can defend themselves. They rejected the ways of God and followed their ways as many of us today are in the habit of doing.

1. The priests ignored the Law and the Lord rejected them (Hos. 4:6).
2. The priests failed to ask from the Lord and to know God through the Law (Jer. 2:8).

3. The priests and the prophets disgraced the house of the Lord (Jer. 2:26).
4. The priests ruled with their own authority (Jer. 5:31).
5. Jeremiah convinced the priests and the people according to the Lord not to listen to the false prophets but they refused (Jer. 27:16).
6. Death prevented many of those priests to continue in the office because they did not depend on God (Heb. 7:23).

The glory of the priesthood was in the aspect of holiness and sound teaching of the Law. However, the priests ignored the Law and the Lord rejected them (Hos. 4:6). The priests and the Israelites have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread out at Tabor (Hos. 5:1). Like people, like priests. The Lord promised to punish and repay them for their wicked ways (Hos. 4:9).

Many of them exchanged their glory with something disgraceful. They sinned as they increased in number (Ezek. 4:9). Romans 1:18-32 summarizes the wickedness of men. It would have been better for them to remain in their current number. Numerical growth was a challenge. It was a challenge in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:1-8). Within this, the Lord does not show them honour anymore (Lam. 4:16). During the return from exile, it is recorded that their sins caused them to be pillaged and humiliated before kings (Ezra 9:7; Neh. 9:32, 34). They followed their wicked ways that took their parents to captivity. They failed to return to the ways of the Lord and were humiliated and despised by men.

It is happening in our time when many priests have abandoned the ways of God and are living in the mercy of anointing. Many have committed sins and defiled their garments. It is only anointing and their gifts that speak for them before men but the Lord is not happy with many.

9. Priestly Laxity and Failure to Repair the Temple.

The priests were very relaxed in their duties. They could not be sound and decisive and to maintain the Law concerning the priestly office. It was within this that Ahimelech gave consecrated bread to David (1 Sam. 21:4-6) which was meant for the priests alone to eat. Sacred foods were for the priests and nobody, who was not a priest, was allowed to eat. No wonder in the days of Nehemiah, nobody could eat; hence, there was no serving priest at the Urim and Thummin (Ezra 2:63).

In the days of the kings, the priests refused to collect the money and didn't engage in the repair of the Temple (2 Kgs 12:8). The collected money was to be used to repair the Temple but the priests failed to collect the contribution for the repairing of the broken parts of the Temple which they were serving; let alone to repair the Temple.

10. Unfaithfulness and Intermarriage.

The priests were defiling the Temple. The leaders of the priests became more unfaithful and followed the detestable ways of the nations and defiled the Temple of the Lord (2 Chron. 36:14). The Lord wanted them to minister faithfully before Him but they engaged in some unfaithfulness which

was detestable to God. The Lord said He would hear them only when they cry (Ezek. 44:15). When terror came upon them as they lost the Temple and were taken captive, Jeremiah lamented on the death of priests and kings on the altar (Lam. 2:20). The Psalmist inspired by the Spirit of God declared that the Lord allowed the priests to be put to the sword (Ps. 78:64). It is not good to be unfaithful in the service of God. Faithfulness is what is required in service unto the Master and unto our human heads or leaders on earth.

Also, the major problem that faced the Israelites after the exile was that of intermarriage. The priesthood had tried and preserved the requirements concerning who the priests should marry for the sake of the office and the service unto the holy God. The Lord had warned them not to marry from other nations or give their daughters in marriage to those nations. Those who were given the mandate of safeguarding the Law against intermarriage were the priests. Unfortunately, after the exile, the priests broke the Law themselves and married foreign women (Ezra 10:18) just like the people of Israel. A famous example was one of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the High Priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite (Neh. 13:28) who was an enemy of God's people during the rebuilding of the Temple and the wall of Jerusalem.

Such priestly attitude would make us to address a common problem. Is it good to marry people of different religion or way of life from ours? Is it good to marry a follower of Islam (boy or girl) in view of the eternal

priesthood in Christ? Some have argued that they can be converted into the saving knowledge of God. Should we marry from the traditional African society? What about the adherents of other sects or religions? Should a priest marry a pagan? What about those who have not receive Jesus their Lord and Saviour? It can be said that some pastors' wives and some men of God holding priestly titles are hardly considered as Christians. Most of them have become problems to their husbands and sometimes the husbands are not genuine priests of Jesus but priests from the kingdom of darkness in the guise of Christianity. Genuineness should characterize our priestly service in the Lord as the Lord shall reward us when He returns.

11. Serving other Gods and Profaning the Temple.

The problem of Israel has been the worship of foreign gods rather than Yahweh who brought them out of Egypt and took them to the Promised Land. The priests, who were the custodian of Yahweh's worship in Israel, engaged in the service at other temples rather than that of God. The Lord said the priests are adulterous (Hos. 10:5). Jeremiah prophesied that Israel, Chemosh and the priests will be taken captive (Jer. 48:7). The Lord will exile Molech and his priests and officials (Jer. 49:3). The priests will be horrified (Jer. 4:9). Of course, the priests must bear the shame of their detestable practices (Ezek. 44:13). The exile was a means of correction to the people of Israel. Despite the exile, the Israelites, including the priests, have not separated themselves from the neighbouring nations (Ezra 9:1). They were to learn lessons

from the exiles but most of them returned and even lived worse than in the days before the exile.

Many today have engaged in so many detestable practices in the house of God. Church offices and Christian guest houses have been secularized and turned to normal hotel rooms where people come and deceive the workers that they are couples. That sense of respect to God is not there. Some of these are pastors and priests generally who go with their girlfriends in the name of retreat or rest with their wives.

The Temple or sanctuary was the duty post for the priests. The priesthood existed because the Temple was visible. The priesthood cannot exist without the Temple. No wonder it lost its power when the Temple was destroyed in the days of Zedekiah and the priests were exiled. Before this wicked act upon Israel, Jeremiah, the priest and prophet, spoke how the priests and prophets desecrated the Temple of the Lord. The priests were godless and their wickedness extended even inside the Temple (Jer. 23:11, 33). It was a custom of the priest to have a man who will stand before the Lord to burn sacrifices, offer grain offering and to offer sacrifices (Jer. 33:18). But the Temple and the altars were desecrated. Strange offerings were offered on the altar in the Temple.

Pastors today have taken strange offerings before the altar. Christians have taken detestable sacrifices to the altar of the Lord. I have heard of the discoveries of Marijuana, used condoms and torn money, which even gas stations would not collect, in the offering bags in churches. The Lord will help and have mercy on us. Thank God for dispensation of grace

for the Lord would have struck if it were under the Law as in the days of old.

12. Drunkenness and Murder.

Most of the priests were drunkards and forgot their duties. Priests and prophets staggered from beer and wine. They staggered when seeing visions and rendering decisions (Isa. 28:7). They actually played with the destiny of the nation of Israel. Because of their disobedience, the Lord promised to make them to be drunk (Jer. 13:13). The Bible says we should not be filled with wine but be filled with the Spirit of God (Eph. 5:18). Wine has become the basis for many pastors to stand and preach or minister in the presence of God. I have heard of a pastor who takes wine before climbing the pulpit to preach as the wine helps to speak. Wine has substituted the Holy Spirit in the lives of such pastors and leaders. They do not get charged unless they have tasted wine. The Holy Spirit, who charges the preacher, is now substituted with wine and it makes it disastrous to the members. There are many words in Greek for wine but English does not have such diversity of words rather than the single-headed word wine. We are to avoid anything wine. There is nothing like red wine or table wine. Anything that has alcohol is wine and must be avoided.

Also, the priests were to safeguard the lives of people. They were to watch the well-being of people and bless them. But the priests were murdering their followers on the road to Shekem and committing shameful crimes (Hos. 6:9). The exile was because of the sins of the prophets and the iniquities

of the priests who have shed blood of the righteous (Lam. 4:13). They fed on the blood of the righteous.

Today, pastors are commissioning the murder of other pastors in the quest for leadership in our denominations and ministries. They are hiring men to intervene on the success of others in the quest for Church leadership and positions. There are killings upon killings to cover up known sins in the name of safeguarding the integrity of some pastors. The Lord promised to punish and repay them for their wicked ways (Hos. 4:9).

13. Selfishness and Abandoning the Poor

Despite all the opposition during the rebuilding of the Temple during Zerubbabel and the renovation of the wall of Jerusalem during Nehemiah, Eliashib the priest was selfish and gave Tobiah a space in that same Temple (Neh. 13:13). Tobiah (believed to be bearing a Jewish name, God is good) was an enemy of the Jews during the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem with Sanballat and Geshem. Because Eliashib was very close to Tobiah, the storeroom for the holy things of God was given to him by Eliashib the High Priest. Eliashib was very selfish to have done this on the basis of the relationship and jeopardizing the lives and integrity of the priesthood and the people of God to the heathens who were mocking them.

Also, the priests in the days of Jesus would have anything to do with the poor in the society. Israel was known to have a great proportion of poor and destitute. Jesus gave a parable symbolizing the attitude of the priests in those days. He pictured the ways of the priests as abandoning the helpless

man in the name of being in a hurry to go to the Temple and to serve God (Lk 10:31). The Temple was greater than the lives of the people of God. It was greater than the people God had sent His Son to die for. Contrary to the priestly attitude, Jesus' teachings centred on the poor and transforming their lives and making them human beings once more. He dealt with the spiritual and physical aspects of the people in the society. Some of the Pentecostal pastors are clear-headed on this note rather than most of the mainstream evangelical pastors particularly in the lives of the young people. Tambiyi stated that:

The Pentecostal and the Charismatic movements are successful today for they go for the forgotten arms of the larger ministry which the mainline churches have put into the basket. This is where the boundaries of influence are clearly and legitimately drawn. The Pentecostals and the Charismatics take advantage of that to expand their wings of ministry in our societies.⁹²

He added that:

Similar can be said of the neglected attitudes towards the youths in the mainline churches. Most youths in the midst of their struggles

⁹² Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, "The Influence of the Pentecostals on Youths in Mainline Churches: Throneroom Trust Ministry Unveiled" https://www.academia.edu/8399963/THE_INFLUENCE_OF_PENTECOSTAL_MOVEMENTS_ON_YOUTHS_IN_MAINLINE_CHURCHES_THRONEROOM_TRUST_MINISTRY_UNVEILED/ page 11-12.

within the society are expected to still supply for the Church. Even when they cannot clean their backs, the mainline churches insist they reach out through offerings and pay tithes in double measures. How can the youths be of help in the Church when they are struggling with their challenges? It is within this inability to shoulder such responsibility that the Pentecostals discovered the missing links and have tried to fill it. By this, the Pentecostals started giving the youths hope despite their challenges. These preachers preach and pronounce blessings to members as expected of priests in the Bible.⁹³

The Pentecostals most times make people rich among them before expecting them to sow back to the activities in the Church but the opposite is witnessed among the mainstream evangelicals when they just want to collect rather than training people to make it. We need a balanced gospel in African twenty-first century which concentrates on the spiritual and physical needs of the human souls.

14. Indignant and Jealous

In the days of Jesus, it is recorded that the chief priests saw how people were shouting hosanna and they became indignant (Matt. 21:23). Jesus was considered a king and was honoured but such became a problem to the chief priests. These are those, who guarded the Law and the prophets who

⁹³ Tambiyi, "Influence", 12.

spoke about Jesus, but they were not happy at the fulfilment. A paralleled account is when the High Priest and the members were filled with jealousy and arrested the apostles and imprisoned them (Acts 5:17) for the sake of the Gospel of the Kingdom.⁹⁴ We must not be indignant and jealous about our fellows when we see them excelling in the priesthood and in their calling or being effective in their spiritual gifts.⁹⁵

15. Self-Priesthood and Self Glorification

In Acts of the Apostles, Luke recorded Sceva to be a Jewish High Priest (Acts 19:14). His children were automatic priests by birth. With the death of Jesus, the trend of priesthood changed from being biological to having a relationship with the owner of the priesthood, Christ. But because their father was a High Priest, the sons who were also priests in the making, went out to minister in the name of Jesus, which Paul was preaching, without relationship with Jesus. Ordination was by affiliation to Christ rather than biological as it was in the Levitical priesthood. The demon chased them severely

⁹⁴ This message of the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of heaven as reflected in the work of Matthew was inaugurated by John the Baptist and became the dominant teaching of Jesus during His ministry on earth. For a better study of the Kingdom of God particularly the Jewish expectation, presence of the Kingdom, the future of the Kingdom and the Kingdom of grace see Palmer, 13-19.

⁹⁵ For a better understanding of the gifts of the Spirit see Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* (rev. ed.) (Lagos: Jetmove, 1999). Lloyd Edwards, *Discerning your Spiritual Gifts* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1988). Chris S. Abashiya, *Tongues: To Speak or Not to Speak* (Jos: Midland Press, 1993).

and torn their clothes. These ones were not sent by God as most of the pastors who claim to be sent by God. Many have undertaken prophetic actions and have been wounded by the enemies because such actions were undirected prophetic actions and were not commanded by the Lord.

The priests glorified themselves and were glorified by many people because of how they have exalted themselves in the society in those days. People who stood for the truth were despised and glory was given to the priests, most especially the High Priest. It is clear for the High Priest Ananias ordered Paul to be struck (Acts 23:2). People rebuked Paul for speaking against God's High Priest (Acts 23:4). The priests in the New Testament self-glorified themselves and made themselves gods before the people as many pastors and Christians have reprogrammed the lives of others to fit their intentions.

In African Christianity, some pastors have become High Priest by themselves and are taking the glory even when Jesus is said to be our High Priest (Heb. 4:14-15; 5:10; 6:20; 8:1; 9:11). They have self-glorified themselves among the members and are being deified by the members. The glory returns to them when they preach or perform any miraculous acts in the name of the Lord. God does not share His glory with any man, not even with angels (Isa. 42:8; 48:11).

CHAPTER SIX THE DIVINE PRIESTHOOD INAUGURATED

1. The Merging of Priesthood and Kingship

During the Hellenistic period, the priesthood had the highest status among the people. The office of the High Priest functioned as the main representative of the Jews during the late Persian and the Greek regimes. It appeared that most of the people in administrative positions were the priests. The Temple in Jerusalem overshadowed all other institutions in Judea because it became the centre for Jewish life and activities.

The profile of the High Priest increased substantially in the second Temple period, after the return from the Babylonian Exile. From this time on, the High Priest became more prominent. The monarchy was gone, the civil authority was in the hands of the Persians, the Jews were no longer independent; and hence, the chief power tended to center in the high priesthood.

He was distinctly known as High Priest (*hakkōhēn haggūdōl*). He took a leading part in establishing the ecclesiastico-civil system, particularly the building of the Temple. The office passed from father to son (Num. 25:11-13), and if this was not possible a member of the family was appointed. The High Priest served in the office until death (Num. 35:25, 28; this custom ended during the period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, 174 B.C. - 163 B.C.). He represented the people to the foreign powers that controlled the homeland, caring for the security of Jerusalem and its water supply,

and he was responsible for the collection of taxes as well as the supervision of the Temple service. Both spiritual and cultural responsibilities were placed on him, e.g., the High Priest Simeon, son of Onias II, who traditionally has been referred to as Simeon the Just, exercised great influence upon the religious and spiritual development of Israel.

Hellenism reached its peak under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He had total disdain for everything Jewish. The high priesthood was purchased. Danny McCain stated:

There was a High Priest in Jerusalem at this time named Onias III who was a strict orthodox Jew. However, the High Priesthood had become such a political office that a certain Jason, by promising to pay more money to Antiochus, was able to get himself appointed as High Priest.⁹⁶

It is stated that Jason encouraged the Hellenists who had sought his election.

A gymnasium was built in Jerusalem, Greek names became commonplace, and Hebrew orthodoxy was considered obscurantist and obsolete. Yet Jason argued with his close companion and fellow-Hellenist, Menelaus, of the tribe of Benjamin, who offered higher tribute to Antiochus than that paid by Jason, and had himself installed as High Priest. The orthodox Jews, who had been scandalized when Jason was

⁹⁶ Danny McCain, *Notes of New Testament Introduction* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2005), 7.

named High Priest, were more deeply disturbed when Menelaus, a Benjamite with no claim to priestly office, was installed. Jason raised an army to back his claim to the high priesthood, and Menelaus courted the favour of Antiochus. The Syrians, who were campaigning against Egypt, felt it essential to maintain effective control of Palestine. Antiochus staged a sneak attack on Jerusalem one Sabbath Day (when the orthodox would not fight), and slaughtered a large number of the enemies of Menelaus. The city walls were destroyed, and a new fortress, the Akra, was built on the site of the citadel. Antiochus was determined to remove all traces of orthodox Jewish faith. Israel's God was identified with Jupiter, and a bearded image of the pagan deity (perhaps in the likeness of Antiochus) was erected on the Temple altar, where swine were offered in sacrifice. Jews were forbidden, under penalty of death, to practice circumcision, Sabbath observance, or the celebration of the feasts of the Jewish calendar. Copies of the scriptures were ordered destroyed. The laws were enforced with the utmost cruelty.

An aged scribe named Eleazar was flogged to death because he would not eat swine's flesh.⁹⁷

The period, because of Hellenism and the sacrifices of pigs or swine on the altar of the Lord, became rampant in order to profane the name of the Lord. During the Seleucids (198-166BC), the influence of the Romans started to be felt which made Hannibal of Carthage to flee to Antiochus III. He was defeated and his son Antiochus IV Epiphanes was released to return to Syria and was made king. Rome also intervened and he revenged on the Jews. Antiochus IV killed many and stopped them from observance of religious rites and polluted the Temple by sacrificing a pig or swine on the altar in Jerusalem. This made the Jews to be expecting a political messiah who will fight for them.⁹⁸

The Maccabean period began when Antiochus IV was polluting the Jewish life. This was a period of guerrilla warfare that was waged by zealous Jews to rid Palestine of foreign occupation. This continued and reached its peak when a Syrian official tried to force Mattathias, an old priest, to offer a pagan sacrifice in Modin as instructed by Antiochus IV. Mattathias resisted and another Jew completed the sacrifice. Mattathias killed that Jew who offered the sacrifices

⁹⁷ W. A. Criswell ed., *The Criswell Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 1085. Also see McCain, *New Testament*, 7.

⁹⁸ Antioch in Syria (named after Antiochus) grew stronger and became the centre where Christians were first called Christians (Acts 11:19-26).

and the government officials destroying the altar and fled to the wilderness with his three sons. This is clearly captured by Gromacki:

After Antiochus Epiphanes' intolerable pollutions of the Temple in 168 BC, further abuses were heaped upon the Jews. The deplorable conditions reached a pinnacle when a Syrian official tried to force Mattathias, an old priest, to offer a pagan sacrifice in the village of Modin. The priest refused and when an apostate Jew volunteered to do so, Mattathias killed him and the government envoy, destroyed the altar, and fled into the wilderness with his three sons. The priest became a national hero overnight. Soon the family was joined by other zealots and a guerrilla army was formed.⁹⁹

With this, it showed that the priesthood was with God and had a high fear of God.

Research has shown that other zealots joined them in the wilderness and shortly, Mattathias died and the leadership was passed to Judas called Maccabeus, "the hammer." Judas engaged in a guerrilla war to expel the Syrians from Palestine and to restore rightful Temple worship in Jerusalem. On December 14, 164 B.C., he succeeded by restoring daily burnt offerings at the Temple. This day was set aside as the Feast of Dedication (or Feast of Lights) (Jn 10:22) and was kept at the time of Jesus' ministry. The Syrians were defeated and the

⁹⁹ Gromacki, 10.

Jews were liberated, however, Judah died and Jonathan (160-143 B.C.) his brother took over the mantle of leadership.

Later, Simon his brother (143-134 B.C.) also took over as the leader. Simon gained a family official recognition as the High Priest which came to be the Hasmoneans. Succeeding Jewish leaders further solidified the Jewish nation in an effort to secure independence. During the Hellenistic period, the High Priests varied in their allegiance to Jewish ideals and in their attractions to the Greek culture. Both Simeon II and Onias III continued the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah while it is probable that Jason, one of the leaders of the Hellenist party, turned Jerusalem into a model of the Greek *polis*.

The priesthood seems to have reached its zenith during the Hasmonean period (ca. 165 B.C. - 60 B.C.) when it could be legitimately categorized as a part of the Jewish aristocracy with far-reaching influence and position in society. Gromacki explained the Hasmonean priestly influence:

The death of Simon, the last son of Mattathias, ended the Maccabean era of struggle; the ascent of John Hyrcanus, the son of Simon, marked the beginning of the dynasty of Hasmonean ruling priests. The next hundred years of political freedom were marked by jealousy, greed, and suspicion. The failure of the family to rule itself was manifested in the civil disorder and the military weakness which eventually led to a Roman takeover.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Gromacki, 11.

During the Hasmonean period (165 B.C. - 75 B.C.) the High Priest was a national leader, and eventually the positions of High Priest and king of Israel were represented by the same person. The High Priest was an appointment of his choosing from among the priests. This loosened the link of the high priesthood with a particular family. The custom of a High Priest holding the position for life was abolished, and although a high status was given to the office as it was confined to the religious activities at the Temple.

In the late Maccabean era, the priests were members in a number of the parties and sects within Judaism. It would seem that the priests were a substantial part of the leadership of the Sadducees, and their membership in the Sanhedrin made them influential powers in both civic and religious matters. Priests also were part of the leadership in the separatist sect of the Essenes. Some of their writings (e.g., the *Manual of Discipline*) indicated that the priesthood was a vital part of the hierarchy.

Later, Aristobulus I (104-103 B.C.), the son of Hyrcanus, was the first Jewish leader during this Intertestamental Period to assume the title of "king." After his rule, his widow, Salome Alexandra, designated his oldest brother, Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.) as High Priest and king of the Jewish nation. Alexander Jannaeus ruled and at his death, he asked his wife to dismiss his Sadducean advisors. His wife and her son, Hyrcanus II favoured the Pharisees which led to the death of many Sadducees as a result of Alexander's action to the Pharisees. This brought enmity between the Sadducees

and the Pharisees. Hyrcanus II reigned for a short time and his brother Aristobulus II conspired with the Sadducees for his removal so he fled to the house of Aretas, the king of Nabatean Arabs.

It is clear that “Aristobulus II became both the High Priest and king thus controlling the Israelite politics and religion.”¹⁰¹ Civil war broke out in Israel under the leaderships of Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II (67-63 B.C.), the sons of Salome Alexandra. The Romans were asked to settle the dispute. Rome decided in favour of Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus was subsequently appointed High Priest to rule over Judea and Idumea.

Antipater, an Idumean and the father of Herod the Great, gave Hyrcanus II hope of priesthood. Gromacki stated that:

He (Antipater) informed Hyrcanus II that the latter could be restored to the ruling high priesthood by a movement of the army of the Nabatean Arabs against Jerusalem. Hyrcanus II agreed and started back to the Jewish capital. At this time Rome, which had observed the political strife from a distance, intervened, decided in favour of Hyrcanus II, defeated Aristobulus II, and restored Hyrcanus II to the priestly office.¹⁰²

This was when Roman influence and control entered the land of Palestine. Palestine was under Roman occupation during the time of Jesus’ ministry and the early history of the

¹⁰¹ McCain, 11.

¹⁰² Gromacki, 12.

Church. Later, "Hyrcanus, the former High Priest, was appointed as Ethnarch of Judea and also was reconfirmed as High Priest."¹⁰³ After him, the son of Antipater, Antipater II, was one of the powerful forces behind Hyrcanus, the one eventually appointed High Priest by Pompey and later reconfirmed by Caesar.¹⁰⁴

Later, Antigonus son of Aristobulus II conspired with Parthians to capture Jerusalem. When he gained ground as priest and king, young Herod, son of Antipater of Idumean went to Rome and gained favour from Mark Anthony who conferred on him "the king of the Jews." Herod returned under the Romans influence, drove the Parthians and established his kingdom in Jerusalem. Herod established a political rulership over Jerusalem. Gromacki wrote that:

The Hasmonean priesthood that had exercised civil power for the one hundred years lost it when Herod came to the throne and never regained it. Although the priests had much power among the Jewish populace, the iron hand of Rome was there to stay. The constant jealousy of the Hasmonean priests, the struggle between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and intervention of Gentiles (Syrians, Parthians, Idumeans and Romans) created a genuine spirit of unrest among the people. They longed for a

¹⁰³McCain, 12.

¹⁰⁴ McCain, 12.

person to lead them to peace and freedom. It was within this that Jesus came.¹⁰⁵

The practice of merging the offices of kingship and High Priest came to an abrupt end in the Roman period; under the regime of Herod the Great. Also, within this period, since the period was with political unrest, mistreatments, lack of comfort and freedom, that Jesus Christ was born (Gal. 4:4). It is worth observing that “Herod became the governor of Galilee in 47 BC. Although he never became the High Priest, he was the real power in Judea at this time.”¹⁰⁶

After the death of Herod and the removal of Archelaus, the appointment of the High Priest became the responsibility of the Roman governors. In the first century A.D., the appointment came from the family of Herod (i.e., Agrippa I, Herod of Chalcis, and Agrippa II) and resulted in a group of well-placed, wealthy priestly families being given the office on a regular basis (i.e., the Boethus family, the Phiabi family, and the family of Anan). According to the Talmud, the High Priest bought the office from the government and the position was changed every year. Since an ex-High Priest kept his rights to the dignity of the office, a kind of oligarchy of high priesthood was established with many of the privileges being shared by members of his family. A distinguished and wealthy noble group of families emerged and took advantage of society in social, economic, and religious matters. Thus

¹⁰⁵ Gromacki, 12-13.

¹⁰⁶ McCain, 12.

such groups as the Pharisees and the Dead Sea community severely criticized the high priesthood.

2. The Roman Destruction of the Levitical Priesthood

With the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70, the priesthood lost its main religious base in the Jewish society. In their role as teachers, the priests were replaced by the Pharisees and the rabbis or teachers of the Law in the synagogues.

One sees the rights and privileges of the priests to be enacted in full force within Orthodox Judaism. The priest was called to read the Law and to bless the people in the synagogues. He was avoided contact with the dead and had some privileges of visiting people in the hospitals without compromising his purity. He was not to marry a divorcee. But with time, Reformed Judaism disregarded the laws applying to a priest and adopted new trends of liberalism in view of the Orthodox priestly beliefs and regulations.

The age close to the destruction of the Temple during the war in AD 66-70 witnessed the dislike of the High Priest when the Zealots took charge of Jerusalem. There were disqualification of many members of the High Priest's family. It was by choice to have a High Priest who was picked among many priests. Phinehas ben Samuel, a stonemason by profession was a relative by marriage to the family of Rabbi Hillel. Phinehas was the last High Priest as the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in A.D. 70 ended the necessity of such a figure in the Jewish life and history; hence, the Temple was destroyed.

Thereafter, the scribes became the true centre of the Jewish community and activities. Some of the priest were the scribes. But the priest still has the privilege of a certain respect. He would read the scriptures and bless the people. He also received the first-fruits offerings. The expert in the Law became central to Jewish life in Judaism and the Torah became of significant to restructuring the morals of the people. We can say that the Jews still hope in the restoration of the Temple and the priesthood and believe in the Torah as it has taken the place of the Temple, Sacrifices and the priesthood.

Although the Jews today still look up to the rebuilding of Temple, the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Jesus. In His discussion with the Samaritan woman, Jesus unveiled the intention of God concerning the merging of the world. He stated that a time would come for universality of worship (Jn 4:21-23) rather than worshipping God on Mount Gerizim or the Temple in Jerusalem (v. 21). He emphasized in the conversation with the disciples in Matthew 24:2. The destruction made it plain that God can be accessed anywhere when we seek Him with genuine hearts.

3. The Advent of Eternal Priesthood

The frequent words in the New Testament are *hiereus*, and *archieus* although the word *hierateuma* (1 Peter 2:5, 9), "priesthood," is not found with reference to the Jewish priesthood. The word "priest" is used in the New Testament

72 times while the plural “priests” is used 83 times dominantly in the Gospels.

The word *hierōsunē*, which is more abstract than the later Greek *hierateia*, can mean "priesthood," "priestly office," "priestly dignity," or, more rarely, "priestly ministry." The Levitical priesthood has not achieved any *teleiōsis*. There is thus a change of *hierōsunē*. Christ's priesthood in the order of Melchizedek remains forever for He possesses the priesthood.

In New Testament times, the High Priest was the chief civil and ecclesiastical figure among the Jews. He was chairman of the Sanhedrin and head of the political relations with the Roman government. We know he would participate in sacrificial systems on the Day of Atonement and the daily offering of sacrifices within the week. According to Josephus, the High Priest officiated at the Sabbath, the New Moon, and yearly festivals. The daily *minḡā* (Lev 6:12).

Before the fall of the Temple, there were few references to the works of the priests. Luke 1:5-9 attests to the effect that Zacharias was of the course of Abijah, the 8th of the 24 courses of priestly divisions by lots (1 Chron. 24:7-18).

The power of the High Priest was replicated beyond that of an ordinary priest in the Gospels. The word *archiereis* is mentioned often than *hiereis*. The office of the High Priest was not retained until death as the office was presiding officer of the Sanhedrin. The word *hiereus* is of course employed in its ordinary signification on the rare occasions when reference is made in the New Testament to corresponding

ministers of other religions, as to the priest of Zeus (Acts 14:13) and also to Melchizedek (Heb. 7:1).

From the three years and a half of Jesus' ministry, it became clear that the priesthood had a dimension that seemed to maintain the ways of the Lord under the Law but miss-viewed the activities of God under His divine calendar. It was a zealous priesthood without knowledge of the time and season. The priesthood did not have a discerning spirit to tell the covenant side of the reign of Jesus in the promised Kingdom of Israel.

It is readily seen that the work of the High Priest, both because of his entry into the Most Holy Place and because he bore the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment for a memorial before Yahweh continually, far more suitably than that of the ordinary priests typified the atoning and intercessory work of Jesus (Ex 28:12, 15).

Even when John the Baptist came, it was a problem. The priests did not understand the ways of the Lord. They did not believe John and since the time was all about signs. They needed signs concerning the Coming One of David. The socio-economic struggles and political unsteadiness and unrest and being in the hands of a foreign king Herod, the priests and Levites of Jerusalem sent men to ask John if he was the Messiah (Jn 1:19).

When Jesus came He performed certain miracles since His concern was the poor and the destitute who were not considered human beings in the society. These were the abandoned in the society. When He healed the man, He asked

the man to go show himself to the priest for examination (Matt. 8:4; Mk 1:44; Lk 17:14). The priests were known for examining people according to the Law and declaring them clean. It was the duty of the High Priest to declare the soundness of the person caught up with leprosy. During this period, the priesthood had nothing good which it has achieved, ironically, apart from standing against the will of God and acting contrary to the will of Jesus when He came to the earth.

The priests were known to engage in the offering of sacrifices. They still follow the division in the Law. Zechariah was a priest in the division of Abijah and his wife Elizabeth (Lk 1:5). Zechariah was serving as a priest before God (Lk 1:8). It was during his time of service that the angel Gabriel appeared and announced the birth of John the Baptist. The same angel went to Mary concerning the birth of Jesus.

The High Priest was Caiaphas who had a palace (Matt. 26:3). Chief priests and elders assembled in the palace of the High Priest to decide the fate of Jesus (Matt. 26:3; Mk 14:53). Caiaphas the High Priest had a servant and servant girls (Matt. 26:51; Mk 14:47, 66). He was the High Priest had a courtyard where Jesus was tortured (Matt. 26:58; Mk 14:54; Lk 22:50).

During the torture of Jesus, the High Priest questioned Jesus in the public contrary to the accusers of Jesus whom he questioned in the public (Matt. 26:62; Mk 14:60). The High Priest needed Jesus to break the law of oath (Matt. 26:63). The High Priest asked Jesus whether He is the Son of God, the Son

of the Blessed One (Mk 14:61). Hearing the response of Jesus, the High Priest tore his clothe for he considered Jesus to be blasphemous (Matt. 26:65; Mk 14:63).

In a parable of Jesus, a priest was going to the Temple but abandoned a helpless man (Lk 10:31). This speaks of the attitudes of the priests at that time. They were concerned with the things of men rather than the things of God. They abandoned the ways of the Lord and had all hope and concern set on the doctrine of men.¹⁰⁷

The priests were known to be the custodians of the Law of the Lord (Matt. 2:4). They were to be men of direct integrity. They were to tell people the mind of God. They were to play prophetic role as in the days of old when Zadok the priest was a seer (2 Sam. 15:27). Jeremiah and Ezekiel were all prophets and priests. The same expected prophesying attitude was witnessed in the days of Jesus when Caiaphas the High Priest ignorantly prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation (Jn 11:51).

Jesus said that the priests desecrated the Sabbath and remained innocent (Matt. 12:5). He said the chief priests and teachers of the law will kill Him (Matt. 16:21; 20:18; Lk 9:22). The chief priests and the Pharisees understood Jesus' parable was referring to them (Matt. 21:45; Lk. 20:19).

As stated earlier, the chief priests saw how children were shouting hosanna to Jesus and they became indignant (Matt.

¹⁰⁷ The Lord gave 10 commandments but the priests and the Pharisees added 620 laws making them 630 laws in order to entangle the people and make them lawbreakers.

21:23; Jn 11:47). They were angry that the people were shouting and elevating Jesus. The elder and the chief priests questioned Jesus' teaching authority (Matt. 21:23; Lk 20:1-2). Jesus was not a Levite. This was a challenge of teaching qualifications in the Temple. They felt Jesus was not qualified to stand in the Temple and teach the people. Unfortunately for them, Jesus' teachings had powers and authority more than the teachings of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Jesus performed miracles that they could not do. The plan to murder Lazarus was to discredit the works of Jesus (Jn 12:10). This was to thwart the works of Jesus and make His works look stupid before the people.

Caiaphas was High Priest and the chief priests gathered in his house to decide the verdict for Jesus (Matt. 26:3). The chief priests gave Judas Iscariot money for him to betray Jesus (Matt. 26:14; Mk 14:10; Lk 22:4). The chief priests and elders declared Jesus a commodity and publicized Him (Jn 11:57). The chief priests and elders sent troop to arrest Jesus (Matt. 26:47; Mk. 14:43; Lk 22:52; Jn 7:32; 18:3).

The High Priests of each of the years were deified and regarded. They were considered people closer to the Most High and highly respected. It was a practice that the chief priests had rights to stop people from entering the Temple. As a result, the people were afraid of them in order that they would not stop them from entering the Temple to pray. Jesus was struck to dignify the High Priest (Jn 18:22). Even during the torture, Jesus was sent first to the High Priest (Jn 18:24).

The chief priests and the Sanhedrin looked for false evidence against Jesus that they will put him to death (Matt. 26:59; Mk 11:18; 14:1, 55; Lk 19:47). The chief priests and elders decided to put Jesus to death in the morning (Matt. 27:1; Mk 15:1; Lk 22:66). The chief priests accused Jesus of many things (Mk. 15:3; Lk 23:10).

The chief priests rejected Jesus as king (Jn 19:15). They protested that Pilate should not write that Jesus is the king of the Jews but that He claimed to be king of the Jews (Jn 19:15). Pilate announced to the chief priests and the people that Jesus was innocent (Lk 23:4). The chief priests and elders shouted that Jesus should be crucified (Jn 19:6). The chief priests and elders handed over Jesus out of envy to be crucified (Mk. 15:10; Lk 24:20).

After the arrest of Jesus and seeing the torture and the plan to execute Jesus, Judas returned the money to the chief priests and elders (Matt. 27:3). The chief priests and elders rejected the returned money to get mixed up with the treasury since it was blood money (Matt. 27:12). The chief priests and elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas to be released rather than Jesus (Matt. 27:20; Mk 15:11).

On the cross, the chief priests and elders mocked at Jesus (Matt. 27:41; Mk 15:31). Even when Jesus resurrected, the chief priests and Pharisees went to instigate Pilate (Matt. 27:62). Some of the guards reported to the chief priests and elders about the events at the tomb (Matt. 28:11). They devised a way and bribed the guards to lie against the

resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 28:12). Such thoughts tell of the attitude of the priesthood in the days of Jesus.

4. Jesus the Highest Priest

The priesthood took a strange form from the usual nature of the priesthood which was a common practice of those days as it has suffered during the Greco-Roman period. Jesus is the fulfilment of Old Testament priesthood. His linkage to the priesthood is prophesied in Psalm 110:4 and fulfilled in the Gospels and exposed in the book of Hebrews.

Because of the diversity within the biblical sources the stipulation that only the firstborn son of the High Priest could be High Priest is a debated issue. Many scholars view the High Priest as a late creation of the second Temple period. The power and significance of the priesthood increased in the postexilic period, and it found its supreme expression in the position of the High Priest. When the king did not materialize to establish a distinctive nation in the pattern of David's and Solomon's kingdoms, the High Priest acquired more and more importance as the person who gave definition to the Israelite community.¹⁰⁸

Others hold that the hierarchy within the priesthood dates back to a very ancient period of Israel. Eli, in the Temple of Shiloh (1 Sam 1-3), may be an example of the High Priest from the very early period. Deuteronomy offers little about

¹⁰⁸ W. O. McCready, "High Priest" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition, Copyright © 1979 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. All rights reserved. *PC Study Bible V5*.

the high priesthood (Deut. 20:2 may be a reference). The traditional view that Deuteronomy was created under Mosaic authorship implies that the book is a unit and it assumes the division of priest and High Priest. Some modern literary critics see different layers of tradition in the text that were brought together around the 7th century B.C. Those who hold the latter view usually side with the proposal that the High Priest is a somewhat later development in the priestly system. But the lack of reference to a High Priest in Deuteronomy may be due to its subject matter; the text does not deal with priestly matters in any detail and thus has no need to describe the office of High Priest.¹⁰⁹

The fulfilment of priesthood is found in Hebrews as Jesus brought to fulfilment the role of the High Priest during the atonement (Heb. 4:14-5:10; 7:11-28). Every aspect of the symbolism pointed to His fulfillment of the typology of the Old Testament (Matt. 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19). After His resurrection His teaching was the same, although at this time He could speak even more plainly, since He had now accomplished His work of redemption (cf. Lk 24).

The book of Acts reveals how the New Testament church proclaimed Jesus' priesthood particularly in Peter's sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:14) and his defense before the Sanhedrin (4:8). Paul also expressed the sacrificial and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. One finds clear teachings in Romans 4-6; 1 Corinthians 15; Galatians 3-4; Colossians 1-2; and various other places.

¹⁰⁹ McCready, *PC Study Bible V5*.

Hebrews 8-10 gives us clear thoughts on Christ's priestly work. This is depicted by the writer of Hebrews as fulfilling the Old Testament sacrificial systems. Jesus the eternal High Priest came and offered up Himself as a living sacrifice, that men might receive forgiveness and pardon for their sins. He redeemed us with his blood which is better than the blood of animals in the Old Testament. The works of John also have injunctions on Christ's priestly work.¹¹⁰

Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of His people (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 3:27; Col. 1:20; 2:14; Heb. 9:24). He always intercedes on His people's behalf (Heb. 7:25). Jesus' priestly superiority over the human High Priests became glaring;

1. Jesus worshipped God (Heb. 9:1-10).
2. He offered His blood which is higher than the blood in the Old Testament (Heb. 9:11ff).
3. He offered sacrifices which are of higher significance with those in the Old Testament (Heb. 10).
4. He was superior to the priests and high priests of Israel.
5. He was superior to angels (Heb. 1:1ff), Moses (Heb. 3:1ff) and the Sabbath (Heb. 4:1ff).
6. He was in the order of Melchizedek. Christ being sinless, despite his humanity, caused Him to belong and become a greater and older priesthood not within Israel's confine but that of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:10; 7). Historically, the blessing bestowed upon Abraham and

¹¹⁰ W. S. Reid, "Offices OF Christ" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised edition, Copyright © 1979 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. All rights reserved. *PC Study Bible V5*.

the reception of tithes from him prove the superiority of Melchizedek to Levi, and still more to the priestly descendants of Levi (Heb. 7:4-10).

Jesus offered himself to the Father in heaven and provided us with eternal redemption. This happened on the day he died on the cross when the curtain of the Holy of Holies torn into two (Matt. 27:51). He made all of us priest. We all now have accessed to the Holies of God which even the High Priest in Israel had accessed once in a year on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). We can now go and present our sacrifices of praise, good deeds, self, and soul won for the Lord (Heb. 13:15-16; Rom. 12:1; 2 Tim. 4:6; Rom. 15:16).

People come to know of His priestly work and what He has accomplished by it because He, as a prophet, sets forth the will of God for their salvation. Moreover, men come to faith in Christ only as He by virtue of His kingly office sovereignly brings them to faith and obedience. His priestly office is central to His redemptive work, but man would neither know nor believe were it not for the other two offices that he fulfils.

5. Melchizedekian Priesthood

Melchizedek is without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life like Jesus (Heb. 7:3). Melchizedek remained a priest forever like the Son of man (Heb. 7:3). The appearance of another priest like Melchizedek made what was said in the Word clearer (Heb. 7:15). Anderson stated, "That Melchizedek was a type of the Messiah the Jews admitted; and his priesthood had to do, not with offering

sacrifices for sins, but with ministering blessing and succour and sustenance.”¹¹¹ It is clear that even father Abraham paid him homage and gave tithes to this priest. Melchizedek was known as the priest of the Most High God, king of righteousness and king of peace. He was made like the Son of God.

There was a need for the one who will bring perfection not in the order of Aaron but Melchizedek (Heb. 7:11). The psalmist says “You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4). Jesus’ priesthood became like that of Melchizedek. He abandoned the old form of Aaron and adopted the priestly dispositions of Melchizedek, having no beginning and no end as the Father is eternal. We can see Jesus to belong to a high priesthood which was not endorsed by men but by God.

6. The Continuous Combat against the Eternal Priesthood

a. In the Days of Annas

Jesus died during the reign of Annas being the High Priest of that year. The Church was established (Acts 2) when he was the one on the seat. The Church came within the same time shortly after the death and ascension of Jesus. The disciples of Jesus began the work dealing with the same generation of Jewish leaders who killed Jesus. It was the same Sanhedrin members. The *kerygma* became a problem¹¹² since it was

¹¹¹ Anderson, 29.

¹¹² The concept of the *Kerygma* was developed by C. H. Dodd in his book *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (1936) as figured

accompanied with power of the Holy Spirit. It was accompanied with signs and wonders. It was within this that the priests and members of the Sanhedrin discovered the apostles might have been with Jesus. This caused Annas the Jewish High Priest of that time and the members of the Sanhedrin to be filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and imprisoned them (Acts 5:17).

The priests and the captains of the Temple came up against Peter and John (Acts 4:1). Annas the High Priest and others met to decide Peter and John's case (Acts 4:6). The chief priests and elders forbade the disciples from preaching the gospel (Acts 4:23). This was against Christ himself. It was against the message of Jesus and Jesus himself. It was a means to deter the Gospel from spreading to the outermost parts of the earth.

The death of the couple (Ananias and Saphira) was a signal to the priests that the Lord was endorsing the message of the apostles. The chief priests and elders were puzzled and wondered what have come up at that time when the wife also died (Acts 5:24). The High Priest questioned the apostles (Acts

from the book of Acts. It has been observed that the *kerygma* was made up of six components; the age of fulfillment has dawned –the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus exalted to God's right hand and he exercises authority from heaven, the Holy Spirit is a sign of Christ's present power and glory, the messianic age will reach its consummation in the return of Jesus and it appealed for all to repent for the forgiveness of sins. The central core was the death and resurrection of Jesus. See Timothy Palmer, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2012), 67-68.

5:27) just like they did to Jesus. They challenged them in order to stop the intention of God.

Annas the High Priest asked Stephen whether the charges were true (Acts 7:1). A large number of priests became Christians as a result of the Gospel message (Acts 6:7). It was Annas the High Priest who issued Saul a letter to the synagogues in Damascus to persecute many Christians (Acts 9:1, 14; 22:5) and put many Christians to death (Acts 26:10).

b. In the Days of Sceva

Another High Priest mentioned is Sceva. We do not have enough information about him. The book of Acts told us that he was a Jewish High Priest (Acts 19:14). Whether the man performed priestly duties we do not know but we read the attempt of his sons. If their father was the High Priest, they were also priests. But because their father was a High Priest, the sons were also priests in the making. This informed their audacity to go out to minister in the name of Jesus which Paul preached without relationship with Jesus. I have never read about priests doing exorcism in the Bible. It is clear that priestly work did not pertain exorcism. But some prophets performed exorcisms in the Old Testament (Elijah and Elisha) unless Elijah is considered a prophesying priest since he performed sacrifice. Jesus as a priest and a prophet also did the same in the Gospels.

c. In the Days of Ananias

Another High Priest mentioned in the book of Acts is Ananias who ordered Paul to be struck (Acts 23:2). Paul stood before

the chief priests and people and rendered his defence (Acts 22:30). People rebuked Paul for speaking against God's High Priest (Acts 23:4) during this time. Some men reported to the chief priests and elders that they have taken an oath not to eat until Paul was put to death (Acts 23:14). The chief priests and elders presented charges against Paul that he should be condemned (Acts 25:2, 15). The High Priest Ananias went to Damascus to marshal charges against Paul in Caesarea (Acts 24:1). These revealed the efforts of the priests to shut down the works of Jesus as they fought the followers of Jesus after they have killed Him.

7. Priesthood in Hebrews: Jesus compared to the Priests

The book of Hebrews exposed the peak of the divine priesthood of Jesus. I have extracted some facts about the nature of priestly exposition in the book to reveal the highest place Jesus has occupied in the priesthood, not of Levi but in the eternal priesthood. I have specified the areas in which Jesus is different from the priests. The priestly roles were direct opposite of the facts mentioned below.

- a. Jesus was made a merciful and faithful High Priest in service unto God and to make atonement for sins (Heb. 2:17).
- b. He is the apostle and High Priest which we confess (Heb. 3:1). In those days, a High Priest is selected among men to represent God, to offer sacrifices and offer gifts (Heb. 5:1).
- c. Christ did not take the glory of becoming a High Priest (Heb. 5:5).

- d. He is a representative of men before God and God before men. He offered sacrifices and gifts. Jesus went in before us and on our behalf (Heb. 6:20).
- e. But Jesus is the great High Priest who had gone through the heavens (Heb. 4:15).
- f. God made him a High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6, 10; 7:17). Jesus was not a Levite but became High Priest to inaugurate a kingdom of priesthood that broke the usual and opened the gate for all of us to become priests. Jesus descended from Judah (Heb. 7:14). With this Anderson stated, "That the priesthood of Christ could not be Aaronic, the Apostle impresses on the Jewish mind by pointing to the fact that our Lord sprang out of Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood."¹¹³

Whether or not the writer of Hebrews is Apostle Paul or Barnabas, the Levitical priesthood did not bring perfection (Heb. 7:11) but that of Christ which was in the pattern of Melchizedek did. The Law appointed weak men as priests but the oath appointed the Son a priest forever (Heb. 7:28).

- g. The priests performed daily duties in the outer room (Heb. 9:6). Jesus was not from the earth and is not qualified for priesthood according to the Law (Heb. 8:4). Jesus received a higher priestly ministry in the New Covenant (Heb. 8:5).

¹¹³ Anderson, 29.

- h. Jesus went into the Tabernacle that was not of this creation (Heb. 9:11).
- i. Jesus became priest not on the basis of a regulation but the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16).
- j. Jesus became a priest through oath by God's promise (Heb. 7:21). Jesus priesthood meets our needs (Heb. 7:28) but that of Levi did not.
- k. Jesus' priesthood is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens (Heb. 7:26).
- l. He did not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins or the people (Heb. 7:28). He sacrificed for our sins once and for all when He offered himself (Heb. 7:27).
- m. Jesus the High Priest is sitting at the right hand of God the Majesty in heaven (Heb. 8:1).
- n. Jesus serves in the sanctuary, the true Tabernacle set up by the Lord not by man (Heb. 8:2; Ps 110:1).
- o. Priests were to offer both gifts and sacrifices (Heb. 8:3). Jesus too must have something to offer (Heb. 8:3). Only the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year but Jesus, without blood. He offered himself for the sins of all men (Heb. 9:7). The priests stood and performed sacrifices day by day and again and again (Heb. 10:11).
- p. The Old Testament sacrifices did not take away sins (Heb. 10:11), but Jesus offered once and for all and had the glory of sitting at the right hand of God (Heb.

10:12). The blood of animals was for covering of sins in the Most Holy place (Heb. 13:11).

- q. Jesus is such a great High Priest of the house of God (Heb. 10:21). The blood of animals did not cleanse sins forever. But the blood of Jesus cleansed forever.¹¹⁴
- r. Death prevented many of those priests to continue in the office (Heb. 7:23). But Jesus, who is the opposite of the other high priests, offered himself for all (Heb. 7:27) and He remains forever.
- s. Jesus has made us a kingdom and priests to serve the Almighty God (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Believers will become priests during the second death and we will reign with Christ forever (Rev. 20:6). We will reign with Christ in the Temple the Lord had set for us as faithful witnesses of His glory.

Charles C. Ryrie has this to say concerning the Temple and the place of believers in terms of worship in the Temple.

Revelation 11:12 speaks of a Temple. John measured the Temple from the inner Temple or the Holy of Holies, the altar and the worshippers. These worshippers will be the faithful, believing Jews of the tribulation day. This Temple is the one which will be built in Jerusalem during the tribulation and in which ancient Jewish rites will be reinstated. It is apparently the same Temple in which the man of sin will seat himself

¹¹⁴ For an analysis on the blood of Jesus see Mary K. Baxter, *The Power of the Blood* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 2005).

demanding to be worshipped measuring itself seems to be an act of knowing, claiming or staking out. In this act of John, God is giving assurance that He will take note of those who faithfully worship Him in the tribulation days. This will occur during the last part of the tribulation when the man of sin overthrows Jewish worship and establishes his own. Thus the functioning worship of the Temple described in Revelation 11:1-2a occurs during the first part of the tribulation, while the treading down of the city by Gentiles (11:2b) follows during the last forty-two months.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 71-72.

CHAPTER SEVEN
PRIESTLY OFFICES AS REFLECTED IN
SPIRITUAL GIFTS

It is clear that our spiritual gifts in the Church, which are meant for ecclesiastical purposes, are products of the eternal priesthood which we have received in Jesus Christ. Becoming Christians open the gate for priestly dispositions. Christians are a community of priests in the Lord. There is no inequality in the priesthood and nothing like superiority in the priesthood; we only complement each other. As a result, we are a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4-5). I. M. Haldeman elaborated:

The church has been brought in in the stead of the law system. With the setting aside of the Jews is the setting aside of the priesthood on earth. The only High Priest is our Lord Jesus Christ and He exercises His office as such only in heaven. There is no warrant for any special class of priests in the church. All Christians as priests. They are spiritual priests. As priests all Christians as on a level with each other, no one Christian has a right to special prominence as a priest. Christians as a family of priests, each having the

same function as the other, and that is: 'to offer up spiritual sacrifices.'¹¹⁶

The Church needs ultimate strength from the Holy Spirit to enable her grow in power and deeds. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit bestowed upon us the spiritual gifts. Many people believe that some gifts are sign gifts and have ceased. The Pentecostal arm of the church believe all gifts are functional. There is the middle group. These ones are not sure and rally in the middle.¹¹⁷ I believe God should decide ceasing or continuity of the gifts and since it is the age of the Holy Spirit, God is putting the gifts for ecclesiastical growth in this generation. There are genuine gifts and there are fake ones.

Today the African Church, like the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 1:7), is filled with various spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit has given to the African Christians. Within this domination of spiritual gifts, the African Church is filled with grooves of spiritual men and women.

In the strictest sense, there are passages that give us clues concerning the spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11). Some of them are ministerial gifts. These passages tell

¹¹⁶ I. M. Haldeman, *The Tabernacle, Priesthood and Offerings* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell company, MCMXXV), 264-5.

¹¹⁷ Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* (Lagos: Jet move, 1999). Lloyd Edwards, *Discerning Your Spiritual Gifts* (Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 1988). John F. MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). J. Oswald Sanders, *The Holy Spirit and the Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940). Donald Macleod, *The Spirit of Promise* (Ross Shire: Christian Focus, 1988), 29-30.

us of the various gifts for the edification of the Church as outlined below;

- Apostles
- Prophets
- Evangelists
- Pastors
- Teachers: some believe that Paul mentioned “pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11)
- Wisdom
- Faith
- Healings
- Miraculous powers
- Discerning spirits
- Speaking in tongues
- Interpreting tongues
- Administration and leadership
- Helping others
- Serving others (Deacons, Acts 6)
- Showing mercy

It can be stated that every member of the African Church is unique with unique spiritual gift(s). That is why we do not function in the same office all of us but we are distributed to occupy different offices; hence, we are the body of Christ. Whatever we will do has to be done as unto the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 10:31). This gives us a better conception of service in the ministry as Dave Cave rightly puts it, “Every believer is a part of the house of the Lord with a duty and responsibility to play his or her part properly.”¹¹⁸

In the Levitical priesthood, we had the administrators, teaching priests, prophets as priests, Temple sweepers, Temple guards, Temple storekeepers, altar priests, singers

¹¹⁸ Cave, 30.

and all forms of priestly assistants etc. These are the types of priests who operated in that priesthood as we have today in our churches and ministries as the Lord decides within the eternal priesthood. All of these sets of people listed above need to understand that they are priests before they shared in the spiritual callings to serve the Lord within different capacities and vineyards. We need to redefine our scope of reality. We must pattern our lives to fit into the priestly pattern of service to be sacrificial as Jesus. We must state and configure our beliefs in partnership with the eternal priesthood of Jesus which is on the basis of oath and is eternal rather than that of Levi which brought death unto people.

1. Door Watchers

There were priests who stayed at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (Lev. 12:6). Eli the priest sat at the doorpost of the Temple at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:9). The priest Jehoiada stationed men to watch the Temple of the Lord (2 Kgs 11:18). The priests at the entrance were collecting the money (2 Kgs 12:9). Zephaniah the priest and the doorkeepers were all taken as prisoners (2 Kgs 25:18).

The work of the gatekeeper was to be a bouncer, guarding the ritual purity of the Temple area and making sure that the wrong sort of people did not get in (2 Chron. 23:19). Some of them looked after the storehouse and treasury in the Temple (1 Chron. 9:26-27).¹¹⁹ Today, these are the ushers who stand at the entrance door. The usher in the church should consider

¹¹⁹ Cave, 31.

himself a priest of the Lord. The ushers regulate the movement of people as it was with the door watchers in the Levitical priesthood. The Anglican Communion and some churches are strict on this that nobody goes in or out of the church during the ministration of the Word. These priests ensure that sanity is maintained in our fellowships and church meetings.

2. Altar Priests

These priests were responsible for adding firewood every morning to keep the fire burning (Lev. 6:12). They were responsible for preserving the glory and presence of God on the altar. These were like the pastors and the prayer squad members in our different churches or ministries today in the African church. They are the people who go ahead of the congregation to prepare and fuel the meeting environment or Church buildings before the congregation comes. It is significance for them to be active in the Church for they keep the fire burning and make the services or meetings relevant to the lives of people.

3. The High Priest

Aaron, the brother of Moses, had been traditionally called the first High Priest (Lev 21:10; Num. 35:25, 28; Ezra 7:1-5). Only those of the line of the eldest descendants of Aaron could serve as High Priest, and a man's position in the hierarchy of holiness was determined from birth. In Numbers 25:10-13, we see the descendants of Phinehas (Aaron's grandson) are

promised a "covenant of eternal priesthood," which was a reference to a right into the office of High Priest.

The importance of the High Priest's office manifested. The High Priest Eleazar (Aaron's son) is named in the first rank with Joshua, the prince of the tribes and successor of Moses (Num. 34:17; Josh 14:1). With others, he officiated in the distribution of the spoils of the Midianites (Num. 31:21, 26). He acted with Moses in important matters (26:1; 31:29). The whole congregation had to go or come according to his word (27:20). The High Priest's death was a national event, for then the man-slayer was free to leave the city of refuge (35:25, 28). The High Priest was to sacrifice on the day of appointment for service (Lev. 7:35). He made atonement for all the priests and the people (Lev. 16:33). Only anointed and ordained priest was to be made High Priest (Lev. 16:32).

The office of the High Priest is considered to be a postexilic office; hence, the book of Ezekiel did not mention it. But Ezekiel's silence also on kingship does not imply that Israel did not have a king. It can also be said that lack of mention of the office of the High Priest in the book of Ezekiel does not mean the office was not in existence before the exile.

Men served in the Levitical priesthood as shadows of the role of Jesus in the eternal priesthood. Joshua the High Priest was being accused by Satan and delivered by the Lord (Zech. 3:1). The priest was to make atonement and the Lord will hear (Lev. 4:20, 26; 5:8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18; 6:6). The High Priest must not allow his hair unkempt or tear his garments (Lev. 21:10). Jesus is the only High Priest of the Church. No man should

carry such title in the Church today as some pastors are attempting to call themselves High Priests.

4. Priestly Assistants

The Levites were to be assistants to Aaron (Num. 3:6). Some priests were the ones mixing the spices (1 Chron. 9:30). They assisted with various works in the Temple. The Levites were the assistants of the priests. Today, we have also adopted the concept of assistant pastors. Many people have questioned the idea of assistant or associate pastors and senior pastors. The idea was quite developed when there were less churches with many trained pastors. Mostly, the younger pastors attain higher education more than the older ones. However, the idea came that one should stay under and learn the nature of the work in practical terms. It is then clear to state that the Levites were experts in assistantship not on the basis that they were undergoing training before someday they can be promoted to the priestly positions. Some churches or ministries have assistants to the pastors or personal assistants in the real sense who are not into the pastoral line but they assist the pastors in the offices administratively. For example, the Anglican Communion calls them Curates but most times, the Curates are also pastors. In the American society, senior pastors can become assistant pastors. In 2015 while in Michigan, I met a senior pastor, who because he was growing older, decided with God's conviction to become an assistant pastor and allow the junior pastor to take the leadership of pastoring the Church. I think the African Church needs to adjust her priestly role in the leadership of the Church that our senior

pastors should accept such and also the junior pastors need to learn the humility involved.

5. The Sanctuary Priests

The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest (Num. 4:16). He was a leader appointed over those who take care of the sanctuary. He was in charge of the oil, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering, the anointing oil, entire Tabernacle and the holy furnishings and articles. Also, Johanan was a priest in the Temple of Solomon (1 Chron. 6:10). The Jews installed the priests and the Levites for service in the Temple according to the Law (Ezra 6:20). It was an order that whatever the priests requested for the work of the Lord must be given them without reservation (Ezra 6:9).

There were those who were to take care of the Temple. They ensure everything was moving well. They were responsible for the Temple area in terms of sanity and sanctity. We also have people who take care of the Church building or the meeting places. They ensure everywhere is clean and conducive for everybody as we meet to worship God. However, mostly they are not recognised and regarded by the church. I have learned that greeting them while they work, gives them more grace and make them have audacity to do the work effectively. I most times like to recognize with them. God knows them all.

6. Temple Singers

The word “singers” can be best translated musicians as it can mean those who compose as well as those who perform music

or sing songs. There were singers and instrumentalists in the Temple. The Lord instructed that the priests were to blow the trumpets (Num. 10:8). Phinehas held the articles from the sanctuary and the trumpets. These articles were;

1. for signalling during battle,
2. calling people to assemble,
3. and to accompany the worship (Num. 10:1-10; 31:6).

In the days of Joshua, priests were to carry trumpets and blow them (Josh. 6:4). Some priests were to blow the trumpets and some to be doorkeepers of the Ark (1 Chron. 15:24). Asaph was made lead-singer by King David (1 Chron. 16:4-5) and his descendants who were made singers and cymbal players.

During feast of unleavened bread, the Levites and the priests would sing every day for the Lord (2 Chron. 30:21). Priests were assigned by Hezekiah;

1. to burn offerings,
2. to minister,
3. to give thanks,
4. and to sing praises before the Lord (2 Chron. 31:2).

When the foundation of the second Temple was laid after the exile, it was necessary for them to assume their offices. The priests and the Levites took their places to praise the Lord (Ezra 3:10). The older priests wept aloud while the younger ones were rejoicing when they saw the foundation being laid (Ezra 3:12). Also, the priests, the Levites and the singers and Temple servants all settled in their own land (Ezra 2:70).

There were cymbals which were made up of copper and banged together in the Temple to denote beginnings, pauses, and endings of chapters of psalms being sung (1 Chron. 15:19). Ryrie also added to the understanding of the musical instruments used by the priests such as the trumpets, its functions and as depicted in the book of Revelation.

Revelation mentions four angels with four trumpets. There was an appearance of an angel whose function was like that of a priest. Some people said it was Christ, our High Priest. Other said it was an angel but the function described here cannot be undertaken by an angel. He adds incense to the prayers of the saints that ascend before God. Though the imagery is of the tabernacle worship, the meaning is now apparent in light of the finished work of Christ. The incense is the sweet savour of His life and work which gives efficiency to the prayers of the saints. This might be the same angel that sounded the first trumpet which will bring fire mingled with blood. So is clear with the remaining of the trumpets.¹²⁰

7. Administrative Priests

The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest (Num. 4:16). He was a leader appointed over those who take care of the sanctuary. He was in charge of the oil,

¹²⁰ Ryrie, 56-59

the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering, the anointing oil, entire Tabernacle and the holy furnishings and articles.

Priests had and stayed in offices during their duties (Deut. 26:3). Eleazar was part of the team with Joshua who allocated the land to the people (Num. 34:17; Josh. 14:1). The Levites knew of Eleazar's administrative duties and approached him concerning their allocations (Josh. 21:1).

During the reign of the kings, priests were heads of 1,760 members and were able men to minister before the Lord (1 Chron. 9:13). Jehoiada was the chief priest (2 Chron. 24:6, 11) and Azariah was a chief priest (2 Chron. 26:20; 30:10). The idea of chief priest carries the force of leadership, more of administration, within the priesthood particularly in the New Testament. It carries the sense of administration or governance among the priests and the people.

The priests were to be faithful in the distribution of the towns for both young and old alike (2 Chron. 31:15). Caiaphas had a palace as a High Priest where he used to decide cases (Matt. 26:3). Chief priests and elders assembled in the palace of the High Priest (Matt. 26:3; Mk 14:53). A good number of priests and Levites served as administrators throughout the Bible as we have seen reflections like chief priests, heads and the High Priests.

We have chief administrators today in the Church and our ministries. We have heads and coordinators who ensure things are moving well in the house of God. They ensure that the vision of the organization is adhered to. They mobilize people to work hard and serve faithfully under the leadership

of the Spirit. They form the engine and control room for the churches and ministries.

8. Temple Sweepers

There were cleaners and sweepers in the Temple. Some priests were responsible for the upkeep of the environment and inside the Temple. There were priests who removed all the articles of Baal in the house of the Lord (2 Kgs 23:4). We read that the priests went to purify the sanctuary (2 Chron. 29:16). This, I am sure, was the work of the Levites for they were responsible for assisting with work in the Temple. Today we have the Temple or Church building sweepers who ensure the surrounding of the Church building is kept clean. They clean and dust the seats and the altars to ensure the sanity and sanctity of the place of worship. These sweepers are usually considered the least in the Church and they are mostly widows who have believed that is their contribution to the body of Christ. They are, most times, not even recognize because they do not have “tangible gifts or offerings” to give to the pastors in the Church. However, these are those who give their widow’s might. I tell you the truth, most of these sweepers will rejoice at the feet of Abraham, Moses and Jesus on the Last Day while such dignified people in the churches will be far less significant to the Lord Jesus Christ or might miss the glorious heaven.

9. Teaching Priests

Among the works of the priests, teaching of the Law carried the most significance place; for without an understanding of

the Law, the people would not know what to do when they have sinned or when they want to praise God or how to mingle with people in the society. It was the duty of the priests to relate such information that concerned the Law. Without knowledge of the Word, God's people would perish (Hos. 4:6).

During the reign of kings, Adonijah expected Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest to tell him good news (1 Kgs 1:42). Jehoiada the priest, instructed Joash in the counsel of the Lord (2 Kgs 12:2). Hilkiah found the book of the Law in the Temple of the Lord (2 Kgs 22:10). The chronicler summarized it that Israel, for a long time, stayed with God and the priests were teaching the people the Law (2 Chron. 15:3). Jehoshaphat ordered Israel to listen to Amaziah the chief priest on the things of the Lord (2 Chron. 19:11).

It was necessary for the priests to have their portions so they can devote themselves to the study of the Law (2 Chron. 31:4). They were not to be concerned with the things of the world so that they can concentrate on the Word as it was in the days of the apostles (Acts 6:4). Their task was to study and teach the people. But when they sinned, Ezekiel prophesied that the teaching of the priest will be lost (Ezek. 7:26) which was the opposite of the idea as stated under Jeremiah, the word of the priest will not be lost (Jer. 18:18).

As observed above, the exile and the return witnessed an advanced form of Torah studies and teaching with priest Ezra as a leading scribe and teacher even in the exile. Ezra was a priest and a teacher of the Law (Ezra 7:11, 12, 21). When he returned, he brought the Law of Moses and read before the

people (Neh. 8:2). The Governor, Ezra the priest and scribe and the Levites instructed the people (Neh. 8:9; 12:26); hence, the lips of the priest ought to preserve knowledge and instruction (Mal. 2:7). Ezra put the leading priests under oaths to comply with the Word of God (Ezra 10:5).

The Christian teachers or lecturers are the teaching priests of our generation whether in the seminaries, public schools, colleges and universities particularly those who teach Christian Religious Studies or the Bible and theology. Teaching finds its way into the hearts of people when the teacher of the Word is informed about the Word and can apply it accurately. He/she stands in the gap between the people and their ignorance before God. Teaching means influencing a generation of priests unto Jesus. It means setting up right intentions and values for a generation. To God be the glory, I am a teaching priest. For a period of 10 years, I have understood the logistics involved in the unique passing of knowledge to people believing they can also go and relate such information to others. With or without pay, some of us have surrendered our lives to the Master to serve as teaching priests. The people look unto us for proper direction from God's Word. This is why we (teaching priests) have to be careful with what we pass to our students and in the Church in order to avoid misunderstanding of information taught in the classroom, outside the classroom or in the Church setting. The teaching priests set the pace for a couple of beliefs of doctrine for a generation. They are

foundational in setting forth values to all categories of priests in the body of Christ.

10. Prophesying Priests

In ancient Israel, the office of the priest differs from that of prophet in such a way that instead of representing God to man, the priest represents man to God. The prophets concerns himself with relating man to God and God to man. The priest's purpose is to restore men to fellowship with God who is justly angry with man for man's rebellion and rejection of the truth. The priest does this by the sacrifice as substitute for man and he makes atonement, and by intercession on man's behalf.

However, there are instances the priesthood was linked with the prophetic office in ancient Israel in the Bible. There were people who were from the descendants of Levi and had the privilege to serve as prophets and some were not but engaged in offering sacrifices. They were prophesying priest.

- a. Aaron was a priest and was made a prophet and performed the duties of a prophet (Exo. 7:1).
- b. Samuel served as a priest and a prophet (1 Sam. 3:1-15). He offered sacrifices (1 Sam. 10:8).
- c. In the conquest on Mount Carmel, Elijah who was a great Old Testament prophet offered sacrifices, a duty designated for priests (1 Kgs 18:36).
- d. Zadok the priest was also a seer (2 Sam. 15:27).
- e. Prophet Jeremiah was also a priest from Anathoth (Jer. 1:1) yet he served in the prophetic office (Jer. 37:3).

- f. Ezekiel the priest received the Word of the Lord (Ezek. 1:3) and served as a prophet throughout his life.
- g. Caiaphas the High Priest prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation (Jn 11:51).

The binding nexus has been in their abilities to receive from the Lord for the holiness of the society. They were the ones the Lord has endowed with the ability to receive from Him and declare to the people. It is clear that it started with Aaron who served in both the offices. This has relevance to the teaching position in the priesthood. The prophesying priests were to relate the message of God to the people and also to offer sacrifices. They were to listen to the mind of God and relate it to people; and listen to the minds of the people and relate them to God. They were to stand in the gap between God and the people. They were to present men before God and to be prophetic midwives of the people; to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people and to plead the cases between God and the people.

By implication, in this dispensation of grace that Jesus has died for us, every prophet is a priest. The prophetic office cannot function without the priesthood. Only the prophets could rebuke the priests for the people could not bring accusations against the priests (Hos. 4:4). We have prophets today because they are already priests in the Lord Jesus. Our position as sons of God should help inform us of the position of service to the Lord.

11. Collectors of offerings

There were priests who were to collect money and to repair the Temple (2 Kgs 12:5) but did not do the work (v. 7). This was accomplished by the priests at the entrance who were collecting the money (2 Kgs 12:9). Hilkiah the priest was asked to submit the daily money collected at the entrance (2 Kgs 22:4). Jehoiada took a chest with lids and placed it and the secretary and High Priest could gather all the money and put them into the bags (2 Sam. 12:7-10). There were priests whose works were collecting offerings in the Temple or sanctuary just like the Church ushers who collect the offerings during the Church meetings. This is a service unto the Lord. It is honourable and demands faithfulness. We must handle God's money with faithfulness and all sincerity knowing fully that the Lord sees and will judge on the Last Day and that rewards await those who are faithful in handling God's resources. We shall give account of every unauthorized penny which belongs to the Lord.

12. Temple Guards

There were Temple guards in the days of the first Temple. The election of these guards was by lots which resulted to 24 divisions (1 chronicles 26:1ff).

- a. the first lot, which was for Asaph, fell to Joseph his sons and relatives
- b. the second to Gedaliah, he and his relatives and sons
the third to Zaccur, his sons and relatives
- c. the fourth to Izri, his sons and relatives
- d. the fifth to Nethaniah, his sons and relatives

- e. the sixth to Bukkiah, his sons and relatives
- f. the seventh to Jesarelah, his sons and relatives
- g. the eighth to Jeshaiiah, his sons and relatives
- h. the ninth to Mattaniah, his sons and relatives
- i. the tenth to Shimei, his sons and relatives
- j. the eleventh to Azarel, his sons and relatives
- k. the twelfth to Hashabiah, his sons and relatives
- l. the thirteenth to Shubael, his sons and relatives
- m. the fourteenth to Mattithiah, his sons and relatives
- n. the fifteenth to Jerimoth, his sons and relatives
- o. the sixteenth to Hananiah, his sons and relatives
- p. the seventeenth to Joshbekashah, his sons and relatives
- q. the eighteenth to Hanani, his sons and relatives
- r. the nineteenth to Mallothi, his sons and relatives
- s. the twentieth to Eliathah, his sons and relatives
- t. the twenty-first to Hothir, his sons and relatives
- u. the twenty-second to Giddalti, his sons and relatives
- v. the twenty-third to Mahazioth, his sons and relatives
- w. the twenty-fourth to Romanti-Ezer, his sons and relatives

The guards at the Temple bore their shields (1 Kgs 14:28). The guards were all stationed with weapons near the altar and the Temple (2 Kgs 11:11). Jehoida stationed guards to the Temple of the Lord (1 Kgs 11:18).

There were guards in the Temple after the exile. In the days of Jesus, the chief priests instructed the Temple guards

(Jn 7:32) and they reported and were accused of not being able to arrest Jesus (Jn 7:45).

Our generation should have Temple guards. We have security-men who stand to watch over the worship area. We have the watchmen and women who spiritually watch over the wellbeing of people and the spiritual life of the society and the nations of the earth. It is very sad that most of the security-men today employed are drunkards and are less interested in the things of God. Being security-men is part of the priesthood. They are supposed to be priests of the Lord. I am with the opinion that born-again people should be employed to serve within this category of priesthood as the priests of old who served as Temple watchers or guards. This reflects what the crusaders and knights in the Early Church and during the Medieval Ages did to protect the dignity of the Church. Many lost their lives to defend the Church from Islamic invaders of those centuries. But today the office of the knights has been so commercialized and politicized.

13. Temple Builders

In regard to the accessibility to the sacred furniture, the Levites were allowed to approach the furniture only when it was covered (Num. 18:3). In the days of Uriah the priest, he was given a sketch of altar from Damascus and he built it for the Lord (2 Kgs 16:10-15). After the return from the exile, Jeshua son of Jozadak and the priests began to build the altar of the Lord and to offer sacrifices (Ezra 3:2). Eliashib the priest and the priests went and rebuilt the sheep gate (Neh. 3:1). The priests repaired from the surrounding region of Eliashib's

house (Neh. 3:22). They repaired the wall close to their houses (Neh. 3:28).

To build the Temple was the work of the priests. Today, the priests should be in-charge of building the sanctuary or Church buildings. Unfortunately, the builders today of our places of worship and other constructions are not even Christians. They are unbelievers of all kinds. We need to ensure that people who build for us should be Christians (priests) in the New Covenant.

14. Shop and Storehouses' Keepers

The sense of rebuilding of the Temple geared the reforms that took place in the days of Nehemiah particularly the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem and some other social reforms. It was necessary to have a storehouse and have keepers to guard those houses. This kind of work required integrity and trustworthiness. Nehemiah puts trustworthy men Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, the Levite Pedaiah in charge of the storehouse (Neh. 13:13).

But because Eliashib was very close to Tobiah (who was not a Jew and a member of the opposition), the storeroom for the holy things of God was given to Tobiah by Eliashib the High Priest. This room was a store for grain offerings, incense, Temple articles, tithes of grains, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers and contributions for the priests (Neh. 13:5).

Having a store house in the Church is an old priestly idea. Although many churches do not have storehouses. I am with the opinion that we should have one in our churches. It was

from the storehouses that the poor were fed. Their needs were met from the treasury in the house of God. These was more what we have today as welfare departments in our churches and ministries. But whether we are faithful in administering this welfare is a thing of concern. We have to avoid what happened in the Early Church when the issues of impartiality that came up between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews (Acts 6). There is a need to gather and dispose what was gathered to the desperate, IDPs and needy in the society. The churches and ministries should think of having storehouses and place faithful men and women to monitor and be in-charge of those storehouses in order to cater for the needy in the society particularly after crises and violence in the African society.

15. Temple Servants

The 'servants' were regarded as some of the least important of the Temple staff and it was their job to help the Levites (Ezra 8:20). The names of the Temple servants listed here suggest that most, if not all, were not of Jewish origin. They may well be the group prophet Ezekiel was talking about when he accused Israel of allowing uncircumcised foreigners into the Temple (Ezek. 44:7). There were Egyptians (Ziha), Syrian (Rezin), Babylonian (Besai), Arabian (Meunim and Nephussim), Edomite (Barkos), and Illyrian (Sisera) (Ezra 2:43-53).¹²¹

¹²¹ Dave, 31.

In Ezra 2:55, the word 'servants' is the Hebrew word for slaves who were obtained in the Old Testament. People got slaves through:

- Capture in times of war (Gen. 14:21)
- Purchase (Gen. 17:12-13, 27)
- Failure to pay debts and fines (Exo. 22:3; 2 Kgs 4:1; Neh. 5:5, 8)
- Kidnapping as Joseph was kidnapped by his brothers (Gen. 37:27-28).
- People selling themselves or members of their families willfully into slavery to escape poverty, in the knowledge that they would be set free eventually under the requirements of the Law of Jubilee (Lev. 25:39-43).¹²²

Some of the priests served the sons of Solomon. Everything done in the Lord should be considered a service. The Lord has placed men and women who would stand for the truth and serve faithfully. It is our service that would gather our rewards when Jesus comes.

¹²² Cave, 31-32.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AFRICAN CHRISTIANS AND THE PRIESTHOOD

1. The Cross and the Eternal Priesthood

The idea of eternal priesthood began with Melchizedek who was a priest of the Most High (Gen. 14:18). Melchizedek blessed Abraham (Heb. 7:1). His name means “king of righteousness” (Heb. 7:2). As we have stated above, he was without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life just like Jesus (Heb. 7:3). Melchizedek remained a priest forever like the Son of man (Heb. 7:3).

The Psalmist underscored this in reference to Jesus when he said, “You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). The priesthood of Jesus was made visible in conceived manner in a symbolic form when Joshua being the symbol of the Branch to come (Zech. 3:8) was considered by the Lord. This prophetic standard in reference to the Branch was clear and the whole idea was to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus. One sees that a crown of gold and silver was prepared for Joshua the priest (Zech. 6:11). This inaugurated in clear terms the framework of the priesthood and that there will be an everlasting throne in the priesthood (Zech. 6:13) which got fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

When Jesus came, He acknowledged His divine role as a priest when He engaged in all aspects of priesthood adopting the various priestly duties. Although Jesus descended from Judah (Heb. 7:14), He is being made Apostle and High Priest

which we confess today (Heb. 3:1). God made him a High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6, 10; 7:17). Jesus was not a Levite but became a High Priest to inaugurate a Kingdom of priesthood that broke the usual and opened the gate for all of us to become priests. This was accomplished when He went to the cross of Calvary for our sins.

Jesus was to be made a merciful and faithful High Priest in service unto God and to make atonement for sins (Heb. 2:17). Jesus is the great High Priest who had gone through the heavens (Heb. 4:15) yet He did not take the glory of becoming a High Priest (Heb. 5:5).

The Levitical priesthood did not bring perfection (Heb. 7:11). There was a need for the one who will bring perfection not in the order of Aaron but of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:11). The appearance of another priest like Melchizedek made what was said in the word clearer (Heb. 7:15).

Jesus became a priest not on the basis of a regulation but the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16). He became a priest through oath by God's promise (Heb. 7:21).

Jesus' priesthood meets our needs daily (Heb. 7:28). Jesus' priesthood is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens (Heb. 7:26). He did not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and the sins of the people (Heb. 7:28). He sacrificed for our sins once and for all when He offered Himself (Heb. 7:27). Jesus went in before us and on our behalf (Heb. 6:20). Anderson added that:

If then God desired to teach the truth that,
although the high-priest's sacrificial duties were

typical of Calvary, the type would not be fulfilled by Christ in virtues of His priesthood was it possible, in that religion of ritual and of ceremonial ordinances, to teach it with greater, with more dramatic emphasis than by commanding Aaron to divest himself of his high-priestly garments until the sacrificial rites of the day had been accomplished.¹²³

The law appointed priests; men who were weak but the oath appointed the Son the perfect One forever (Heb. 7:28). With such understanding, Steve Motyer observed:

Before God, the Son, is made perfect, that is, he fulfils his ministry perfectly, because he has been through a process that has united him with us and enabled him fully to represent God to humanity, and humanity to God, and as one of us he died our death and has returned 'behind the veil' into the very presence of God.¹²⁴

Priests are to offer both gifts and sacrifices (Heb. 8:3). Jesus too must have something to offer (Heb. 8:3). Jesus serves in the sanctuary, the true Tabernacle set up by the Lord not by man (Heb. 8:2). Jesus was not from the earth and is not qualified for priesthood according to the law (Heb. 8:4) but by virtue of divine inauguration.

¹²³ Anderson, 36.

¹²⁴ Steve Motyer, *Discovering Revelation* (Leicester: Crossway Books, 2005), 94-95.

Jesus received a higher priestly ministry in the New Covenant (Heb. 8:5). The word translated 'new' means "new in quality" not "new in time." This covenant is superior to all the covenants of the Old Testament because it is obtained from the cross, ministered by a superior High Priest, ministered in a better place and founded on better promises of grace, internal change, forgiveness for all and eternal blessings.

Only the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year and without blood He offered Himself for the sins of all men (Heb. 9:7) unlike the priests who stood and performed sacrifices day by day and again and again (Heb. 10:11). Jesus went into the Temple that is not of this creation (Heb. 9:11).

Jesus is such a great High Priest of the house of God (Heb. 10:21). Jesus is the opposite of the other high priests for He offered Himself for all on the cross (Heb. 7:27).

- a. Jesus had a superior title which was above that of the high priests.
- b. He had a superior ordination which could not be compared to any.
- c. Jesus reveals a superior sympathy.
- d. Jesus Christ offered a superior sacrifice, Himself.

Within these, Warren W. Wiersbe observed, "Christ the Great High Priest is superior to Aaron. It would be foolish for anyone to return to the inferiorities of the old Law when he could enjoy the superiorities of Jesus Christ."¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Wiersbe, *Be Confident*, 57.

The Old Testament sacrifices did not take away sins (Heb. 10:11) but Jesus offered once and for all through His death on the cross and had the glory of sitting at the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12).

- a. Christ's sacrifices take away sin (Heb. 10:1-10)
- b. Christ's sacrifices need not be repeated (Heb. 10:11-18)
- c. Christ's sacrifices open the way to God (Heb. 10:19-39).

2. True Christians as Priests

The promise for our priesthood came as earlier as the time of Moses. It could be said that it has been the agenda of God since the creation of the earth and the heavens (Gen. 1:1). It came during the time of Moses when the Lord promised that Israel would become a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exo. 19:6).

The coming of Christ inaugurated this eternal priesthood and made us shareholders of God's righteousness and love. His coming and His death inaugurated an eternal phase of priesthood whose force is the oath of the New Covenant. Jesus became the great High Priest and ushered all of us to be priests, breaking all priestly protocols, and introducing all of us into the priesthood by adoption. We now take the mandate of Christ, taking our sins and those of men to God in an opened air sanctuary.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ David Foster Estes, "Priesthood in the New Testament" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. all right reserved. *PC Study Bible V5*.

We see Paul exhorted the Romans to present their bodies "a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1), and Peter calls Christians "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices" (1 Peter 2:5). These ideas eradicated the beliefs of a mediator. In ancient times it was held that men in general could not have direct access to God, that any approach to Him must be mediated by some member of the class of priests, who alone could approach God, and who must accordingly be employed by other men to represent them before Him. This whole conception vanishes in the light of Christianity.

Our relationship with Christ has opened the door for all believers to have direct access to God and priestly privileges. Every believer is a priest in his own right. The New Testament clearly gives the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

Jesus accomplished priestly right's extension through His sacrificial death and tearing the curtain of the most Holy Place and giving all of us access to the inner room. Thus Christ established symbolic sacrifice among the Old Testament people of God as a type of what He would accomplish in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4; Heb. 9).¹²⁷

Christ's sacrifice was for purification of sins, sanctification, and to perfect the believers. Affirming this Timothy Palmer stated, "The death of Christ, then, purifies, sanctifies and perfects the believer."¹²⁸ Jesus has made us a kingdom of priests to serve the Almighty God (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Believers will reign with Christ forever (Rev. 20:6). This is the

¹²⁷ Estes, *PC Study Bible V5*.

¹²⁸ Palmer, *Theology of the New Testament*, 133-134.

hope we have in the Lord that someday, those who will be left and during the Second death, Christ will make us become fully like Him and we will reign eternally with Him. Jesus is the Chief Priest of the Church and we are all serving priests under his leadership as long as we become Christians.

3. Priesthood and Bond Service

Priesthood should prompt us into service unto the Lord. This work was composed in its initial stage as a teaching paper to enlighten staff of Throneroom (Trust) Ministry on the importance of the priesthood. Throneroom is used here as a symbol to the entire body of Christ. This section is not meant just to make staff of Throneroom understand their priestly roles in service but it is a call for the entire Church of Jesus. This would influence our service as we serve as bond slaves of the Lord believing that the Lord will reward us someday.

Throneroom (Trust) Ministry is sampled here. This is a ministry birthed out of a vision of being an international prophetic and watchman ministry. It aims at “preparing the way for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and helping Christians attain the standards of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹²⁹ The motto has been “Raising a Nation of Priests unto Jesus.” This needs to be understood in the Church and that it is our duty as a church to raise priests that would stand for Jesus in the nations.

¹²⁹ Throneroom Trust Ministry INC, Vision and Working Manual for Staff, 2.

The following are the vision and mission of the Ministry as clearly restated by the Visioneer, Apostle Emmanuel N. Kure in 2014:

Vision

1. Restraining the hand of the enemy for the kingdom of God to be established and to prosper. 2 Thess. 2:7-9; Isa. 59:19
2. Planting churches amongst unreached people groups. Matt. 28:18-20
3. Giving direction to the body of Christ in the evil day. Ezekiel 3:17; Ezekiel 33:1-8
4. An apostolic centre for the gathering of the voices that raise standards in the last days. Acts 4:24; Isa. 56:10; Isa. 2:2-3; Daniel 4:17; Malachi 3:16; Job 22:28

Mission

1. To create a Nation of Priests that will hold back the hand of Satan. Psalm 102:18
2. To tilt Nations, peoples and individuals to fulfill prophecy. Lk. 21:22; 36
3. To fulfill the Ministry of the Watchman. Isa. 62:6-10; Hab. 2:1-2
4. To help all men experience the love of God.

It is a prayer ministry given to Apostle Emmanuel N. Kure for over 25 years now. It was not easy for the Ministry to survive in the midst of intense orthodox movement in Kafanchan and Southern Kaduna entirely. It has endured hardship and suffering. It has endured persecution from within and people called it with different names. Starting the

Ministry was not easy for Apostle Kure but the faithfulness of the Lord preserved it. Apostle Kure's persistence and toughness made the Ministry to force itself even when people did not want its existence in Kafanchan and the nations of the earth. Some of us in the brim of its establishment and growth might not understand the pains and segregation the Visioneer endured. We see great achievements and most times do not reflect on the various strives he has endured to enable the Ministry to grow a tap root.

But it was for this reason that the Ministry was started. Some of us are happy with the Ministry now without a reflection of the past and how it struggled to take shape in the midst of human despair. Apostle Kure has crossed the river with the back and he rode on mountains and toiled in tears to ensure that the will of the Lord is done in this nation and the nations of the earth. For me, it is for this that we, in this generation, must not allow the Ministry be in shamble. We must never do anything that would be contrary to the will of God for this Ministry if we really underscore the effort and pains it took the leader to start and develop its frontiers.

The calling has been;

to be watchmen over nations, tilting them to fulfill God's eternal programme for them... to watch over the Church, to make her fulfill her role in prophecy and prepare her by the Holy

Spirit for rapture...fulfill or be caused to fulfill
prophecy on individuals and nations...¹³⁰

This is to be achieved through prophetic prayers actions, stepping upon grounds to be broken and calling forth what ought to be into existence and deterring what ought not to be. Also, it was to function through prophetic evangelism and mission, creating storehouses to keep the Church alive, prophetic medical evangelism, prophetic and social outreaches the Holy Spirit shows us, throneline Telephone prayer and counselling lines, retreat camp and prophetic prayer conferences, prophetic prayer school and Throneroom publications and bookshops.¹³¹

It has given people appointments (missionary and non-missionary staff). It has a code of conduct which have been spelt out and expected that all staff and associates will abide and glorify God as we serve in this painfully established but successful Ministry over the years. It is stated that the Ministry will not condone a:

...lifestyle which is contrary to the confession as a Christian with an ungodly character and exhibition acts of misconduct, dishonesty, drunkenness, taking illegal drugs, unauthorized disclosure of official information, falsehood, truancy, insubordination, negligence of duty, fornication, adultery, polygamy, conviction of a criminal offense, fraud, embezzlement,

¹³⁰ Vision and Working Manual for Staff, 3.

¹³¹ Vision and Working Manual for Staff, 4.

involvement in secret cults, heresies and any other acts of gross misconduct would face disciplinary measures.¹³²

These are Christian tenets; imbibe in the staff manual and expected that all staff and associates will abide by them. But some of us have neglected this truth and adopted our own ways. The motto has been “Raising a Nation of Priests unto Jesus.” But whether many of us understand this concept of priesthood in the Bible as applied to the Christian life particularly Throneroom (Trust) Ministry is a matter of concern in this generation of membership.

In view of the things mentioned in the vision and working manual for staff of the Ministry, from my observations and interactions, I doubt if some of us (members and workers) in this generation have clearly understood what it means to raise a nation of priests unto Jesus when the Ministry was started.

Many Christians have had our hands soiled up in so many of these acts which the Ministry and the Christian faith forbid as workers. We have become victims in almost all dimensions of these societal vices which Throneroom Trust Ministry as a Ministry will not condone. We have violated the rules and norms which is the framework of holiness intensity. We have become like dogs in the societies as our stories are being told and retold with all sincerity of tension in the society.

¹³² Vision and Working Manual for Staff, 13.

I want to say that I have not lived enough to know the ways of Throneroom Trust Ministry, but I have lived long enough to know that the ways of staff of Throneroom Trust Ministry and Christianity generally must change. I have lived long enough to know that most of us do not have a clear-cut understanding of the vision of Throneroom which the leader received from the Lord at the incipient stage. I have lived long enough to know that there is need to change our mentality towards the original vision given to the founder of the Ministry and to change our positions in the priesthood and as prophetic midwives to pattern our lives as priests unto Jesus as we are serving in His vineyard, Throneroom Trust Ministry.

Despite that, the Lord has a good number of true priests of the Lord in the Ministry and the church generally. As a biblical pattern in the Old Testament, God always had faithful remnants. There are men and women who have neglected the ways and pattern of this world and are seeking the mending of the dignity of the priesthood in the lives of people in Nigeria and the nations of the earth. Throneroom Trust Ministry has been influencing the lives of men and women, young and old, and revealing the divine love of Christ in totality as Jesus extended in absolute and saturated level of divine ministry. A survey of the socio-economic and religious impacts of Throneroom Trust Ministry is in a paper I presented at the Nigeria Pentecostal and Charismatic

Conference, held in Abuja in May, 2014 at Divine-Love Retreat and Conference Centre (DRACC).¹³³

Most Christians in Christian organizations or churches or government are working for food because our laxity in service speaks and sheds light on this count as the priests in the days of Judges and Amaziah in Bethel. The bonding of Jesus is not quite applicable to our lives. The relationship with the Saviour is shakeable. We have refused to allow our religion to be transformed into a relationship with Jesus. We are supposed to be slaves to righteousness but we have become slaves to ungodliness (cf. Rom. 6). No wonder we are subject to fear of losing our jobs as pastors and priests of the Lord everywhere we are serving. Working in the Church and Christian organizations have become like any other place or organizations or parastatals. It should be a service as bond slaves of the Lord here on earth. We should serve in humility and in the power of the Lord.

But some of us have subjected their thoughts to accumulations rather than releasing for the service of God. We usually forget that our ministries or churches are not just ordinary vineyards. I have learned the ways of workers of ministries and churches by observation and interaction. I discovered that only a few understand the spiritual ways of

¹³³ Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, "The Influence of the Pentecostals on Youths in Mainline Churches: Throneroom Trust Ministry Unveiled" https://www.academia.edu/8399963/THE_INFLUENCE_OF_PENTECOSTAL_MOVEMENTS_ON_YOUTHS_IN_MAINLINE_CHURCHES_THRONEROOM_TRUST_MINISTRY_UNVEILED/

priesthood in Jesus. No wonder we have become men-pleasers. I thereby call for a bond service as bond slaves of the Master who is in heaven as we serve here on the face of the earth. This is genuine test of our priesthood as we live and serve in the divine priesthood of Jesus. I urge you to serve as if you do not have another opportunity.

4. A Call to Revisit the Eternal Priestly Framework

Since we are all priests with Christ as our High Priest, we need to pattern our lives in the life of the Old Testament priests and of the Early Church by praying and taking the mandate of divine priesthood as Christ laid in His priestly pattern. We need to understand that Christ has made us priests and He is the High Priest. We are co-workers with Him in the divine priesthood. We are to offer spiritual offerings and sacrifices of ourselves unto the Lord (Rom. 12:1-3; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 1 Pet. 2:4-5). Spiritual gifts are products of this divine priesthood. You function in the body through your gift(s) because you are priest.

If not that God is with us and His glory is revealed in the life of some who are called “men of God” and “men from God”, the glory of the Lord would have left our various churches in Africa. Thank God, for their still men and women of God and from God who still work for the extension of the Kingdom. If not for the covenant made with God that our altars would be places that God will answer the prayers of those who come seeking for help as it was in the days of Solomon (2 Chron. 6:40), most of us would have become

victim and have fallen into the errors of the sons of the Jewish priest Sceva (Acts 19:13-16).

I am sure that almost all of us as priests are vehemently aware of the “comments and remarks” from the wider society about what we do and outside our ministries or churches when we are in “our closets.” There are societal exclamations concerning us and the ministries or churches in which we serve or worship and I believe we are or probably fully aware of those societal remarks that deter our integrity and growth as priests and midwives of Jesus. Do such attitudes fit the priestly calling in Christ Jesus? We need a rethink for a better life.

Most pastors are living on past glory. We are living based on anointing. It is the oil that is still speaking for us. The Lord has cast some out and are only living for food. Our place has been prophesied and fulfilled as the position of Judas Iscariot as an apostle (Ps 69:25; 109:8; Acts 1:20). We call ourselves anointed apostles but; do we do what the apostles did in those days? Do we have the power and spirit in which they ministered? With few pieces of advice, my student, late Sleyefa Hadasa Brown, wrote on this and tried to compare the first century apostleship with the 21st century apostleship.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Sleyefa Hadasa Brown, “A Biblical Understanding of Apostleship and Its Implications to the African Church” (A Project Submitted to the International School of Prophecy and Biblical Studies (Throneroom Trust Ministry), Kafanchan, November 2014). She was one of the brilliant students I have had. She passed away shortly after graduating from

Why do people lie even on the altar and commit offenses of theft on the altar and our “anointed men of God” cannot see from the spiritual lenses as it was in the days of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5)? Why is it that we fail to observe the society and understand that our stories are not sound from moral perspectives? Why do people come with their problems and those problems do not fear our gates (of churches or prayer camps)? Instead, we wish those problems did not come to us.

By this, we are fulfilling the words of Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy. Paul wrote:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them (2 Tim 3:2-5).

These wicked and end-time characters are very visible and experiential in our lives. We left the ways of God into following the ways of men. We have so loved the world and have become enemies of God (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-16). We are concerned about the present –what we will gain in the present world. We forget that there is an eternal reward set forth for faithful Christians. I have written extensively about

School. With this I remember her and believing her name will continue to speak.

heavenly reward.¹³⁵ I believe that everyone who serves the Lord faithfully and with a pure heart and clear conscious will live as God destined for him or her and will also inherit the heavens and the earth.

Why do we attend programmes only when our leaders of ministries or churches are around? We are full of eye-service. The presence of leaders have become a threat to many and made them uncomfortable in achieving their ends. Working in ministries and churches or Church related organizations is not a job, the reward is earthly and eternal but there is need to be careful that we do not get cast away (Greek, *adokimos*) rather than receiving the rewards. There is need for us to serve the Lord faithfully and without grumbling. We are to be faithful bond slaves in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to concentrate in the ways of the Lord as we think of our lives and eternal priesthood in Christ which should make us serve faithfully and to be persistent and wait upon the Lord.

It is not about the pay but about fulfilment, contentment and joy in the service. Some people have become threats to others. We have become like gods to fellow workers. I have vowed that no man takes the glory of God in my service on earth in the vineyard of the Lord. In the midst of being “zealous” for the Lord, we have overstretched the lives of junior workers in the ministries and churches. We fail to note that we are co-workers in the vineyard (3 Jn 8; 1 Cor. 3:9).

¹³⁵ Tambiyi, *The African Church under Fire*, 239-241.

With all these attitudes, I discovered that for us to understand and key into this priestly-service ideally, there is a need for an activation of serving faith, having gotten the saving faith, in Jesus and to key into the eternal priesthood of Jesus. Jesus, in terms of Aaronic priestly requirements, was not qualified but by eternal priesthood, He died for us to inaugurate us into acts of sacrifice. Jesus was not qualified to enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple but by virtue of eternal divinity, He has become a live wire and supplied all the living sacrifices required. He did not offer animal's blood but His blood for the whole world. He did this for the salvation of all those who will believe.

Becoming a Christian opens the priestly gate for all who believe in the New Covenant, which is in the pattern of Jesus not in the pattern of Levi but that of Christ, which gives life in abundance. Though we are not biological descendants of Levi, like Jesus, we have been awarded the priestly positions which are above the priestly orders of Levi. This priesthood is greater than that of Aaron. It is in the order of Melchizedek. We have now become priests with Jesus as our High Priest who pleads before the Father on behalf of our sins daily (1 Jn 2:1-2). Christ has made all of us to be priests and He is our eternal High Priest.

Some denominations and ministries have been practicing what can be termed part-time priesthood. They have pastors who are not fully involved in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. This attitude is making the priesthood to be less productive and ineffective. The truth remains those pastors

do not fully give their attentions to the people. I have encountered many of them on several counts. The work, most times, suffers because they are not there at the right time to cater for the need of the members. We can consider having full time pastors to enable the work move better.

Some of such pastors engage in other vocations to cater for their families. Some would argue that there were people who served the Lord and engaged in other vocations. They cite Paul who was a preacher and a tent-maker. For me, we need to have faith in God and hand-over our families to Him to provide for our needs. I believe that until we get to that level of trusting God and surrender our needs to Him, we cannot be effective as expected. Our families' problems are not above the Owner of the vineyard and families. God started the family institution and He knows the answers to all issues surrounding all families. When our families' problems encounter the Lord, they must give way and let the Lord be glorified.

Therefore, there is a need for readjustment of our priestly philosophies in Jesus Christ. We should consider and affirm our status as priests and as prophetic midwives of this generation, affecting the nation and the nations of the earth. It is clear that midwives do not only represent His presence but they bring down His presence to people. We should endeavour to go beyond the African boundaries to also rain down the glory of the prophetic midwives to the European nations. America and the world super-powers of our time should hear our voices once again. We should be willing to

take the world to the next level. We should stand against the challenges of the Church and our cultures such as same sex marriages (gay and lesbianism), minor marriages and reject any practice which is contrary to the priestly callings which we have in Jesus. God has started restoring the glory of marriage on earth. We should stand to reject the insecurity challenges and insurgences (Boko Haram, IS, ISIS, ISIL) that characterize our existential milieus.

EPILOGUE:
THE FUTURE OF PRIESTHOOD IN AFRICA

The glory of the saints is in their response to selfless service in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians are supposed to be bond slaves in Christ Jesus just like Paul the apostle (Phil. 1:1). It is clear that the twenty first century priesthood is missing the mark upon the truth of the Word of God. We seem to be patterned fully into the Levitical priesthood and not adopting the Christo-priestly philosophies. Even with that we see the Lord cleansing the priesthood and creating some links that the priests will be sanctified. We see the Lord reshaping the priesthood and raising men and women of honour that are taking the lead in godliness within the African society.

To think of the future of the priesthood is to discuss the future of Christianity. Priesthood was established and reshaped by the Lord Jesus Christ. Once a Christian, the priesthood opens its arms and accepts the Christian. Prayers are no longer to be made through channels (the priests) as it was in the Old Testament times. Spiritual gifts are given for ecclesiastical purposes. The access to the Holy of Holies was torn and given every Christian access to the throne and presence of God (Matt. 27:51). Jesus Christ inaugurated the eternal priesthood. The death of Jesus Christ made us priests in Him. Jesus is our High Priest who had gone in for us and made a living sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. I have heard some founding pastors or General Overseers of Ministries calling themselves high priests. It is wrong for a man to consider himself a High Priest in our generation for

Christ is the only High Priest who is standing before the Father on our behalf. I. M. Haldelman added, “The only High Priest is our Lord Jesus Christ and He exercises His office as such only in heaven”¹³⁶ with effect on the earth. As children of God, we can co-opt true and faithful pastors, apostles, teachers, evangelists and prophets to help us with prayers as representatives of God and leaders. Equality needs to be considered. We are only unequal in terms of spiritual gifts as we all function according to the gifts given to us. We do not have the same level of functioning in the body. Everybody has his or her significance in the body. We need to complement each other as we live for the same ecclesiastical purpose on earth.

The future of the priesthood seems enormous with groves of unfaithfulness and unrighteousness. Things are growing worst daily. People are becoming lukewarm and adopting the ways of the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3-12). Ungodliness is on the increase. This is in line with the prophecy of Jesus and Paul (Matt. 24:12; 2 Tim. 3:1-9). People are forgetting the ways of the Lord and adopting the ways of unrighteousness. It is even unbelievable that some pastors and teachers of the Word are violating the priesthood and becoming lawbreakers themselves. Many apostles and prophets have changed their nature in the name of grace. Christians generally are adopting the ways of Sodom and Gomorrah and becoming more godless.

¹³⁶ I. M. Haldeman, *The Tabernacle, Priesthood and Offerings* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell company, MCMXXV), 264.

There is a need for a recess of our priestly roles in Christ so that we can be sure to be what Jesus wants us to be. The future of the Church is frightening and tormenting those who are concerned with the things of God; those who value the truth of the Lord and want to ensure that people know the truth in order for that truth to save many people. You may think it is okay and finding the ways of sin interesting, but Jesus has the final say on the last day.

The African Church has been witnessing a dramatic growth and experiencing the off-shoot of the Holy Spirit. We are experiencing the workings of the Holy Spirit because of the sacrifices made by our fathers of faith in Africa. For example, there are fathers of faith in Nigeria who have all gone to be with the Lord (Baba Paul Gindiri, Benson Idahosa) and those still alive. Among the ones alive are: Pa E. A. Adeboye, Apostle Emmanuel N. Kure, Bishop David Oyedepo, W. F. Kumuyi, and Gbile Akanni etc. These people have stood for their generation. But would the next generation be bold to say that we, in this generation, have stood for their generation in terms godliness and holiness? We need to think fast. The church has grown in righteousness and witnessing a liberty of the Spirit. Jesus has been honoured and exalted within the “braided hair” of faithful African Christians.

There are faithful hearts and hands within the wings of Africa who have not become so entangled with the affairs of Satan. These pastors and members have remained faithful to the Lord. Their oils have not dried from their heads to their

toes. The grace on their heads is influencing the lives of many people and making them become kings and queens in Christ Jesus. Because of them, we are witnessing territorial infilling of the Spirit and fellowship. It could be that the Lord has been merciful to the African continent because of the faithful hearts who have not been mutilating the faith.

But unless the Lord intervenes, many Christians within the African continent will continue to be unenthusiastic about the things of God. Some are becoming more zealous without knowledge and revelation (Rom. 10:2). But I see the Lord cleansing the Church from unrighteousness and making the priesthood adopts the truth and being sanctified from godless paths in preparation for the future glory which the Lord has prepared for us in Jesus. This is our hope. This is our glory and comfort.

Within this understanding, Satan knows he has a very short time and he is busy accusing the saints before the Lord as he did to Joshua the High Priest (Zech. 3). Satan's targets are the leaders; the apostles, teachers, pastors, prophets and missionaries. These are the categories of people Satan targets. To conquer the church, he needs to conquer the custodians of the truth i.e. the leaders. He is after those who are strong in the Lord. He is not concerned about the weak in the Lord. He is restless because he does not have time. He is conscious and is busy mobilizing people to his kingdom. It is now a battle of kingdoms; that of God and that of Satan. It is a battle of altars; that of God and that of Satan. Satan is busy putting more

agents in the schools where ministers are trained rather than in the churches. We need to fight these.

In the late part of 2014 when I was writing this book, I became so disturbed about the conclusion. I became so uncomfortable with my life and weighing my life to see whether I have been living within the expected norms of God in the priesthood of Jesus as I tried to unveil in this book. It was in the midst of this despair and life evaluation that the Lord instructed the conclusion of this book one Sunday morning and He told me what to write. That morning I began to receive revelations from the Lord about the conclusion. I became so terrified that it was more about me in order to reach to the people. The Lord told me to write my Christian experiences whether good or bad that many would learn and change their ways to follow His ways and His name would be glorified. He told me that my journey in the faith reflects some of the ways of many of the priests today. The day was so uncomfortable for me. I lost my peace and glory be to God, the pastor of the local church where I fellowship, preached on the peace of the Lord that morning and I regained my peace in the Lord.

As a teaching priest in the Lord, I have witnessed and passed through tough and terrible moments in life. I have seen terrible days in life. I wished I was not alive at all within those days. I wished I vanished from the face of the earth. I wished those days never appeared. But the Lord reminded me of a verse in the scriptures that says "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be

able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Eph. 6:13).

It was because of this “day of evil” that the Lord had asked us to prepare. It is always a day of battle of the mind; a day of trouble and indecision of the mind; a day of struggle in the mind when mostly we are at the crossroad of decision and history. That is why we are told in the same scripture to;

- a. Put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:13)
- b. Stand firm (v. 14)
- c. Pray in the spirit on all occasions (v. 18).

We are to be ready for those battles which are against the will of God in our lives during some evil days. Righteousness does not prevent those evil days to come. It hastens those evil days to come so that we can prove ourselves worthy of our calling in the Lord. It encourages them so that we can prove our glory in the Lord Jesus. It makes the days more horrible to us so as to see whether we have really understood and have the real righteousness which is by faith in Christ Jesus.

I have seen dreams and their fulfilments. I have crossed the sea with my back. I have tested pains. I have rode on rocks. I have been baked and cooked with cold water. I have heard the cries of the fatherless and oppressed, the needy and the motherless. I have seen things I should not have seen and I have gone to places I should not have gone. I have done things I should not have done.

These are all the process of sanctification in the glorious mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are all processes to make me better in the divine priesthood which is by grace and

faith. I have heard so many voices from the righteous and the unrighteous men. I have chosen to obey the ways of God and sometimes those of Satan. May be I could not recognize or I was careless to harken to the warnings of the Spirit or I heard and chose to be stubborn and disobeyed the voice of God. On the 29th December, 2014, the Lord said to me “you are passing through these to make you a better man for me. You are witnessing cycles to prepare you for greatness.” He said that “there is something significant in you that wants to be birthed but Satan is against it.” He said, He is interested in you but the Devil wants to deprave His plans for my greatness. The cycles in my life are because Satan knows what is in me and how I will break grounds so he is fighting and causing cycles in my life.

With all these, I gained courage once again to persist in the priestly journey of faith. Put yourself in my shoe as a priest in Christ and excel. Weigh your life and see whether you are still standing or you have left the track which was assigned for you by the Lord for the race.

Despite those good and some few bad moments, I am still alive to testify the goodness and mercies of the Lord. If it were in the Levitical priesthood, I would have died; I would have been sent into the “abyss;” I would have entertained fear of the unknown. But glory be to Jesus Christ, the beginner and finisher of our faith. You may be passing through difficult moments but be sure that Jesus has never changed and He can transform your life and priesthood for the better. Look unto Him for your deliverance.

I like to say that the glory and future of the eternal priesthood in Africa should always recognize that Jesus is the Final Authority. He is the Final Depopulator of hell citizens. He is the final Bridge to cross. He is the man who went to the cross and gave for your sins and mine. He is the final Saviour and Motivator. He is the Truth and the Life. He is the Resurrection and the Life. He is the Way to righteousness and godliness. He is the Lord and the Christ. He is the Prince of peace. He is the Invisible God, King Immortal and Righteous Father. He is the Glory of the New Covenant. He is Alpha and Omega. He is the Culmination of our eternal priesthood. He is I am that I am. He is the Righteous Judge. He is Incredible and Invincible King. He is the Saviour of the world. He is our Fountain of glory. He is our song and our food. He is a cold water to our thirsty souls. He is everything to us.

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy –to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 24-25).

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