

# So you are the Temple people!

In your group you will have the High priest, the Chief priests, the priests and the Levites.

*Key information to read and discuss:*

The Temple

The Temple was the most important symbol of the Jewish people, the centre of life, where the national, the cultural, the religious and the political were fused.

The first [Jerusalem](#) Temple was built by King **Solomon**. The Babylonians destroyed it in 587 B.C. At the same time the upper classes of the kingdom of Judah were exiled to Babylon.

After conquering the Babylonian Empire, **Cyrus**, the king of Persia, granted the Jews permission to return to their homeland and build a new temple. Five hundred years later King [Herod](#) initiated a massive rebuilding project, the aim of which was to restore the splendour of Solomon's Temple. The Temple was dedicated in 18 B.C., but the project was only completed in the 60s A.D. Its size and beauty were widely known, but it was destroyed in the turmoil of the [Jewish War](#) in 70 A.D.

A new temple could no longer be built because the Jews were expelled from Palestine half a century later. Today the site is occupied by mosques, so both archaeological excavations and the construction of a new temple are impossible. All that remains is a section of the Temple wall, the so-called 'Wailing Wall'.

The outer court of Herod's Temple was called the 'Court of the Gentiles'. Inside it was the Temple area, divided off by a wall, to which all but Jews were forbidden entry on pain of death.

The outer part of the Temple area proper was the 'Court of the Women', then the 'Court of the Men'. Only priests were permitted to proceed further, to the altar. On this altar were performed the daily animal [sacrifices](#).

The inner vestibule of the Temple was called 'holy'. Here were the seven-branched candlestick, the table of the shewbread and the altar. The 'holy' was divided from the 'holy of holies' by a curtain, inside which the high priest was allowed to go once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to offer a sacrifice for the whole people.

In the outmost court of the Temple were traders, from whom pilgrims who had travelled from afar might purchase sacrificial animals. The money-changers exchanged foreign currency for silver shekels, with which the Temple tax and the price of the sacrificial animal were paid.

In the Temple area was also the Antonia Fortress, one of Herod's palaces, which was located in the north-west corner of the area. From the fortress it was possible to maintain order in the Temple, especially during Passover. It may have been in the Antonia Fortress that Pontius [Pilate](#) sentenced [Jesus](#) to be crucified.

In the Temple there served both priests and *Levites*. The latter did not participate in the sacrificial cult but took care of the music, guarding and cleaning of the Temple.

From:

[http://www.helsinki.fi/teol/pro/\\_merenlah/oppimateriaalit/text/english/judaism.htm#The%20Qumran%20Discoveries](http://www.helsinki.fi/teol/pro/_merenlah/oppimateriaalit/text/english/judaism.htm#The%20Qumran%20Discoveries)

**High Priest, Chief Priests, Priests, and Levites** - members of the tribe of Levi who were responsible for the temple and its sacrifices, and thus were the religious and social leaders of the Jewish people.

- Priests and Levites in ancient Israel had to be men from the tribe of Levi; any Jews from the eleven other tribes could not be priests.
- Levites (members of the tribe of Levi who were not priests) assisted in the practical operation of the temple as guards, musicians, etc. (Luke 10:32; John 1:19; Acts 4:36; cf. Num 3, 8; etc.).
- Priests offered the sacrifices and took care of other cultic/ritual concerns in the temple (Mark 1:44; Matt 12:4-5; Luke 1:5-23; etc.).
- The same Greek word is translated "High Priest" (sg.) and "Chief Priests" (pl.) in most English Bibles; they were in charge of the Temple in Jerusalem and thus were the most important religious leaders in ancient Israel, at least prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.
- The High Priest was appointed annually, but members of the family of Annas and Caiaphas were often reappointed in the first century (Matt 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49; 18:12-28; Acts 4:6).
- The Gospels portray the chief priests (often with the scribes and elders) as members of the ruling authorities who opposed Jesus, long sought to arrest and kill him, and eventually condemned him to death (in cooperation with the Roman governor).

From: [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Jewish\\_Groups.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Jewish_Groups.htm)

#### THE HIGH PRIEST IN THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.

In order to understand the politics of Annas and his House, it is indispensable to illustrate briefly the situation in which the high priests found themselves in the days of Jesus and the early Church, not so much in their relation to Rome, as in their position within the Jewish people; to this end we have to cast a glance at the history of high priesthood. Since Sadoq had been made hereditary high priest by Solomon in 973 B.C., his family held that dignity in undisputed possession for centuries, even through the Babylonian Exile, and down to the days when Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid king of Syria, began to persecute the Jews. In 175 B.C., he deposed the last high priest, Onias II, whose legality was founded on his inheritance, and replaced him by his brother Jesus-Jason. When in 172/1 B.C. Onias II was murdered by the king, his son Onias III fled to Egypt, where he succeeded in establishing a new temple, in which he acted as high priest. There, at On-Heliopolis, his descendants continued the Sadoquite high priesthood till A.D. 73, apparently without ever being molested or challenged as to the legitimacy of their office. This was possible only because in Jerusalem there was no longer a Sadoquite high priest.<sup>1</sup> These events were the root of three evils of the greatest consequences. The first of them was that all those who were high priests in Jerusalem 1 The details concerning this period are taken mainly from Joachim Jeremías, *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu*, Π, B, 1 Lfg. (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 40-59. 3 4 THEOLOGICAL STUDIES after Onias, were illegitimate high priests.

<http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/8/8.1/8.1.1.pdf>

**Questions to discuss:**

How could your group break into 3 smaller groups to represent the High priest / Chief priest, priests and Levites, and then explain what you know about your own group?

Be prewarned – the Essenes may have a go at the high priests of Jerusalem because they do not believe they are legitimate (the paragraph above from theological studies.net details the wars, murders etc that resulted in different family lines taking over the role of high priest). You may need to come up with some counter arguments about why the high priests of Jerusalem are legitimate in your eyes (e.g. your family line has been there for over 200 years – times changes – things happen – move on people!)

### **Interesting things your group could highlight:**

According to Simon from the Sydney Jewish Museum, not a lot is known about Levites but one of the things that is known is that they were responsible for the music at the Temple. (Students love this type of information!)

Look at the Good Samaritan text <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10%3A25-37&version=NABRE>. People often misread and misunderstand this text because when they read that the priest and Levite didn't stop they assume they were on the way to the Temple and ritual cleanliness meant they couldn't stop. Wrong. The text says that the priest was coming down the road (Jerusalem is up high in the mountains and Jericho is below sea-level less than 30km away, so the priest has already been to the Temple). The highest Jewish law is preservation of life, so a Jewish audience would presumably have expected the priest to stop and then expected the Levite to stop and they would have been shocked when they didn't. This story is also a parable so they would have been waiting for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person to come along and be the good, upright Jewish person like themselves, but the shock is that a horrid Samaritan comes along and does the right thing. Your group could use this story to demonstrate that Jesus gave priests and Levites bad press. You could say you've never heard of any priest or Levite who would not stop to help someone in need, no matter who it was, and so clearly Jesus made this story up and you're not impressed. The text doesn't tell us why the priest and Levite don't stop, so you can appeal to the audience and ask if anyone has walked by a situation where they know they should have stopped but they decided to leave it to someone else because it was just too hard.

The Good Samaritan is a story about stereotypes, and the challenge is for readers to not fall into stereotypes, so you could throw this challenge out to the rest of the Jewish community listening today. "Don't judge us based on what you read in the Gospels. This is simply a fictional story and would never have happened in real life!"