

Were the High Priests at the Time of Jesus from the Aaronic Priestly Line?

A question popped up in my WhatsApp account this morning. I love these kinds of questions, so I jumped out of bed and headed to my computer.

Quick question, were Annas and/or Caiaphas descendants of Aaron, or had the high priestly line been lost by their time?

I responded with a long-ish answer to lay the foundation for my answer.



In short, yes, Annas and Caiaphas were descendants of Aaron the High Priest from the tribe of Levi. The Jews never forgot their lineage. Family lines were hugely important, not like in our culture, where we don't even know where our great-grandparents were born.

In 722 BC, the Northern Ten Tribes disappeared after being exiled to Assyria. Poof! No one knows today where they are. However, a few remained intermingled with the remaining tribe of Judah. Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin, and the Prophetess Anna was from the tribe of Asher. Matthew, also called Levi, was surely from that tribe—they had been given no portion of land in Israel but were giving cities among all the tribes. The tribe of Simeon had been absorbed into the last remaining tribe—Judah, from which we get the word Jew and Judaism. Simon Peter, originally just Simon, may have received that name from Simeon.

The priestly line of Levi, and especially the High Priestly line of Aaron, were especially remembered and honored. John the Baptist's father and mother were from the Aaronic line. In Luke 1:5, we read, “In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah [from the line of Aaron]. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth” (see 1 Chron 24:10, 19).

Therefore, Zechariah AND Elizabeth were of full-blooded Aaronic priesthood blood. So then was John who “anointed”

Jesus in the Jordan River (Acts 10:37-38; CCC 438). Since Elizabeth was the close relative of Mary, **one can make the case** that Mary is also of Aaronic blood, making Jesus both King (through Joseph and his life of Judah) and Priest (through Mary and the Aaronic line). No proven, but interesting a appropriate.

Now to Annas and Caiaphas. The priests at the time of Jesus were from the line of Aaron (Luke 3:2; Jn 18:13; Acts 4:6), but they had become somewhat “puppet priests” appointed by the Romans. The Sadducees had become a “political tool” of the Romans, to comply with the Jewish laws and sentiments, but more importantly to serve the interests of Rome which placed and displaced them at will. The priesthood pretty much went to the highest bidder. The Pharisees hated the Sadducees, viewing them as having sold out the secular worldly power.

Paul recognized Annas and Caiaphas not JUST as Roman puppets, but still as God’s High Priests. During one of his trials, we read: “Then Paul said to him, ‘God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?’ Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’ ” (Acts 23:3 5).

While Scripture does not definitively state that Annas and Caiaphas were of the direct lineage of Aaron, it does confirm

that priests were still generally drawn from the descendants of Aaron, albeit appointed for worldly considerations. So yes, Judah had lost its King but not the known kingly line of Judah, since Joseph was of that line. But Judah still had their pureblooded priests.

An interesting side note: Many Jews have the last name Cohen. That is Hebrew for priest. Genetic testing confirms that most of them are from the same family gene pool, probably still linked to Aaron and the tribe of Levi. Wikipedia says that modern genetic studies have shown that many men identifying as *kohanim* share common Y-chromosome markers, sometimes referred to as the *Cohen Modal Haplotype*, supporting the idea of a shared priestly ancestry.