

## 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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> 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

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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 men<sup>4</sup> 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

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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.”<sup>5</sup>

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,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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;<sup>8</sup> God gave Noah seven days' warning before the Deluge wiped out the world, resulting in a *recreation*;<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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

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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.