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An Extraordinary Ordination Leviticus 8:1-36

Intro: The tabernacle has been built (Ex 40) and the offerings have been listed and explained (Lev 1-7) so now the Israelites are able to begin public worship. But, since public worship was to be directed by ordained priests, ch8 will describe the ceremony by which Aaron and his sons are ordained into the ministry of the tabernacle. This will not be simply a new job for Aaron or just a promotion to a new position. This is a position that has both great responsibility and great significance for Aaron, his descendents and all of Israel as a whole.

To properly understand this chapter, it's important to identify how ceremonies function. Generally, a ceremony brings about a change in status for the main participants through a series of rites directly related to the ceremony's purpose.

The purpose of wedding ceremonies is to change the status of a bride and groom from being single to being married and this is done through a series of rites that are directly related to this purpose: exchanging rings as a symbol of their love, taking vows of lifelong faithfulness, etc. Here, the purpose of the ordination ceremony is to change the status of Aaron and his sons, to set them apart as ritually holy priests, which is also done through a series of rites directly related to this purpose: giving them special clothing to set them apart as ritually distinct, having them undergo purification rites that move them to a higher level of ritual purity, etc.

The description of the ordination ceremony is divided into 7 sections, each one ending with a phrase that says either Moses, or Aaron and his sons, did just as the Lord commanded (4, 9, 15, 17, 21, 29, 36). This statement presents Moses and Aaron as models of obedience in matters of worship, a model the Israelites must also follow. There is also another 7 in this ceremony. This ceremony lasts for 7 days. This leads some to see a connection between this passage and the story of creation. In many respects, the tabernacle is the new Garden of Eden, and Aaron (with his sons) is the "new Adam" as they are appointed to *work* and *keep* the tabernacle just as Adam was appointed to *work* and *keep* the Garden (Gen 2:15). It took 7 days to create the world and it takes 7 days to ordain a priest.

This serves to highlight that the rituals in **Lev 8** are acts of creation that mirror the creative acts in **Gen 1-2**.

1-4a – The ordination ceremony was to take place at the door of the tabernacle (**3**), meaning the area in front of the tent's entranceway. This was to ensure that the ceremony would take place before the Lord (**1:3**). The Lord also commanded Moses to gather certain things to this area: those being ordained (Aaron and his sons), the items necessary for the ceremony (garments, anointing oil and various offerings) and the entire congregation of Israel (to witness the ceremony). Since the congregation was quite large, it's likely that the elders gathered on Israel's behalf in the courtyard, with the rest of the people assembling in front of the tabernacle complex.

Having all of Israel attend this ceremony was critical. The common Israelite had a vested interest in what was to take place in this ceremony. It was important for the assembly to witness the ordination process and to be assured that Aaron and his sons were legitimately qualified and appointed to the priestly office. How could the assembly be sure that everything was done as the Lord had proscribed and that Aaron and his sons would be acceptable to the Lord? We'll see at the end of **ch9** that fire will come out from the presence of the Lord when these newly ordained priests offer their first sacrifices. This will sufficiently testify to the authority of these priests and will validate their ministry in the eyes of the congregation so that it will be beyond question.

4b-9 – what the Lord commanded – We should realize that none of this was Moses' idea. The entire consecration ceremony was fully God's plan, not Moses' plan. In some ways this seemed to be a strange and even a messy plan, but it was God's plan for the process of ordaining priests to the ministry of His worship. Also notice there seems to be a dilemma: how are priests to be ordained when there are no official priests? Moses wasn't a priest but Moses is the primary actor, the master of ceremonies as it were, in this process. It's odd to see Moses performing the functions of the priestly office although never officially or permanently appointed as such. The answer is: Moses was acting in the very place of God. The Lord, through His servant, was anointing the tabernacle and the priests to His ministry.

The rituals in this chapter mark a rite of passage for the priest. He is undergoing a change in status from common to holy. Scholars typically refer

to what happens to the priests as an act of dedication: being dedicated to the Lord. But dedication is probably too weak a word for this process. They are actually being offered to the Lord. Moses brought Aaron and his sons... (6). The Hebrew word for brought is the same word already used in Leviticus to describe how the Israelites brought their sacrifices to the Lord. Thus, the priests are seen as offerings made to the Lord. As such, they cross a border that changes their status from common to holy.

Since the ceremony's purpose was to move Aaron and his sons to the highest state of ritual purity (holiness), then it only stands to reason that the first step in this process was for them to go through a rite frequently associated with ritual purification: being washed...with water. We'll see this many times in [Lev](#). The process of consecration began with cleansing. All priestly ministries began with cleansing and it was a cleansing that was received. Aaron and his sons didn't wash themselves; they received a washing. While this was all part of the process, it must have been a bit humbling because this washing happened before the entire assembly of Israel. This cleansing served to remind the priests and the people that priests weren't chosen because they were perfect. They were chosen, but they also needed to be cleansed for service.

In the same way, we can't be cleansed from our sins without being humbled first. Before a person can ever receive Jesus as their Savior, they must recognize they need a Savior and that can be a very humbling process for many. But, when we accept Christ as our Savior, like these priests, every believer is washed by the work of God's Word ([Eph 5:26](#)) and by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit ([Titus 3:5](#)). This cleansing work was accomplished first and foremost by the death of Jesus for us ([Rev 1:5](#)) and it is appropriated by faith in Him alone.

The 2nd step was for special clothing to be put on them. In the Ancient Near East, special clothing indicated that a person had entered into a specific state (a mourner – [II Sam 14:2](#)) or had a specific role (a ruler – [Gen 41:42](#)). The same is true today, as seen in a soldier's uniform, a bride's white dress or a mourner's black clothing. The priest's special clothing identified them as having been set apart by the Lord into a specific state (ritual holiness) to carry out a specific role (to approach His holy altar and minister in His holy tabernacle). It also signaled to the Israelites to give the dignity and honor due to those who carried such a weighty responsibility.

The priestly clothing is described in detail in [Ex 28](#). There was a particular set of clothes for the High Priest and a different set for the other priests. All that's mentioned in our text is related to the High Priest. The more elaborate clothing of the High Priest set him apart as leader of the priests. It's also significant that his clothing had royal overtones: robes are seen elsewhere as the clothing of princes ([I Sam 18:4](#)) and kings ([I Sam 24:4, 11](#)); blue was associated with the clothing of a kingdom's lead administrators ([Ez 23:6](#)); turbans are associated with crowns ([Ez 21:26](#)) and the gold plate also describes a king's crown ([II Kings 11:12](#)).

Such royal clothing would have reminded the Israelites that the High Priest was part of a royal administration. If you look at the details of the High Priest's clothes in [Ex 28](#) you'll notice that the colors and materials used to make the clothes directly correlates to the colors and materials used to construct the tabernacle; suggesting that the one who will work in and guard the holiness of the tabernacle must dress in a way that corresponds to that holiness and even participate in that holiness. The one who would draw near to the Lord of the universe must wear royal clothes that reflect His splendor and majesty. The High Priest led the royal attendants (the priests) of the heavenly King (the Lord), who was dwelling in the midst of His kingdom people (Israel) in His holy palace (tabernacle) so his attire must properly reflect his royal position and responsibilities.

We should also note here that just like the washing, the clothing of the priests didn't originate with them. They put on garments that were given by God. These garments were provided for them. They were out no expense in buying them, no labor in weaving them, no effort in making them; they simply had to put them on. In the same way, every believer is clothed in Jesus Christ, in His righteousness. All we have to do is put on the garments that Jesus has provided for us, at His own cost, and which He freely bestows upon us out of His boundless love for us.

10-13 – This anointing oil consisted of olive oil and spices ([Ex 30:23-25](#)), was specifically made for tabernacle use and as such, was especially holy; whatever it touched became consecrated (set apart as ritually holy). It is used here to consecrate the entire tabernacle complex in order to prepare it as a place of worship. Moses began by anointing the tabernacle (tent) and everything in it. Next, he anointed the objects in the courtyard: the altar of

burnt offering and all its utensils, which he sprinkled...7 times to consecrate them thoroughly. This also included the bronze laver (and its base), which stood between the altar and the tent. After this, the tabernacle complex was now consecrated and ready for use in public worship.

Moses now turns to Aaron and anoints him as well. This act not only consecrates him for the ordination ceremony; it also sets him apart as the leader of the priests. Just as his clothes were reflective of the materials of the tabernacle, so was his anointing. He's just as holy as the tabernacle and all its furnishings were holy. This special oil designated that anything anointed by it was then set apart for God's service. Once sprinkled with oil, the tabernacle wasn't just a tent anymore, the altar was no longer just a fire-pit; Aaron was no longer just a man but High Priest of the living God.

Moses clothes the other priests. Everything was now in place to offer the ordination ceremony's 3 main sacrifices: the purification offering (14-17), the burnt offering (18-21) and the ordination offering (22-29).

14-17 – The purification offering normally preceded burnt and/or fellowship offerings. This order is logical since cleansing sin and ritual impurity naturally precedes expressions of general worship or atonement (burnt) or that of covenant fellowship. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the bull, symbolically transferring their sin to the animal, indicating that this sacrifice was being made on their behalf. Priests were as sinful and impure as other Israelites and equally in need of atonement. Because sin and impurity defiled the Lord's dwelling place, Moses took the sacrificial blood, the most powerful cleansing agent available, and went to the altar of burnt offering (representing the entire tabernacle). He applied the blood on the altar's horns, thus purifying both it and the entire tabernacle. By doing this, he was making atonement for it: removing the sin and impurity from it and consecrating it for sacred use.

Like these ancient priests, every believer can only be consecrated to God through sacrifice. Yet, our consecration to God should be greater because it was made by a far greater sacrifice – the sacrifice of God's own Son.

18-21 – Moses next presented a burnt offering for Aaron and his sons. As with the purification offering before, the animal substitute also symbolically received the sin of the priests as they laid their hands on its head and

confessed their sin. The ram was then completely burnt before the Lord and its blood was sprinkled on the altar. The burnt offering was a virtual confession, a tangible promise that said, “We’ve 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, just as this animal that died in our place.”

22-29 – The ordination offering was simply another type of fellowship offering, as indicated by their many similarities: the blood is sprinkled all around the altar; the fat is burned up on the altar; most of the meat is divided between the officiant (Moses) and the offerors (priests); and any meat not consumed within a certain amount of time must be burned up. It’s appropriate that the ordination offering is a type of fellowship offering because the fellowship offerings served as meals which confirmed a covenant and the priesthood was a covenantal promise to Aaron and his sons. The order is also appropriate: after making atonement for their sins and impurity (purification/ burnt) and recognizing the Lord as the one worthy of all praise (burnt), the priests now confirmed the covenant of priesthood that the Lord was bestowing on them.

Now, just as the blood was placed on the extremities of the altar to make it holy, so it is also placed on the extremities of Aaron and his sons (from top to bottom) to make their whole body holy. Next, Moses presented some of the best portions of the sacrifice as a wave offering on the priest’s behalf. In this way, the priests dedicated these objects to the Lord, thus acknowledging His greatness and worthiness. Moses then burned these portions on the altar as a pleasing aroma, that is, as a way for them to seek the Lord’s favorable acceptance of their ordination. A share of the fellowship offering normally went to the attending priest. Since Moses was functioning as the officiating priest, he received this portion and presented it as a wave offering in accordance with the Lord’s command (**29b**).

30-36 – Finally, Moses took some of the anointing oil and sacrificial blood from the altar and anointed Aaron, his garments, his sons and their garments as a last act of consecration. By having these action repeated the Lord was signifying the great significance and deep extent of this consecration. Attention now moves to what remains for Aaron and his sons to do. First, they had to cook and eat the holy meat and bread at the door of the tabernacle, in sight of the whole congregation. The idea is straightforward: holy meat must be eaten by holy people in a holy place. If

any was left over, it was to be burned up, to reduce the risk of defiling it.

For the priests, this was literally a fellowship meal with the Lord. This eating speaks of the continuing relationship of the priests with the Lord. In a similar way, eating is a good picture of a healthy, continuing relationship with Jesus. Eating is personal: no one can eat for you and no one can have a relationship with Jesus on your behalf. Eating is inward: it does no good to be around food or to rub food on the outside of your body; you must take it in. We must take the reality of Jesus to ourselves inwardly, not just in an external way. Eating is active: Some medicines can be received passively; they're injected under the skin and do their job. Some medicines can even be received in our sleep – but no one can eat while asleep. We must actively (deliberately) take Jesus to ourselves. Eating arises out of a sense of need and produces a sense of satisfaction. We will only have a healthy relationship with Christ to the degree that we sense our need for Him and then receive the satisfaction which only that relationship will bring.

It was also important that Aaron and his sons did not leave the tabernacle area during their ordination. The idea being, if they left this holy place and went out into a non-holy place (anywhere outside the tabernacle area) they would be disregarding the holiness of the ordination process and thus, risking death. Clearly, being a priest had its advantages but it also had its perils; it was a hazardous occupation. This transition from the common to the holy was fraught with danger because it made them more responsible to the Lord, not less. In fact, in just a couple of chapters, we'll see just how dangerous being a priest could be. Yes, the priesthood had its rewards but the priests could also incur the wrath of God more quickly and easily than the ordinary Israelite.

When Israelites engaged in public worship, they came before the very presence of their holy King in His holy palace. But this presented an immediate problem, because the Lord's holiness destroys impurity and sinfulness in the same way light destroys darkness. How were impure and sinful Israelites to come safely before Him? Only through the work of holy priestly mediators. By having this ordination ceremony take place before all the Israelites, the Lord made it clear that they needed ritually holy people to act as their representatives before Him. And by providing these mediators, the Lord assured the Israelites that He desired them to enter His presence and enjoy covenant fellowship with Him. This is the Lord's heart for His

entire creation for He desires all to repent and be saved and has provided the ultimate mediator – Jesus Christ, the righteous – to save us and bring us back into covenant fellowship with Him.

To the priests, this ordination ceremony communicated the seriousness of their calling. To be set apart as holy in order to stand and minister in the presences of such a holy King was a great responsibility, requiring them to show full respect for their ritually holy state. The ceremony also emphasized that they couldn't enter into this state proudly. The elaborate series of rites they had to go through to become ritually holy showed that they were not holy in and of themselves; they were just as sinful and impure as other Israelites and just as much in need of atonement. This serves to highlight the great contrast between these priests and Jesus, our great High Priest. Instead of needing atonement for a sinful life, He makes perfect atonement available to us by His holy life, by offering Himself as the ultimate atoning sacrifice for sinners. Jesus fulfills and perfects the office of High Priest for us. He is now the only mediator we need between us and God. We no longer need human mediators as Jesus perfectly fulfills that role.

It's clear that the rites of this ceremony in ch8 are applicable in many ways to ministers today but that doesn't mean they're not applicable to every believer. The Bible says that we are a kingdom of priests and as such, every believer has a calling, every believer is ordained by the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord in some capacity. We, as God's priests, must be committed to discovering and performing our position of service. We must be consecrated to this work and seek appropriate purification for it. [II Tim 2:20-21](#) speaks to this point expressly. What kind of vessel do you desire to be? To be a vessel of honor, we must demonstrate a deliberate dedication to our service, making that our primary goal in life, not just an occasional pastime. All the while, enjoying close fellowship with the Lord while we are serving Him. These are all things every believer should faithfully pursue because only in doing so will we find satisfaction. 😊