



Leviticus - Chapter Eight

Summary of Chapter Eight

This chapter describes the rite of priestly ordination as a fulfilment of the commands given in Exodus Chapters 28-29. It is a highly structured narrative divided into seven parts by the phrase 'as the Lord commanded'. The number seven often symbolises completion in the OT, and in this chapter the sevenfold layout signifies that, by the end, the installation of the priests is fully achieved.

III Leviticus 8:1-10:20 - The Establishment of the Priesthood

The Book of Exodus ends with the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus Chapters 35-40), and Leviticus Chapters 1-7 provides a manual for sacrifice in the tabernacle. Now Chapter 8 records the installation of the priesthood, and Chapter 9 describes the first services in the tabernacle. Chapter 10 records an occasion when priests did not obey the words and instructions of the Lord in matters of worship.

III.a Leviticus 8:1-36 - The Rites of Ordination

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² Take Aaron and his sons with him, the vestments, the anointing-oil, the bull of sin-offering, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; ³ and assemble the whole congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁴ And Moses did as the Lord commanded him. When the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting, ⁵ Moses said to the congregation, 'This is what the Lord has commanded to be done.'

Leviticus 8:1-5

Exodus Chapter 29 records the command God gave to Moses to carry out this consecration ceremony with Aaron and his sons. Now that the tabernacle was built it was time to perform the ceremony. Exodus 29:1b stated the purpose for the ceremony: <<*so that they may serve me as priests*>>. That is, it was to set the priests aside for God's purpose and will. Aaron and his sons, along with their vestments, will be consecrated by the offerings, oil, and unleavened bread. Nearly one-third of the uses of the term commanded in Leviticus can be found in this chapter, pointing to the absolute command of the Lord and the complete loyalty of Moses.

Assemble the whole congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting. God gave a specific lists of items needed in the consecration ceremony, and commanded that the entire congregation together witness this ceremony. It would not be performed secretly. The entrance of the tent of meeting is a reference to the entrance to the screened-off courtyard that surrounds the tabernacle.

This is what the Lord has commanded to be done. The whole matter of consecration was God's plan, not the plan of Moses. In some ways this was a strange and messy plan, but it was God's plan for the process of consecration.

⁶ Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water. ⁷ He put the tunic on him, fastened the sash around him, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him. He then put the decorated band of the ephod around him, tying the ephod to him with it. ⁸ 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 ornament, the holy crown, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:6-9

Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water. This was not a ceremony for just anyone in Israel. There were special consecration ceremonies available to anyone, such as the Nazirite vow in Numbers Chapter 6. However, this ceremony was for the priests alone, for Aaron and his sons, the four then living and all their direct descendants that would follow.

Moses washed them with water. The process of consecration began with cleansing. All priestly ministries began with cleansing, and a cleansing that was received: you shall wash them. Aaron and his sons did not wash themselves; they received a washing. This was humbling, because it took place publicly at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. No one can be cleansed from sin without being

humbled first: <<Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me'>> (John 13:8).

This great cleansing was a one-time thing. From then on they just needed to cleanse their hands and their feet. Like these ancient priests, every Christian is washed by the work of God's word: <<Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word>> (Ephesians 5:25-26); by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit: <<But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit>> (Titus 3:4-5). This cleansing work was accomplished by the death of Jesus for everyone: <<John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood>> (Revelation 1:4-5), and is appropriated by faith.

He put the tunic on him. Moses clothes Aaron and his sons with beautiful garments, which not only cover their nakedness: <<Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves>> (Genesis 3:7), and: <<You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it>> (Exodus 20:26), but also represent the Lord's glory and beauty and the glorious task of mediating between the Lord and his people: <<For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics and sashes and head-dresses; you shall make them for their glorious adornment>> (Exodus 28:40). Like these ancient priests, every believer is clothed in Jesus Christ and in his righteousness: <<If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels>> (Revelation 3:5). These are clothes that are given freely by Jesus, but received and worn by faith.

The sash, the robe, the ephod, the breastpiece, and the turban. Each of these specific articles of clothing was made for the high priest, garments to show the glory and for beauty of the priesthood: <<You shall make sacred vestments for the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron>> (Exodus 28:2).

The Urim and the Thummim were to be placed in the breastpiece of judgement and carried before the Lord, but their function is not fully explained. From several contexts where they are referred to in the OT, it appears that the Urim and Thummim, whatever they were, were used in seeking the Lord's decision on particular matters; refer to Exodus 28:30, Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 23:9, 28:6 and 30:7-8; and Ezra 2:63.

¹⁰ Then Moses took the anointing-oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. ¹¹ He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its base, to consecrate them. ¹² He poured some of the anointing-oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him. ¹³ And Moses brought forward Aaron's sons, and clothed them with tunics, and fastened sashes around them, and tied head-dresses on them, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:10-13

God had commanded Moses to anoint the tabernacle and its utensils with the anointing-oil to set apart these items for holy use; refer to Exodus 30:22-33.

He poured some of the anointing-oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him. Priests also had to be anointed. The oil, a picture of the Holy Spirit, was poured over their heads, indicating that it was given in great measure, not in small measure: <<*It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes*>> (Psalm 133:2). Things were sprinkled, but upon people the oil was poured out.

To consecrate him means that the anointing oil set Aaron apart. If something is consecrated, it is then set apart for God's service. Once sprinkled with oil, then the tabernacle was not just a tent anymore; the altar was no longer just a fire-pit; and Aaron was no longer just a man. Like these ancient priests, every believer has an anointing: <<*But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge*>> (1 John 2:20) that they may receive and walk in by faith.

¹⁴ He led forward the bull of sin-offering; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bull of sin-offering, ¹⁵ and it was slaughtered. Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it, to make atonement for it. ¹⁶ Moses took all the fat that was around the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and turned them into smoke on the altar. ¹⁷ But the bull itself, its skin and flesh and its dung, he burned with fire outside the camp, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:14-17

He led forward the bull of sin-offering; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bull of sin-offering. Moses presents a sin-offering on the altar for the purification of the priesthood and the altar. The washing at the door of the tabernacle was only one aspect of the symbolic cleansing from sin. There also had to be the punishment of the guilty, and this happened in the sin-offering. As Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull, they symbolically transferred their sin to the bull. Like these ancient priests, every believer can only be consecrated to God through sacrifice. A Christian's consecration should be greater, because it was made through a far greater sacrifice, the sacrifice of God's own Son: <<*Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son*>> (Acts 20:28).

Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar. The altar was sanctified with the blood of the sin-offering, and the best of the animal was burnt before the Lord, the rest was destroyed outside the camp. The sin-offering said, 'We have failed to give our best to God. This animal now gives its best to atone for our failure, and we decide to live now giving our best, even as this animal who dies in our place.' The idea behind the ancient Hebrew word for altar is essentially 'killing-place'. The ancient altar, a place of death, was made holy and was consecrated to God. Like that ancient altar, the altar of the New Covenant, i.e. the Cross, is transformed from a place to death to a place set apart to bring life.

¹⁸ Then he brought forward the ram of burnt-offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, ¹⁹ and it was slaughtered. Moses dashed the blood against all sides of the altar. ²⁰ The ram was cut into its parts, and Moses turned into smoke the head and the parts and the suet. ²¹ And after the entrails and the legs were washed with water, Moses turned into smoke the whole ram on the altar; it was a burnt-offering for a pleasing odour, an offering by fire to the Lord, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:18-21

These verses are confirmed by Exodus 29:15-18 and Leviticus Chapter 1. Aaron and his sons dedicate themselves by offering a ram as a burnt-offering. This animal, probably costlier than a goat, is in keeping with the greater responsibility that they bear before the Lord; refer to the comment made on 4:1-21. As the sin-offering before it, the burnt-offering also symbolically received the sins of the priests and they laid their hands on the head of the animal and confessed their sin.

Moses turned into smoke the whole ram on the altar. The ram was completely burnt before the Lord, with its blood sprinkled on the altar. The burnt-offering said, 'We have failed to give our all to God. This animal now gives its all to atone for our failure, and we decide to live now giving our all, even as this animal who dies in our place.' This demonstration of total commitment to the Lord only came after the first three aspects of the ceremony: cleansing, anointing, and atonement. Without these three things settled first, believers cannot truly give themselves to God.

²² Then he brought forward the second ram, the ram of ordination. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, ²³ and it was slaughtered. 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 After Aaron's sons were brought forward, 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 dashed the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar. ²⁵ He took the fat – the broad tail, all the fat that was around the entrails, the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat – and the right thigh. ²⁶ From the basket of unleavened bread that was before the Lord, he took one cake of unleavened bread, one cake of bread with oil, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat and on the right thigh. ²⁷ He placed all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and raised them as an elevation-offering before the Lord. ²⁸ Then Moses took them from their hands and turned them into smoke on the altar with the burnt-offering. This was an ordination-offering for a pleasing odour, an offering by fire to the Lord. ²⁹ Moses took the breast and raised it as an elevation-offering before the Lord; it was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:22-29

The ritual relating to the second ram bears the nature of the peace-offering. Whereas the first ram (vv.18-21) purified the altar and the priests in general, the second ram is for the sacrifice of installation. Placing its blood on the right extremities of the priests constitutes a form of merism, where the two extremities of the body stand for the whole person. Thus, it symbolises total dedication and purification.

In law, merism is a figure of speech by which a single thing is referred to by a conventional phrase that enumerates several of its parts, or which lists several synonyms for the same thing. In rhetoric, merism is the combination of two contrasting words, to refer to an entirety.

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. To express the idea of consecration, blood from the ram was placed on the ear, thumb, and toe of the priest. It was blood from the ram and not the wool, not the fat. God wanted the life of the sacrificial victim to mark his consecrated priests. Leviticus 17:11 is one of many passages that expresses this principle: <<*For the life of the flesh is in the blood*>>. God wanted the life of the sacrificial victim to be evident in the body of the priest.

He took the fat – the broad tail. The second ram used in the consecration ceremony, the ram whose blood was applied to the ear, hand, and foot of the priest, was used as a **wave** or **elevation-offering** before the Lord. Then these portions, along with the bread and the wafer, were burnt on the altar as an act of complete devotion.

³⁰ Then Moses took some of the anointing-oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his vestments, and also on his sons and their vestments. Thus he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and also his sons and their vestments.

Leviticus 8:30

This is the second use **of the anointing-oil**, and this time the **sprinkling of blood on Aaron and his vestments** is added to the command of Exodus 28:1-2. Since the latter rite is mostly performed on the tent and its utensils, Aaron and his sons are probably regarded as equivalent to those objects with regard to holiness and consecration. This mixture of oil and blood stained the garments of Aaron and his sons. It would be a long reminder of this ceremony of consecration.

³¹ And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, 'Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of ordination-offerings, as I was commanded, "Aaron and his sons shall eat it"; ³² and what remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn with fire. ³³ You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the day when your period of ordination is 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 You shall remain at the entrance of the tent of meeting day

and night for seven days, keeping the Lord's charge so that you do not die; for so I am commanded.' ³⁶ Aaron and his sons did all the things that the Lord commanded through Moses.

Leviticus 8:31-36

Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting. This is a meal of covenant ratification. The ceremony symbolises the bond between the Lord and his priesthood.

The second ram, after the ram presented as a burnt-offering, had its life applied to the consecrated priests. First its life was applied with the application of blood to the ear, hand, and foot of the priest. Then through a ritual meal, its life was applied by the priest taking the ram into himself. In this way, eating is a good picture of a healthy, continuing relationship with Jesus:

- Eating is personal. No one can eat for another person, and no one can have a relationship with Jesus on their behalf.
- Eating is inward. It does no good to be around food or to rub food on the outside of the body, it must be ingested. Jesus must be demonstrated inwardly, not merely in an external way.
- Eating is active. Some medicines are received passively, they are injected under the skin and go to work. Such medicines could even be received while one sleeps, but no one can eat while asleep. Jesus must be accepted actively and not passively.
- Eating arises out of a sense of need and produces a sense of satisfaction. A healthy relationship with Jesus comes from a true sense of need for him and when one receives the satisfaction that this relationship brings.

What remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn with fire. God did not want to fellowship with them over stale food. Even if they had the exact same meal, God wanted it made fresh. He wants fellowship with him to be fresh.

You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days. With the coming generations, new descendants of Aaron would qualify for the priesthood and would be consecrated in the same way. For Aaron and his descendants the consecration process took seven days.

You shall remain at the entrance of the tent of meeting day and night for seven days. For seven days they lived at the tabernacle and ate the ram of the consecration and the bread of consecration. The consecration ceremony was not quick and easy. It took time, reflection, and a constant awareness of sacrifice and atonement.

Keeping the Lord's charge so that you do not die. After seven days of living in the tabernacle, they would either love the tabernacle of God and his presence, or they would hate them. If approached with the right heart, their consecration demonstrated the heart of the Psalmist: <<*How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God*>> (Psalm 84:1-2).

Aaron and his sons did all the things that the Lord commanded through Moses. Obedience is the key to a godly life of service and sacrifice.