Aaron

âr´un , sometimes pronounced ar´on (אהרון , 'ahărōn - S eptuagint Ἀαρών Aarōn , meaning uncertain: Gesenius suggests "mountaineer"; Fürst, "enlightened"; others give "rich," "fluent." Cheyne mentions Redslob's "ingenious conjecture" of hā'ārōn - "the ark" - with its mythical, priestly significance, Encyclopedia Biblica under the word):

1. Family

Probably eldest son of Amram (Exodus 6:20), and according to the uniform genealogical lists (Exodus 6:16-20; 1 Chronicles 6:1-3), the fourth from Levi. This however is not certainly fixed, since

there are frequent omissions from the Hebrew lists of names which are not prominent in the line of descent. For the corresponding period from Levi to Aaron the Judah list has six names (Rth 4:18-20; 1 Ch 2). Levi and his family were zealous, even to violence (Genesis 34:25; Exodus 32:26), for the national honor and religion, and Aaron no doubt inherited his full portion of this spirit. His mother's name was Jochebed, who was also of the Levitical family (Exodus 6:20). Miriam, his sister, was several years older, since she was set to watch the novel cradle of the infant brother Moses, at whose birth Aaron was three years old (Exodus 7:7).

2. Becomes Moses' Assistant

When Moses fled from Egypt, Aaron remained to share the hardships of his

people, and possibly to render them some service; for we are told that Moses entreated of God his brother's coöperation in his mission to Pharaoh and to Israel, and that Aaron went out to meet his returning brother, as the time of deliverance drew near (Exodus 4:27). While Moses, whose great gifts lay along other lines, was slow of speech (Exodus 4:10), Aaron was a ready spokesman, and became his brother's representative, being called his "mouth" (Exodus 4:16) and his "prophet" (Exodus 7:1). After their meeting in the wilderness the two brothers returned together to Egypt on the hazardous mission to which Yahweh had called them (Exodus 4:27-31). At first they appealed to their own nation, recalling the ancient promises and declaring the imminent deliverance, Aaron being the spokesman. But the heart of the

people, hopeless by reason of the hard bondage and heavy with the care of material things, did not incline to them. The two brothers then forced the issue by appealing directly to Pharaoh himself, Aaron still speaking for his brother (Exodus 6:10-13). He also performed, at Moses' direction, the miracles which confounded Pharaoh and his magicians. With Hur, he held up Moses hands, in order that the 'rod of God might be lifted up,' during the fight with Amalek (Exodus 17:10 , Exodus 17:12).

3. An Elder

Aaron next comes into prominence when at Sinai he is one of the elders and representatives of his tribe to approach nearer to the Mount than the people in general were allowed to do, and to see

the manifested glory of God (Exodus 24:1 , Exodus 24:9 , Exodus 24:10). A few days later, when Moses, attended by his "minister" Joshua, went up into the mountain, Aaron exercised some kind of headship over the people in his absence. Despairing of seeing again their leader, who had disappeared into the mystery of communion with the invisible God, they appealed to Aaron to prepare them more tangible gods, and to lead them back to Egypt (Ex 32). Aaron never appears as the strong, heroic character which his brother was; and here at Sinai he revealed his weaker nature, yielding to the demands of the people and permitting the making of the golden bullock. That he must however have yielded reluctantly, is evident from the ready zeal of his tribesmen, whose leader he was, to stay and to avenge the apostasy by rushing to

arms and falling mightily upon the idolaters at the call of Moses (Exodus 32:26-28).

4. High Priest

In connection with the planning and erection of the tabernacle ("the Tent"), Aaron and his sons being chosen for the official priesthood, elaborate and symbolical vestments were prepared for them (Ex 28); and after the erection and dedication of the tabernacle, he and his sons were formally inducted into the sacred office (Lev 8). It appears that Aaron alone was anointed with the holy oil (Leviticus 8:12), but his sons were included with him in the duty of caring for sacrificial rites and things. They served in receiving and presenting the various offerings, and could enter and serve in the

first chamber of the tabernacle; but Aaron alone, the high priest, the Mediator of the Old Covenant, could enter into the Holy of Holies, and that only once a year, on the great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:12-14).

5. Rebels Against Moses

After the departure of Israel from Sinai, Aaron joined his sister Miriam in a protest against the authority of Moses (Nu 12), which they asserted to be self-assumed. For this rebellion Miriam was smitten with leprosy, but was made whole again, when, at the pleading of Aaron, Moses interceded with God for her. The sacred office of Aaron, requiring physical, moral and ceremonial cleanness of the strictest order, seems to have made him immune from this form of punishment. Somewhat

later (Nu 16) he himself, along with Moses, became the object of a revolt of his own tribe in conspiracy with leaders of Dan and Reuben. This rebellion was subdued and the authority of Moses and Aaron vindicated by the miraculous overthrow of the rebels. As they were being destroyed by the plague, Aaron, at Moses' command, rushed into their midst with the lighted censer, and the destruction was stayed. The Divine will in choosing Aaron and his family to the priesthood was then fully attested by the miraculous budding of his rod, when, together with rods representing the other tribes, it was placed and left overnight in the sanctuary (Numbers 17:1-13). See AARON 'S ROD .

6. Further History

After this event Aaron does not come prominently into view until the time of his death, near the close of the Wilderness period. Because of the impatience, or unbelief, of Moses and Aaron at Meribah (Numbers 20:12), the two brothers are prohibited from entering Canaan; and shortly after the last camp at Kadesh was broken, as the people journeyed eastward to the plains of Moab, Aaron died on Mount Hor. In three passages this event is recorded: the more detailed account in Nu 20, a second incidental record in the list of stations of the wanderings in the wilderness (Numbers 33:38 , Numbers 33:39), and a third casual reference (Deuteronomy 10:6) in an address of Moses. These are not in the least contradictory or inharmonious. The dramatic scene is fully presented in Nu 20: Moses, Aaron and Eleazar go up to

Mount Hor in the people's sight; Aaron is divested of his robes of office, which are formally put upon his eldest living son; Aaron dies before the Lord in the Mount at the age of 123, and is given burial by his two mourning relatives, who then return to the camp without the first and great high priest; when the people understand that he is no more, they show both grief and love by thirty days of mourning. The passage in Nu 33 records the event of his death just after the list of stations in the general vicinity of Mount Hor; while Moses in Dt 10 states from which of these stations, namely, Moserah, that remarkable funeral procession made its way to Mount Hor. In the records we find, not contradiction and perplexity, but simplicity and unity. It is not within the view of this article to present modern displacements and rearrangements of the

Aaronic history; it is concerned with the records as they are, and as they contain the faith of the Old Testament writers in the origin in Aaron of their priestly order.

7. Priestly Succession

Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, and sister of Nahshon, prince of the tribe of Judah, who bore him four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. The sacrilegious act and consequent judicial death of Nadab and Abihu are recorded in Lev 10. Eleazar and Ithamar were more pious and reverent; and from them descended the long line of priests to whom was committed the ceremonial law of Israel, the succession changing from one branch to the other with certain crises in the nation. At his death Aaron was succeeded by his oldest

living son, Eleazar (Numbers 20:28; Deuteronomy 10:6).

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