

Who was Eleazar in the Bible?

Eleazar was one of four sons born to Aaron, Moses' brother and high priest of the Israelites. Eleazar is featured often in the account of the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness. Like his father and brothers, Eleazar was consecrated as a priest in service to the Lord (Exodus 28:1).

Eleazar and his brother Ithamar remained faithful in their service, but Eleazar's other brothers did not. Nadab and Abihu "offered unauthorized fire to the LORD" in the desert of Sinai (Leviticus 10:1; Numbers 3:4). Because they did not respect the Lord and honor His commands, God destroyed both of them with fire. Through Moses, God commanded Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar to refrain from mourning. They had been consecrated with oil and were to remain at the tabernacle on pain of death. God also gave them instructions to never drink alcohol when the time came to enter the tent of meeting and told them how to present the food offerings. These men and their families were allowed to eat the leftover food offerings, provided they followed certain rules (Leviticus 10:12-15).

Eleazar eventually became the chief of all the Levites, the Israelite tribe God had set apart for priestly service, and he was put in charge of the workings of the tabernacle (Numbers 3:32; 4:16). While the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, Eleazar was responsible for offering sacrifices on behalf of the people (Numbers 19:1-8). When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram gathered 250 men and rebelled against Moses, God ordered Korah and the 250 men to burn incense before Him. God then judged Korah and his followers by sending fire to consume them (Numbers 16:35). Eleazar was given the grisly job of sifting through the ashes to gather the censers the men had used to burn the incense. The censers were to be melted down, hammered into sheets, and used to overlay the altar in the tabernacle.

In Numbers 20:22-29, on the day of Aaron's death on Mount Horeb, Moses had taken both Aaron and Eleazar up the peak to transfer Aaron's priestly garments to Eleazar. This gesture was a ceremonial confirmation that Eleazar was taking over for his father as high priest. Eleazar continued as high priest for the rest of his life, serving the Israelites as a mediator, adviser, and intercessor before the Lord. Eleazar commissioned Joshua as Moses' successor and later helped with such matters as the division of land when the Israelites finally took possession of Canaan (Numbers 34:17; Joshua 14:1; 19:51).

Eleazar had a son named Phineas, who also served the Lord faithfully (see Numbers 25). Eleazar eventually passed away and was buried in Gibeah, the land that had been given to his son Phineas when the Israelites settled in the Promised Land. The high priest was chosen from Eleazar's line for seven generations, until the time of Eli, who was of the house of Eleazar's brother Ithamar. During the time of King Solomon, Zadok was appointed as the high priest, returning that office to the family of Eleazar (1 Kings 2:35).

There are seven other men named Eleazar found in the Bible, although none quite as noteworthy as Aaron's son. Some were Levitical priests, one was of the same line as Jesus, one was known for having married and divorced a foreign wife, and one even fought the Philistines "till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword" (2 Samuel 23:10). You can read about each of these other men named Eleazar in 1 Samuel 7:1; 2 Samuel 23:9-10; 1 Chronicles 11:12; 23:21-22 and 24:28; Ezra 8:33; 10:2 and 25; Nehemiah 12:42; and Matthew 1:15.