Definition: A priest is one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion, especially a mediator between man and God." (Webster)

The origin of dedicated priests is uncertain.

Melchizedek, King of Salem was a priest of God (Gen. 14:18)

Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, was priest of Midian. (Exodus 4:1)

There were priests among the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. (Exodus 19:22, 24)

There were false priests who served false gods:
• Priest of Midian (Exodus 18:1)
• Priests of On (Genesis 41:45)
• Priests of Dagon (1 Samuel 5:5)
• Priests of the high places (1 Kings 12:32)
• Priests “of them that are no gods.” (2 Chronicles 13:9)

At Mount Sinai, God designated Aaron and his descendants to serve as priests. (Exodus 28:1, 44; 30:30; 40:13-15; Numbers 3:3)

All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests.

Only those designated could perform priestly duties.
• Not other Levites (Numbers 16:1-3; 1-10; 10:1-3)
• Not even Moses or his descendants (1 Chronicles 23:13)
• Not anyone other than Aaron and his descendants (Numbers 16:40)

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PRIESTLY SERVICE:
• Must be a male (Exodus 28:1)
• Must be a descendant of Aaron (Exodus 28:1) with a documented linage.
• Must be between 30 and 50 years old. (Numbers 4:3)
• Must be unblemished (not lame or blind). (Lev. 21:16-23)
• Must have a proper marriage. (Leviticus 21:9, 14)
  - Not married to a harlot.
  - Not married to a divorced woman.
  - Not married to a widow other than a priest’s widow. (Ezekiel 44:22)
  - The high priest must marry a virgin of his own people.
• Must have no uncleanliness (leprosy, etc.). (Lev. 22:3-9)
• Must have an untrimmed beard with well trimmed (but unshaved) hair. (Ezekiel 4:20; Leviticus 21:5
• Must be properly dressed. (Exo. 28:1-4; Ezekiel 44:17-19)

DUTIES OF THE PRIEST
• Teach the people. (Leviticus 10:8-11)
• Serve as judges to resolve controversy. (Deut. 21:5)
• Offer sacrifices. (Exodus 29:38-42)
• Assess impurity. (Leviticus 13-15)
• Burn incense. (Exodus 30:7-8)
• Bless the people. (Numbers 6:22-27)
• Bless God (Deuteronomy 10:8)
• Keep the tabernacle. (Numbers 3:38; 4:16)
• Take care of the altar (Leviticus 6:8-13), the lamps, and the showbread (Leviticus 24:1-9)
• Prepare the holy things for each days journey. (Num. 4:5:15)
• Continue the sacred fire. (Leviticus 6:12-13)
• Blow the trumpets. (Numbers 10:1-10)

THE HIGH PRIESTS
• Also called the chief priest. (2 Chronicles 19:11)
• God’s leader over the priests.
• Aaron served as the first High Priest. (Exodus 40:12-13)
• Aaron’s son, Eleazer, replaced him as High Priest when he died. (Numbers 20:26-28)
• The position of high priests continued through the time of Christ (Matthew 26:3 and apparently to the time of the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D.)

DUTIES OF THE HIGH PRIEST
• Direct the work of the priests & Levites. (Numbers 3:4)
• Inquire of the Lord. (Judges 20:28)
• Consecration of the priests. (Exodus 29:1-37)
• Maintain the golden candlestand with its fire. (Lev. 24:1-4)
• Burning incense daily (Exodus 30:7-8), and in a special way on the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16:2, 12-13)
• Offering sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. (Hebrews 5:1; Leviticus 23:6, 11, 15, 20)