

Leviticus Bible Study #10

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 8:1-36

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. **3** And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting.” **4** And Moses did as the LORD commanded him, and the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

5 And Moses said to the congregation, “This is the thing that the LORD has commanded to be done.” **6** And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. **7** And he put the coat on him and tied the sash around his waist and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him and tied the skillfully woven band of the ephod around him, binding it to him with the band. **8** And he placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. **9** And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses.

10 Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. **11** And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them. **12** And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. **13** And Moses brought Aaron's sons and clothed them with coats and tied sashes around their waists and bound caps on them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

14 Then he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering. **15** And he killed it, and Moses took the blood, and with his finger put it on the horns of the altar around it and purified the altar and poured out the blood at the base of the altar and consecrated it to make atonement for it. **16** And he took all the fat that was on the entrails and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat, and Moses burned them on the altar. **17** But the bull and its skin and its flesh and its dung he burned up with fire outside the camp, as the LORD commanded Moses.

18 Then he presented the ram of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. **19** And he killed it, and Moses threw the blood against the sides of the altar. **20** He cut the ram into pieces, and Moses burned the head and the pieces and the fat. **21** He washed the entrails and the legs with water, and Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It was a burnt offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering for the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

22 Then he presented the other ram, the ram of ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. **23** And he killed it, and Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. **24** Then he presented Aaron's sons, and Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses threw the blood against the sides of the altar. **25** Then he took the fat and the fat tail and all the fat that was on the entrails and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat and the right thigh, **26** and out of the basket of unleavened bread that was before the LORD he took one unleavened loaf and one loaf of bread with oil and one wafer and placed them on the pieces of fat and on the right thigh. **27** And he put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons and waved them as a wave offering before the LORD. **28** Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. **29** And Moses took the

breast and waved it for a wave offering before the LORD. It was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, as the LORD commanded Moses.

30 Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments, and also on his sons and his sons' garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.

31 And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and there eat it and the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I commanded, saying, 'Aaron and his sons shall eat it.' **32** And what remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn up with fire. **33** And you shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed, for it will take seven days to ordain you. **34** As has been done today, the LORD has commanded to be done to make atonement for you. **35** At the entrance of the tent of meeting you shall remain day and night for seven days, performing what the LORD has charged, so that you do not die, for so I have been commanded." **36** And Aaron and his sons did all the things that the LORD commanded by Moses.

Introduction

When we arrive at the eighth chapter, the textual style shifts from an instructional and legal format to a narrative focus. This is after the shift in the text's focus from general instructions for Israelites concerning sacrifices to focusing on the priests-to-be, Aaron and his sons. With the sacrificial code explained and the preparations made, *now* it is time for Aaron and his sons to be ordained to the ministry of priesthood. This chapter and the next present Moses and Aaron conducting the meticulous fulfillment of all of God's commandments concerning sacrifices in order to commence their regular ministry.

On the one hand, this shift serves as a means of continuing and legitimizing the priesthood. Since Leviticus presents the Mosaic Code as something which ought to continue perpetually, these narrative chapters present a blueprint for future priests in their own ordinations as well. In addition to the practical instruction to priests, the average Israelite could see that the valid ordination of the first priests – cataloged by Moses himself – meant that he could *trust* the ones who were performing sacrifices for him. Thus the sacerdotal institution is established and authenticated by these two chapters.

There are other laws to be addressed in Leviticus. In subsequent writing, Moses will detail cleanliness standards, purity standards, the calendar of feast days, and more. But before Aaron and his sons and the rest of Israel learn anything about these matters, the sacrificial system must be instituted and observed. This is not an accidental detail. As discussed in previous lessons, the sacrifices both make and regain sacred space so that the children of Israel can engage in a proper relationship with God. The other regulations will teach the people how to *maintain* sacred space, but such instructions are not valuable if that dynamic is not established in the first place. A man of the tribe of Asher might know that eating pork is forbidden according to the dietary laws because it would defile him; but of what use is that law if he is currently defiled and unable to be cleansed? So the sacrificial regulations are *first* because they are the first priority, and Moses wastes no time in ensuring that the offerings begin as soon as their stipulations have been learned.

Vs.1-9

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. **3** And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting." **4** And Moses did as the LORD commanded him, and the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

5 And Moses said to the congregation, “This is the thing that the LORD has commanded to be done.” **6** And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. **7** And he put the coat on him and tied the sash around his waist and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him and tied the skillfully woven band of the ephod around him, binding it to him with the band. **8** And he placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. **9** And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses.

All of the details concerning the ordination ceremony were planned out in the twenty-ninth chapter of Exodus. When Moses says “This is the thing that the Lord has commanded to be done,” this is a reminder rather than an innovation: the congregation of Israel was expecting this moment to arrive. As commanded and foretold, everything is done exactly as God instructed.

Another point of emphasis is that the ceremony is begun in front of the congregation. The gold plate (called the “holy crown” here) which was fastened to Aaron's turban was engraved with the phrase “Holy to the Lord.”¹ Yet one important change was made. Initially, the plate was a sign that Aaron would bear built for any impurities made by the children of Israel as *they* consecrated *their* gifts to the Lord. In other words, the initial expectation was that the children of Israel would be permitted to conduct their own offerings on altars at home or in community centers, but the golden calf incident resulted in the stripping away of any priestly rights the people had on their own; the tribe of Levi and the Aaronic dynasty became the sole intermediary party within the nation as a corrective measure.² At first the priestly line was intended as something of an insurance for the children of Israel, so that Aaron – serving as first among equals – would cover for mistakes and transgressions in the midst of ordinary religious observances. Now the people had to rely on the Levitical caste. However, this ordination ceremony demonstrates that the new order was an adjustment to the plan, not an abrogation. God still intended to see to it that Israel was covered by the blood of sacrifices and residing as the sole sacred nation in the world.

Of greater importance to believers today, we see that Aaron and his sons are first washed with water. This washing takes place before a sin offering is made and before the blood of the sin offering is sprinkled onto the priestly family. After a fashion, this prefigures the conversion of Christians, who are washed first in the waters of Baptism before they can be said to be washed by the blood of Christ. While it is true that Baptism confers the forgiveness of all our sins,³ the Church has never permitted an unbaptized person to commune at the Altar, wherein they receive the forgiveness of their sins by the Body and Blood of our Savior. While not *exactly* typological in nature, the pattern presented here is striking. It broadly resembles the entry into the universal priesthood of Christians, and shows that the priesthood of ancient Israel was privileged enough to live the closest analogue to Christian life during the era of the Old Covenant. Given the priesthood's Passover lifestyle, wherein they are always dining on unleavened bread and always eating in haste, always pronouncing absolution and receiving it themselves, the intent becomes clear that these men lived in something like a state of redemption – and their countrymen who were under the Law were to look to their lives as the standard for holiness.

Vs.10-13

10 Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. **11** And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them. **12** And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. **13** And Moses brought Aaron's sons and clothed them with coats and tied sashes around their waists and bound caps on them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

The anointing oil is poured on both the altar and Aaron. This designates the altar for service to

1 Exodus 28:36-38

2 Exodus 32:25-29

3 Acts 2:38

the Lord and the priestly family as the ones to do it. Aaron's sons are not fitted with their coats, sashes and caps until after Aaron has been consecrated; their father's consecration was necessary so as to signify that all who came from his loins were also inheritors of the solemn service to which they were ordained. Additionally, the sons themselves are not anointed with any of the oil until after the sacrifices have been made. Beginning with the oil, we see that much of the ceremony is dedicated to *connecting*. The father is connected to his sons, the priestly family is connected to the altar, the blood connects them to the sacrifices, and the Tabernacle itself becomes their home for seven days, connecting them to the holiest space in the world at the time. This all begins with the oil of anointing, which connected the chosen quality of the Tabernacle furnishings to the chosen quality of Aaron.

Vs.14-32

14 Then he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering. **15** And he killed it, and Moses took the blood, and with his finger put it on the horns of the altar around it and purified the altar and poured out the blood at the base of the altar and consecrated it to make atonement for it. **16** And he took all the fat that was on the entrails and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat, and Moses burned them on the altar. **17** But the bull and its skin and its flesh and its dung he burned up with fire outside the camp, as the LORD commanded Moses.

18 Then he presented the ram of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. **19** And he killed it, and Moses threw the blood against the sides of the altar. **20** He cut the ram into pieces, and Moses burned the head and the pieces and the fat. **21** He washed the entrails and the legs with water, and Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It was a burnt offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering for the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

22 Then he presented the other ram, the ram of ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. **23** And he killed it, and Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. **24** Then he presented Aaron's sons, and Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses threw the blood against the sides of the altar. **25** Then he took the fat and the fat tail and all the fat that was on the entrails and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat and the right thigh, **26** and out of the basket of unleavened bread that was before the LORD he took one unleavened loaf and one loaf of bread with oil and one wafer and placed them on the pieces of fat and on the right thigh. **27** And he put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons and waved them as a wave offering before the LORD. **28** Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering with a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. **29** And Moses took the breast and waved it for a wave offering before the LORD. It was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, as the LORD commanded Moses.

30 Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it on Aaron and his garments, and also on his sons and his sons' garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.

31 And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and there eat it and the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I commanded, saying, 'Aaron and his sons shall eat it.' **32** And what remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn up with fire.

Three animal sacrifices are made, not according to the number of men⁴ but according to their purpose. First, a sin offering must be made for the priestly family to expiate their sins; a man must be forgiven of his sins first if he is to serve the Lord. Second, a ram is offered as a burnt offering, with the priestly family placing their hands on the animal to signify that they shall be the ones conducting these sacrifices after their consecration is complete. Then an ordination ram is sacrificed, with its blood placed upon Aaron's ear, thumb and toe; all that he shall think, whatever he shall do, and wherever he shall go – these are dedicated to service unto the Lord. The blood of the ordination offering is also

⁴ Aaron had four sons at this point.

sprinkled on Aaron and his sons to further *connect* them to the Tabernacle and the offerings. Just as the altar is chosen by God for service, so is Aaron, hence the oil; but the blood that is the life of the animal goes upon both altar and man to signify that his life shall be something of a sacrifice as well. This too prefigures the Christian life, for believers are called upon to be a “living sacrifice.”⁵

One may note that it is *Moses* who does all of these actions. A priest could not ordain himself for service, but must have another consecrate and make offerings for him before he may begin fulfilling his duties. Moses however was directly commissioned as national prophet by God,⁶ thereby making his sacrifices valid until and after the Aaronic office was instituted. That Moses could make sacrifices by virtue of his office is assumed in the text. Later on, when Aaron and Miriam challenge Moses' authority, God asserts his uniqueness as a prophet who speaks face to face with the Divine, making his a cut above even those who have visions or dreams.⁷ For Moses to be the one conducting the ordination ceremony demonstrates his superior authority. Here there is a limit to the prefiguring of Christian life, for one enters the universal priesthood of all believers by virtue of regeneration, not awaiting another to take one's hands for their first wave-offering sacrifices.

Nonetheless, for both the ordination sacrifice and the unleavened bread, a wave offering takes place. Moses, the superior authority, guides the priestly family through their first sacrifice. These motions represent the bestowal of authority: from now on, these newly minted priests have the right and the responsibility to conduct sacrifices at the altar of God in the court of the Tabernacle. To make it official, Moses instructs them to boil the meat of the offering and eat it with the rest of the grain offering, both of which are only lawful for *priests* to eat.

Vs.31-36

33 And you shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed, for it will take seven days to ordain you. **34** As has been done today, the LORD has commanded to be done to make atonement for you. **35** At the entrance of the tent of meeting you shall remain day and night for seven days, performing what the LORD has charged, so that you do not die, for so I have been commanded.” **36** And Aaron and his sons did all the things that the LORD commanded by Moses.

The newly ordained priests were charged with a seven day period of seclusion at the entrance of the tent of meeting. They cannot leave, spending all of their time by the altar. There is no stated reason for this period of time, except that it is connected to an atonement for them despite having already sacrificed a bull for atonement that very day. This may have something to do with creation though. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh;⁸ God gave Noah seven days' warning before the Deluge wiped out the world, resulting in a *recreation*;⁹ this is also seen in the standard seven years of service offered by Jacob to Laban for his wife Rachel, with whom he began a new family.¹⁰ While it is a tired phrase to say “seven is the number of completion” as so many commentaries do, it rings true in this case. In order for creation to be complete, seven days passed. In order for Noah to be saved from the Flood which destroyed the world, seven days must pass. And in order for a man to be “re-created” into a priest, seven days were the requirement under the Mosaic Law.

There are practical considerations baked into this requirement as well. By starting his vocation in seclusion, the new priest is doing *nothing* but practicing and learning proper sacrifice technique. During this time, he learns to become entirely reliant on God and the people He sends. He cannot obtain water by himself, nor tend to his family, nor do anything which is normally necessary for

5 Romans 12:1

6 Exodus 3-4

7 Numbers 12

8 Genesis 1:1-2:3

9 Genesis 7:4

10 Genesis 29:18-20

everyday life. All he can do is perform sacrifices, pray, eat, and sleep. By the end of such a week, the whole man will be oriented toward the work that God has ordained for him to do. It would be akin to the residency requirement for medical students or basic training for military conscripts. In either case, whenever a doctoral candidate finishes his residency or a new soldier graduates boot camp, they are a new person, veritably *breathing* the expertise in their field. So it is with Aaron and his sons.

Leviticus Bible Study #11

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 9:1-24

1 On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel, **2** and he said to Aaron, “Take for yourself a bull calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, both without blemish, and offer them before the LORD. **3** And say to the people of Israel, ‘Take a male goat for a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both a year old without blemish, for a burnt offering, **4** and an ox and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD, and a grain offering mixed with oil, for today the LORD will appear to you.’” **5** And they brought what Moses commanded in front of the tent of meeting, and all the congregation drew near and stood before the LORD. **6** And Moses said, “This is the thing that the LORD commanded you to do, that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.” **7** Then Moses said to Aaron, “Draw near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and for the people, and bring the offering of the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded.”

8 So Aaron drew near to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. **9** And the sons of Aaron presented the blood to him, and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar and poured out the blood at the base of the altar. **10** But the fat and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver from the sin offering he burned on the altar, as the LORD commanded Moses. **11** The flesh and the skin he burned up with fire outside the camp.

12 Then he killed the burnt offering, and Aaron's sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar. **13** And they handed the burnt offering to him, piece by piece, and the head, and he burned them on the altar. **14** And he washed the entrails and the legs and burned them with the burnt offering on the altar.

15 Then he presented the people's offering and took the goat of the sin offering that was for the people and killed it and offered it as a sin offering, like the first one. **16** And he presented the burnt offering and offered it according to the rule. **17** And he presented the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning.

18 Then he killed the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings for the people. And Aaron's sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar. **19** But the fat pieces of the ox and of the ram, the fat tail and that which covers the entrails and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver — **20** they put the fat pieces on the breasts, and he burned the fat pieces on the altar, **21** but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved for a wave offering before the LORD, as Moses commanded.

22 Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. **23** And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. **24** And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

Introduction

In the eighth chapter of Leviticus, Moses begins the process of consecrating Aaron and his sons. This begins with an entry ceremony with plenty of sacrifices, and continues for seven days with an intensive residency at the tent of meeting. For seven long days, all the priests can do is perform sacrifices, pray, and sleep. At the end of this process, it is time for them to demonstrate their new skills by making proper sacrifices with the assembly of Israel as their audience. If God accepts their offering,

then their ordination is legitimate and Israel must submit to their spiritual leadership; if not, then they shall die. The ninth chapter details the fateful day in which they were found acceptable to the Lord.

Vs.1-6

1 On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel, **2** and he said to Aaron, “Take for yourself a bull calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, both without blemish, and offer them before the LORD. **3** And say to the people of Israel, ‘Take a male goat for a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both a year old without blemish, for a burnt offering, **4** and an ox and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD, and a grain offering mixed with oil, for today the LORD will appear to you.’” **5** And they brought what Moses commanded in front of the tent of meeting, and all the congregation drew near and stood before the LORD. **6** And Moses said, “This is the thing that the LORD commanded you to do, that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.” **7** Then Moses said to Aaron, “Draw near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and for the people, and bring the offering of the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded.”

Seven offerings are made: one bull calf, one ram, one goat, one calf, one lamb, one ox, and another ram – with an additional grain offering to go with the latter two sacrifices. These are all used in their order for two sin offerings, three burnt offerings, and two peace offerings. The bull calf and the male goat are sin offerings for the priests and the assembly respectively. The first burnt offering is likely the morning offering here, while the remaining two are for the priests and the assembly each. The peace offering at the end declares that the priests have fulfilled their ordination requirements, while the Israelites are fulfilling the command to follow their lead. The principle of *Shalam*, or peacemaking/fulfillment, is being observed in real time with these offerings. By making these sacrifices, the priests declare that they are now qualified to perform their vocations, while the offerings of the Israelites in turn proclaim acceptance. When the glory of the Lord appears at the end of this chapter, it is a sign that He accepts their efforts and fulfilling His commandments in this matter, both the priests and the laity. Sacred space is now established.

Vs.8-21

8 So Aaron drew near to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. **9** And the sons of Aaron presented the blood to him, and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar and poured out the blood at the base of the altar. **10** But the fat and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver from the sin offering he burned on the altar, as the LORD commanded Moses. **11** The flesh and the skin he burned up with fire outside the camp.

12 Then he killed the burnt offering, and Aaron's sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar. **13** And they handed the burnt offering to him, piece by piece, and the head, and he burned them on the altar. **14** And he washed the entrails and the legs and burned them with the burnt offering on the altar.

15 Then he presented the people's offering and took the goat of the sin offering that was for the people and killed it and offered it as a sin offering, like the first one. **16** And he presented the burnt offering and offered it according to the rule. **17** And he presented the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning.

18 Then he killed the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings for the people. And Aaron's sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar. **19** But the fat pieces of the ox and of the ram, the fat tail and that which covers the entrails and the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver— **20** they put the fat pieces on the breasts, and he burned the fat pieces on the altar, **21** but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved for a wave offering before the LORD, as Moses commanded.

When the process of consecration began, Moses was the one making all of the offerings. Aaron and his sons were not permitted yet. Now, after having spent their week long residency doing nothing but working on their vocation, they now possess the full rights and responsibilities of making offerings

that will mark all members of the Aaronic priesthood. As no mistakes were made and nor is there any dialogue during the sacrifices, the text conveys a kind of confidence that has been instilled in the new priests. Their consecration and residency have forged their expertise to the point where they capably and handily conduct the sacrifices which please our Lord. Unfortunately, as we will see in the next chapter, for two of Aaron's sons this confidence turned into a deadly arrogance.

Vs.22-24

22 Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. **23** And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. **24** And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

After delivering a benediction, Moses and Aaron presumably have to back away from the altar when the glory of the Lord appears. No description of this glory appears; the word **קְבוֹד**¹² is translated as “glory” but is bereft of imagery. Thankfully, both earlier and later on in Scripture, similar occurrences fill in the details for us. When King Solomon finishes the Jerusalem Temple and consecrates it by bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the new Most Holy Place, God shows His approval in the same fashion. The Chronicler states that “the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.”³ That the priests could not perform their functions tells us that this was no mere fog rolling in, and nor was it smoke since the Temple was not damaged; the cloud of God's Glory is distinct from any gaseous substance that humanity is used to. From the writings prior to Leviticus, we see that it was almost certainly luminous as well: when Moses was summoned to Sinai to receive the tablets of the Law it was said to be “like a devouring fire” – yet not without a cloud in that instance either.⁴

The appearance was spontaneous. While the pillar of smoke and fire was there amid the people as it had been,⁵ Moses states clearly in the sixth verse that this “Eighth Day ceremony” of ordination was so “that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.” This means that God appeared by the tent of meeting to consume the offering by “fire from the Lord,” while at the same time the Angel of the Lord (who is God)⁶ is in the midst of the assembly. Thus in this moment, when God showed approval of Aaron and his sons in their service, two Persons of the Trinity act as witnesses. The Holy Spirit, who dwelt with the believers, is present in the “background” as well.

For this reason, these three verses serve as the climactic center of Leviticus, the central point of a chiasmic structure. The same presence of God, both in the glory cloud and with Christ in the pillar of fire, was there when the children of Israel first heard the Law at Mt. Sinai; the completion of Aaron and his sons' ordination signals that the sacred relationship between God and Israel has been fully restored by the institution of the regular sacrifices. Sacred space was finally established for the foreseeable future.

A similar moment happened after the erection of the Tabernacle towards the end of the Exodus,⁷ but this was the sole previous sacrifice to have happened before the institution of the Aaronic priesthood. There, God demonstrated His approval of the Tabernacle itself by accepting

1 Transliterated “Kabowd,” Strong's #3519

2 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3519.htm>

3 2 Chronicles 5:13b-14

4 Exodus 24:16-18

5 Exodus 13:21, Numbers 14:14

6 Exodus 14:19, 23:20-21

7 Exodus 40:1-38

the single burnt offering the prophet made that day. Between that singular sacrifice and the ordination of Aaron and his sons, none were made – leaving the children of Israel with a feeling of spiritual uncertainty regarding whether the Covenant had truly been reinstated after the golden calf incident. Here, with the approval of the priesthood and the promise of future sacrifices to be made, they could look with confidence toward the Tabernacle and know that our Lord was still in relationship with them.

Leviticus Bible Study #12

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 10:1-20

1 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. **2** And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. **3** Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace.

4 And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, “Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp.” **5** So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. **6** And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, “Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled. **7** And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you.” And they did according to the word of Moses.

8 And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, **9** “Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. **10** You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, **11** and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”

12 Moses spoke to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his surviving sons: “Take the grain offering that is left of the LORD's food offerings, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. **13** You shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, from the LORD's food offerings, for so I am commanded. **14** But the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed you shall eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you, for they are given as your due and your sons' due from the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the people of Israel. **15** The thigh that is contributed and the breast that is waved they shall bring with the food offerings of the fat pieces to wave for a wave offering before the LORD, and it shall be yours and your sons' with you as a due forever, as the LORD has commanded.”

16 Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it was burned up! And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the surviving sons of Aaron, saying, **17** “Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? **18** Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded.” **19** And Aaron said to Moses, “Behold, today they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and yet such things as these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would the LORD have approved?” **20** And when Moses heard that, he approved.

Introduction

There is a clear pattern that emerges in the Old Testament which almost always plays out the same way beat-for-beat. First, God establishes a place and puts humans in it; then humans commit a sin

which would ruin or destroy that place; then God punishes them and takes action to mitigate the sins of humanity. God creates the universe, Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, and are thus cast out having had animals killed to cover them.¹ Some time after that, God *re*-creates the world by the process of the Deluge, and institutes a covenant with mankind through Noah; shortly after this mankind attempts to usurp ownership of the world via the Babel incident, and God mitigates the situation by confusing their languages and calling Abraham to begin a new holy nation for the Messiah.² When God ratifies the Covenant with the children of Israel with a celebratory meal,³ the golden calf incident follows,⁴ for which the Levitical system itself serves as a corrective.

Later in Israel's history, this cycle will continue to be observed. God establishes sacred space, men put it at risk through their sin, and then God takes corrective action. This is especially evident with the monarchy stopping the recurring cycle of Judges after the conquest of Canaan.⁵ God gave His approval for the Jerusalem Temple, only to have to split Israel into two kingdoms on account of Solomon's betrayal.⁶ Time does not permit for a thorough accounting of every example in this cycle, but once the pattern is recognized it is unmistakable. God establishes, man ruins, and then God punishes before mitigating the ruin.

The tenth chapter of Leviticus demonstrates this same cycle, but with an encouraging *asterisk* for the reader. Nadab and Abihu are killed as punishment for their use of strange fire, but nothing in particular changes concerning the structure of the new religious observances. Aaron remains high priest, the sacrifices are maintained, and the Tabernacle furnishings are not destroyed. Yet God still enacts mitigating reforms after the incident, namely establishing educational practices. To prevent any repetitions of Nadab and Abihu's failure to show proper reverence, now the priests are to be thoroughly educated, enough to turn forth and educate the people as an additional duty to their sacrificial responsibilities.

While the event itself is a disaster, especially in Aaron being bereft of two of his sons, there is a special encouragement found in this chapter. The Levitical system is shown to be antifragile in nature. Unlike the golden calf incident and other disasters, there is no *new* institution which must be put in place to correct it; so long as one priest survives, religious life in Israel can continue unabated no matter how many others fall by their sin.

Vs.1-7

1 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. **2** And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. **3** Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

4 And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." **5** So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. **6** And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled. **7** And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

1 Genesis 1-3

2 Genesis 9, 11:1-9

3 Exodus 24:1-11

4 Exodus 32

5 Judges 2:16-19, 1 Samuel 8:4-9

6 1 Kings 8, 11

The nature of Nadab and Abihu's sin is unclear, but there are clues. First, there is no command at this point for the priests to burn incense on anything but the *Altar of Incense*.⁷ This tells us that they were engaging in a ritual that they had made themselves. Second, the word translated as “unauthorized” is זורר,⁸ which has a connotation of foreignness or adulteration, commonly used in a negative sense. Multiple times the term is employed to refer to false gods.¹⁰ What these two men did was not only something God did not command, it is undoubtedly *pagan* in nature. God kills them for this offense, which clearly constitutes a violation of the First Commandment, “you shall have no other gods before Me.” Aaron holds his peace, recognizing the justice of the execution.

Mishael and Elzaphan are tasked with carrying the bodies for ceremonial purposes. Touching a dead body would introduce uncleanness in Aaron or his other sons, requiring a pause in the sacrifices as the men were made ritually clean again. Meanwhile, Aaron and his other two sons are commanded to remain at the entrance of the tent of meeting, being strictly forbidden from the standard mourning process of the time (head unadorned, tearing one's robes, etc.). Moses reminds them of the anointing oil so as to tell them they are still “on the clock” as it were; they do not have the luxury of disobeying God by deviating from their work to mourn.

Vs.8-11

8 And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying, **9** “Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. **10** You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, **11** and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”

The command given to Aaron to not drink when working at the tent of meeting is another context clue as to the reason Nadab and Abihu were killed. It appears to be that both brothers drank heavily, became intoxicated, and decided to perform a pagan ritual in front of the altar. It may have been the case that the brothers would not have done this if they had been sober. Nonetheless, as God says “I will be sanctified” – that is, *shown to be set apart* – it appears that the alcohol only revealed what was in the men's hearts, namely faithlessness. They were only undergoing the ordination process because they *had* to for their father's sake, not out of any special love or devotion to our Lord.

To prevent this from happening again, God institutes new reforms to bolster the priestly institution. First, while it ought to have been an assumed practice, the priests are now *de jure* barred from drinking during their service times. In addition (and far more importantly), the priesthood is now connected with education for themselves and the Israelite laity. This is to say, they must know the Law intimately, to the point of being able to teach others. Everyone in Israel is thus enjoined to internalize everything that God commands, from the ways sacrifices are conducted to the means by which they remain undefiled. The rest of Leviticus, after this chapter, will serve as a fulfillment of this command; its contents will shift to the general education of the Israelites for social and religious matters not covered by the contents of Exodus.

Vs.12-20

12 Moses spoke to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his surviving sons: “Take the grain offering that is left of the LORD's food offerings, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. **13** You shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, from the LORD's food offerings, for so I am commanded. **14** But the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed you shall eat in a clean place, you and your sons and

7 Leviticus 4:7

8 Transliterated “Zuwr,” Strong's #2114

9 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2114.htm>

10 Deuteronomy 32:15-18, Psalm 44:20-21

your daughters with you, for they are given as your due and your sons' due from the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the people of Israel. **15** The thigh that is contributed and the breast that is waved they shall bring with the food offerings of the fat pieces to wave for a wave offering before the LORD, and it shall be yours and your sons' with you as a due forever, as the LORD has commanded.”

16 Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it was burned up! And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the surviving sons of Aaron, saying, **17** “Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD? **18** Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded.” **19** And Aaron said to Moses, “Behold, today they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and yet such things as these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would the LORD have approved?” **20** And when Moses heard that, he approved.

Moses reiterates the command for eating sacrifices to Aaron and his remaining sons. This shows the solid nature of the Levitical system; even when crass idolatrous practices cause wrath to break out against Nadab and Abihu, Aaron is *still* the priest and is expected to carry out his duties. God is demonstrating not only His mercy to the sacerdotal family here, but also to all Israel; there will be no mass slaughter of the Levites like there was for Israelites after the golden calf incident, but at the same time even the priests are held accountable. The new order is not a fragile one, but it *is* thoroughgoing in its applications. Thus the Law accounts for the cycle of affront and mitigation without raising the priesthood up too much, as though they were above God's Commandments.

Aaron does have to speak for his refusal to eat though. In what appears to be the first instance of fasting in Scripture, Aaron and his remaining sons afflict themselves so as to show proper penitence for the affront of the strange fire. Since he says that the death of his sons happened to him, he takes some responsibility for however his sons were raised. Since the sin offerings are made for him and his family in accordance with the Law thus far given, he is not performing this fast out of any desire to merit forgiveness. His recognition of the justice of the Lord merits a true expression of contrition. Since he and his sons were barred from mourning Nadab and Abihu, with Israel mourning on their behalf, his fast is performed for purely penitential faith.