

## High priests of the second temple

Background of high priests:

Divine election of high priestly family, Aaron's line (anointed Lev 8; affirmed Num 17)

Judgment against line of Eli (1 Sam 2-3; fulfilled 1 Kgs 2:26-27)

Line of priests from Zadok (1 Kgs 1:32-40; 1 Chron 6:8-15) to the time of Seleucids

### Persian rule<sup>1</sup>

Joshua (c. 520 BCE)

Joiakim (Neh 12:10, 12, 26)

Eliashib (444) (Neh 3:1, 20-21; 13:28)

Joiada (Neh 12:10, 22)

Johanan (410) (Neh 12:22)

Jaddua (c.336-323) (Neh 12:22)

Notable high priests of Persian period:

(1) Joshua son of Jozadak, helped rebuild the temple (Ezra 3; Hag 2; Zech 3), and also made apostasy marriages for his family (Ezra 10:18)

(2) Eliashib prepared a room in the temple for Tobiah the arch-enemy of Israel (Neh 13:4-9)

(3) Eliashib the high priest's son made apostasy marriage with Sanballat the Horonite an arch-enemy of Israel (Neh 13:28-19)

### Hellenistic rule

**(Ptolemaics 305-198)**

Onias I (c. 309-265)

Simon I (Sir 4:1)

Eleazar (c. 283-246)

Manasseh

Onias II (c. 246-221)

Simon II (c. 221-204)

Description of Day of Atonement

**“The leader of his brethren and the pride of his people was Simon [II] the high priest, son of Onias [III], who in his life repaired the house, and in his time fortified the temple .... How glorious he was when the people gathered round**

---

<sup>1</sup>List adapted from James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 491-493; “High priest,” *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906)

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7689-high-priest>, and see article for list of references in Josephus. Other notes are my own from scripture, Josephus, VanderKam 2004, H. Hoehner, “Herod,” *ISBE* (Eerdmans, 1989). Also, for discussion of high priests during Persian rule, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Ezra and Nehemiah,” in *EBC* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), Introduction, sec. 7. Also note other “Jewish” shrines in this period, including the Samaritan shrine at Gerizim in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, see Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 120-131; shrine at Elephantine during the Persian period (cf. Elephantine Papyri); Onias IV fled to Egypt and established a temple at Leontopolis in c. 154 (closed in 66 CE).

**him as he came out of the inner sanctuary!** Like the morning star among the clouds, like the moon when it is full; like the sun shining upon the temple of the Most High, and like the rainbow gleaming in glorious clouds ... **When he put on his glorious robe and clothed himself with superb perfection and went up to the holy altar,** he made the court of the sanctuary glorious. ... Then the sons of Aaron shouted, they sounded the trumpets of hammered work, they made a great noise to be heard for remembrance before the Most High. Then all the people together made haste and fell to the ground upon their faces to worship their Lord, the Almighty, God Most High. And the singers praised him with their voices in sweet and full-toned melody ... **Then Simon came down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, to pronounce the blessing of the Lord with his lips, and to glory in his name.”** (Sirach 50:1, 5-7, 11, 16-18, 20 RSV)

#### **(under Seleucids 198-64)**

Onias III (?-175) (1 Macc 12:7)

Jason (175-172) (2 Macc 4:7)

Menelaus (172-162) (2 Macc 4:27)

[Interlude: Onias IV?]

Alcimus (162-c. 159) (1 Macc 7:5)

[Inter-Sacerdotium, Josephus says the office of high priest was vacant for six years (*Antiquities*, 20.10; yet see 12.10.6, 11.2). This is much contested.]

Notable events under Seleucids:

(1) Under Seleucid rule priesthood began to be by appointment for political ends, usually financial kickbacks to overlords, beginning with Jason (175-172) then Meneleaus (172-162)

(2) Inter-Sacerdotium, is a much discussed period in which Josephus says there was no high priest (c. 159-152)

#### **Hasmonean rule**

Jonathan (152-142) (1 Macc 9:28)

Simon (142-134) (1 Macc 14:46)

John Hyrcanus (134-104)

Aristobulus I (104-103)

Alexander Jannaeus (103-76)

Hyrcanus II (76-67)

Aristobulus II (67-63)

Hyrcanus II (restored) (63-40)

Antigonus (40-37)

Notable events under Hasmoneans:

(1) Under Hasmoneans, the Maccabees take over priesthood, continuing the Seleucid policy of appointments not from the Zadokite line.

(2) Hasmoneans fused high priesthood with political ruler beginning with Jonathan (152; 160-142) and Simon (142-134)

All the people agreed to grant Simon the right to act in accordance with these decisions **So Simon accepted and agreed to be high priest, to be**

**commander and ethnarch of the Jews and priests**, and to be protector of them all. (1 Macc 14:46-47 NRSV)

### **Herodian and Roman rule**

#### **(under Herod the Great)**

Ananel (37-35)  
Aristobulus III (35)  
Ananel (restored) (35-30)  
**Jesus son of Phiabi<sup>c</sup> (30-24/22)**  
**Simon son of Boethus<sup>b</sup> (24/22-5)**  
Mattathias son of Theophilus (5-4)  
Joseph son of Ellem (one day)  
**Joazar son of Boethus<sup>b</sup> (4)**

**<sup>a</sup> from family of Ananus/Annas**

**<sup>b</sup> from family of Boethus**

**<sup>c</sup> from family of Phiabi**

#### **(Under Archeiaius)**

**Eleazar son of Boethus<sup>b</sup> (4)**  
Jesus son of Sie (Σιε) (4)  
**Joazar son of Boethus<sup>b</sup> (4 BCE-6 CE)**

#### **(Under Quirinius)**

**Ananus son of Seth<sup>a</sup> (6-15 CE) (Luke 3:2)**

#### **(Under Valorius Gratus)**

**Ismael son of Phiabi<sup>c</sup> (15-16)**  
**Eleazar son of Ananus<sup>a</sup> (16-17)**  
Simon son of Camith (17-18)  
**Joseph Caiaphas<sup>a</sup> (18-36/37) (Matt 16:3, 57)**

#### **(Under Vitellius)**

**Jonathan son of Ananus<sup>a</sup> (36/37)**  
**Theophilus son of Ananus<sup>a</sup> (37-41)**

#### **(Under Agrippa)**

**Simon Cantheras son of Boethus<sup>b</sup> (41-42)**  
**Mattathias son of Ananus<sup>a</sup> (42-43)**  
Elionaeus son of Cantheras (c. 43-45)

#### **(Under Herod of Chalcis)**

Joseph son of Camei (45-48)  
Ananias son of Nebedaeus (48-59)

#### **(Under Agrippa II)**

**Ishmael son of Phiabi<sup>c</sup> (59-61)**  
Joseph son Simon (61-62)  
**Ananus son of Ananus<sup>a</sup> (62)**  
Jesus son of Damnaeus (c. 62-63)  
**Jesus son of Gamaliel (63-64) (his wife from family of Boethus<sup>b</sup>)<sup>2</sup>**  
Mattathias, son of Theophilus (c. 64-66)

#### **(appointed by the people during the war)**

Phannias son of Samuel (c. 68)

### Summary of priests under the Herodian and Roman rule

---

<sup>2</sup> Priest can only marry virgin (Lev 21:13). This may be “an instance in which a priest betrothed to a widow before his elevation was permitted to marry her afterward” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*).

(1) Under Herod and the Herodian rulers after him as well as the Roman overlords, most priests were appointed for personal reasons and/or for political advantages of various kinds mostly from a few families

(2) Motives of Herod the Great for appointing high priests:

- Those not powerful so they would not be a threat, like Ananel (Annas?) of Babylon (c 37-30)
- Appointed Aristobulus brother of Mariamne, his wife of Hasomeans  
“Alexandra invited Herod to be her guest in Jericho. Herod exhibited friendliness toward Aristobulus and on a hot day suggested that they go swimming to cool off. Some of Herod’s servants and friends were swimming and playing in the water with Aristobulus. **As if in sport Herod’s friends held Aristobulus’s head too long under water and he drowned.** Herod simulated the most profound grief and provided a lavish funeral and a very fine tomb (Ant. xv. 3. 2- 4 [42- 61]; BJ i. 22. 2 [437]).” (Hoehner, “Herod,” *ISBE*) In a complicated course of events he also later had Alexandra and Mariamne (and other contenders) executed.
- When Herod wanted to married the commoner Mariamne II because she was a great beauty, he appointed her father Simon son of Boethus high priest (c. 24-5 BCE) which gave her standing to be married to the king
- In 5 BCE Matthias became temporarily ritually defiled before a fast by nocturnal emission so Ellemus was appointed priest for the day (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.6, 4 [165-167]).
- Luke very unusually refers to high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, but probably is referring to the dominant priests of the period in general (Luke 3:2)

[Overview of (pro-)Herodians]

“**Herod the Great and Agrippa I selected most of the high priests from the house of Boethus** (between Herod’s death [4 B.C.] and Agrippa I’s accession [A.D. 37] Judea was under Roman prefects and most of the high priests came from the house of Annas). It seems probable, therefore, that **Boethusians who were pro-Herodian ... and the Sadducees were pro-Hasmonean.** With Herod Antipas’s marriage to Herodias [29] (a Hasmonian on her mother’s side), however, the political differences between the Boethusians (Herodians) and the Sadducees were less clear-cut. It may be possible that Antipas married Herodias to gain the support of the Sadducees.” (Hoehner, “Herodians,” *ISBE*)