

## Times of Refreshing

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The book of Joshua ends with the death of Eleazar, son of Aaron. Phinehas, his son, succeeded him as high priest. Phinehas is best known for decisively ending God's punishment of Israel for their unfaithfulness with the Moabites. God praised Phinehas:

*Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites, when he manifested such zeal for my sake among them, so that I did not consume the Israelites in my zeal. Therefore, announce: "I am going to give to him my covenant of peace. So it will be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of a permanent priesthood, because he has been zealous for his God, and has made atonement for the Israelites" (Numbers 25:11-13).*

So, upon the death of Joshua, a zealous high priest, Phinehas, ministered at the Tabernacle.

Strangely, the priesthood and the Tabernacle nearly vanished from the narrative for several centuries. The book of Judges begins with Israel seeking God's guidance in how to conquer their land. Eighteen chapters later, the first — and only — priest mentioned in Judges appears: Micah hired a Levite as the priest of his idolatrous shrine. The house of God plays a prominent role in the judgment of Benjamin in Judges 20. Shiloh — the location of the Tabernacle — is mentioned at the end of the book of Judges (e.g. 21:19-21). Though it can be challenging to pin down exact dates in the book of Judges, it appears Judges 19-21 transpired in the middle of the era. These relatively few references to the priesthood and Tabernacle imply that both became less valuable to a large segment of Israelites.

The story of Samuel begins at the Tabernacle, where his father and mother faithfully visit year after year. Hannah dedicates her son to the service of God, and Eli, the high priest, raises Samuel at the Tabernacle. Unfortunately, Eli does not measure up to his forefather, Phinehas. Eli's sons — one of whom is named Phinehas — corrupt the priesthood to the degree that Israelites no longer want to worship God at the Tabernacle. Eli allows Israel to use the Ark of the Covenant as a religious relic in their war with the Philistines. The Philistines captured the Ark, killed Hophni and Phinehas, and presumably destroyed Shiloh in an unrecorded battle later (see Jeremiah 7:12). Eli dies with his house in ruins, and the priesthood revoked from his descendants. The house of Phinehas the Zealous meets an ignoble end with Phinehas the Corrupt.

In response to a faithful woman's prayer, God provided a prophet to initiate reforms to the priesthood and Tabernacle. What took centuries to unravel, Samuel slowly rebuilt. With the Tabernacle separated from the Ark of the Covenant, Samuel led the people in sacrifice and worship at various high places. God directed Samuel to anoint David, whose love for the house of God inspired him to continue Samuel's reforms. Solomon followed his father's divinely inspired plans and built a permanent home for God in Jerusalem. God worked through faithful men to restore His house and priesthood to their proper place.

As the rest of the historical account of the monarchy teaches, every few generations, additional restorations were needed. Jehoash repaired the temple that had fallen into disrepair. Hezekiah and Josiah led full restorations of the nation in their reigns, purging the land of idolatry and inclining their hearts to the Law of the Lord. At the direction of Cyrus, king of Persia, Zerubbabel and Joshua built a second temple to replace the one destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

It is never too late to restore the house of God.

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...(Acts 3:19).