

THE COMPLETE **BOOK** OF



WHO'S WHO

IN THE BIBLE

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A

AARON

Moses' brother and Israel's first high priest. In the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, Aaron was Moses' spokesman and assistant during the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. Aaron was three years older than Moses and was 83 when they first confronted the pharaoh (Ex 7:7). Their sister, Miriam (Nm 26:59), must have been the eldest child, old enough to carry messages when the infant Moses was found by the pharaoh's daughter (Ex 2:1-9). Aaron's mother was Jochebed and his father was Amram, a descendant of the Kohath family of Levi's tribe (Ex 6:18-20).

Aaron and his wife, Elisheba, had four sons (Ex 6:23), who were to follow him in the priesthood (Lv 1:5). Two of them, Nadab and Abihu, violated God's instructions by performing a sacrilegious act while burning incense and were burned to death as a result (Lv 10:1-5). The priesthood was then passed on through the other two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, who also sometimes failed to carry out God's instructions precisely (10:6-20).

Aaron's prominence in the events of the Exodus arose partly from the fact that he was Moses' brother. When Moses tried to avoid becoming Israel's leader on the grounds of having a speech impediment, Aaron's ability as a speaker was recognized and used by God (Ex 4:10-16).

Events of Aaron's Life

The Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt at the beginning of Aaron's life. Raised as an Egyptian by one of the pharaoh's daughters, Moses had fled into the Midian Desert after killing a cruel Egyptian taskmaster (Ex 1-2). When God sent Moses back as a liberator (chs 3-4), he also sent Aaron out to meet Moses in the desert (4:27). Moses was a stranger to his people after so many years of exile, so Aaron made contact with Israel's elders for him (4:29-31). When Moses and Aaron went to see the pharaoh, God told the Egyptian monarch through the two of them to let the Israelites go (Ex 5:1). When the pharaoh made life even more miserable for the Hebrew slaves, God began to show his power to the Egyptian ruler through a series of miracles (chs 5-12). God performed the first three miracles through Aaron, using a rod (probably a shepherd's staff). The pharaoh had his palace sorcerers do similar tricks. After God brought a plague of gnats (KJV "lice") over all Egypt, the Egyptian magicians admitted defeat and said, "This is the finger of God!" (Ex 8:19, NLT). Then God brought on more plagues through Moses, culminating in the deaths of all the Egyptians' firstborn sons. Aaron was with Moses (12:1-28) when God revealed how he would "pass over" the properly marked homes of the Israelites, sparing their children on the night the Egyptian children died. That event was the origin of the Passover feast still observed by Jews today (13:1-16).

After God led the Israelites to safety and destroyed the pursuing Egyptians, Aaron participated with Moses in governing the people on their long wilderness journey to the Promised Land (Ex 16:1-6). Later, battling against Amalek's army, Aaron helped hold up Moses' weary arms in prayer to maintain God's blessing (17:8-16). Although always subordinate to Moses, Aaron seems to have been recognized as an important leader (18:12). God summoned him to be with Moses when God gave the law on Mt Sinai (19:24). Aaron was among

QUICKTAKE

AARON

STRENGTHS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- First high priest of God in Israel
- Effective communicator; Moses' mouthpiece

WEAKNESSES AND MISTAKES

- Pliable personality; gave in to people's demands for a gold calf
- Joined with Moses in disobeying God's orders about the water-giving rock
- Joined sister Miriam in complaining against Moses

LESSONS FROM HIS LIFE

- God gives individuals special abilities, which he weaves together for his use
- The very skills that make a good team player sometimes also make a poor leader

VITAL STATISTICS

Where: Egypt, wilderness of Sinai

Occupations: Priest; Moses' second in command

Relatives: Brother: Moses. Sister: Miriam. Sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar

KEY VERSES

"Then the LORD became angry with Moses. 'All right,' he said. 'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he speaks well. And look! He is on his way to meet you now. He will be delighted to see you. . . . Aaron will be your spokesman to the people. He will be your mouthpiece, and you will stand in the place of God for him, telling him what to say'" (Exodus 4:14, 16).

Aaron's story is told in Exodus—Deuteronomy 10:6. He is also mentioned in Hebrews 7:11.

the representatives of the people who ratified God's statutes in the Book of the Covenant (24:1-8). Aaron went with those leaders partway up the holy mountain and saw the vision of the God of Israel (24:9-10). With Hur, he was left in charge when Moses was with God on the mountaintop (vv 13-14).

Moses was gone for over a month, and in a moment of weakness, Aaron gave in to the people's request for an idol to worship. He melted down their gold ornaments to make a golden image of a calf (Ex 32:1-4). (The Israelites had probably been influenced in Egypt by the cult of Apis, a fertility god in the form of a bull.) At first, Aaron seemed to think he might be doing something acceptable to God (v 5), but things got out of hand and a drunken sex orgy took place around the idol (v 6). God was angry enough to destroy the

people, but Moses interceded, reminding God of his promise to multiply Abraham's descendants (Ex 32:7-14). Moses furiously confronted Aaron about the immorality and idolatry, which Aaron blamed on the people without admitting any guilt of his own (vv 21-24). Although the idolators were punished by death (Ex 32:25-28) and the whole camp by a plague (v 35), Aaron was evidently not punished. In a retelling of the events, Moses said that Aaron was in great danger but was spared because he had prayed for him (Dt 9:20).

In their second year of nomadic wilderness life, Aaron helped Moses carry out a census (Nm 1:1-3, 17-18). Eventually, Aaron may have become jealous of Moses' position of leadership, for Miriam and Aaron began to slander their brother, even though the elderly Moses was by then more humble than any man on earth (Nm 12:1-4). God's anger toward the two was averted by Moses' prayer, although Miriam did suffer for her sin (12:5-15). Aaron again seems to have escaped punishment entirely. With Moses, Aaron opposed a rebellion at Kadesh (14:1-5). He stood with Moses against a later revolt (ch 16). After a final incident at Meribah, where the Israelites almost revolted again, God accused Moses and Aaron of having failed to take him at his word and denied them entry into the Promised Land (20:1-12). Aaron died at the age of 123 on Mt Hor, after Moses had removed his elaborate priestly garments and put them on Aaron's son Eleazar (Nm 20:23-29; 33:38-39).

See also Levi.

DIGGING DEEPER

AARON THE PRIEST

Because it marked the beginning of the priesthood in Israel, the consecration of Aaron to his office was both instructive and solemn. Nothing was left to human ingenuity; all was precisely commanded by God. There were three ceremonies: washing, clothing, and anointing. When the Tabernacle was finished, Aaron and his sons were set apart to the priesthood by washing (to signify purification), clothing with official garments (for beauty and glory), and anointing with oil (to picture the need of empowering by the Spirit; cf. Ex 28; 40:12-15; Lv 8). Aaron thus became the first high priest, serving nearly 40 years. The character of his office was hereditary; this is attested to by his sons' wearing his garments when they succeeded to the office of high priest (Ex 29:29-30; Nm 20:25-28). Although all priests were anointed with oil, the anointing of Aaron and his successors was distinct from that of the ordinary priests (Ex 29:7; 40:12-15; Lv 8:12). Because the priesthood was inherited, all subsequent priests had to trace their ancestry back to Aaron (Ez 7:1-5; Lk 1:5). Also, a sharp distinction was always drawn between the family of Aaron and the rest of the Levites (cf. Nm 3:5). Thus, the high priest was designated as the anointed priest in a special sense (Lv 4:3-4; 6:20-22; 21:10).