

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Inauguration of Public Worship

### Leviticus 9:1-24

**Intro:** Our text continues the narrative from the previous chapter. Here, Aaron and his sons will perform their first official sacrificial duties for themselves and for the congregation of Israel. Ch8 describes the process of their ordination and all the sacrifices and rituals performed were to that end alone. Now they will perform the official duties for which they have been consecrated and ordained for: the offering of sacrifices and the manipulation of sacrificial blood. This is not the only “first” to occur in ch9. We’ll also see for the first time, Aaron will enter the tent of meeting and, for the first time, he will pronounce a blessing on the people.

This chapter is full of significant events and Aaron’s entering the tent of meeting is just one of them. If you recall, the tabernacle was no longer just a tent since it had been anointed with holy oil and consecrated to the Lord (8:10-11). Now the tent of meeting stood as the earthly palace of Israel’s covenant King who had come to dwell in the midst of His covenant people. As such, the tent was the place where the Lord’s people came before Him, bringing Him their offerings and enjoying covenant fellowship with Him. Leviticus has identified how these offerings were to be presented (1-7) and has described the ordination of the priests who would present them on their behalf (8). Now that the priests are ordained, the Israelites could begin their public worship of the Lord, a worship that would continue unabated for centuries until the perfect Sacrifice arrived to effectively and permanently put an end to all animal sacrifice for sin.

**1-5** – Notice that vs1 stresses that Aaron and his sons begin their ministry on the eighth day, immediately after their 7-day ordination process. Some scholars draw a connection between this story and the creation account in Genesis, stating that the story of Gen 3 begins on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after the 7-day creation. The eighth day bears some significance in the OT. It is emphasized in Israel’s festival calendar as it represents the first day of a new week. In their worship rituals, the eighth day marks the beginning of something new, a new way of life, the beginning of a clean or holy state after a period of purification or consecration.

The original creation was completed within 7 days, so the eighth day in Scripture represents the start of God's new creation, His work of redemption. Circumcision took place on the eighth day to mark the start of the infant's new life as a member of God's covenant people. So it seems right to see this eighth day beginning as more than just the end of the 7 day ordination process but rather the first day of a new beginning in the relationship between the Lord and the priests and, through them, with the people of Israel. This was a day of firsts, of new beginnings. After 7 days of patient fellowship with the Lord in His tabernacle, God was ready to do a new work in and through the priests.

The day begins with Moses summoning the appropriate people to the tabernacle: Aaron and his sons would be performing the sacrifices, while the elders of Israel would be present to perform rites on behalf of all Israel (hand-leaning rite). Of course, because this was a highly significant event, all of Israel gathered at the King's palace where the priests would present offerings on their behalf. Moses identifies the appropriate offerings to sacrifice before the Lord (2-4). There were to be 2 sets of sacrifices: the first to be made on behalf of Aaron (and his household) and the second on behalf of the congregation of Israel.

Each of these sacrifices was especially necessary because, as Moses says in v4, today the Lord will appear to you and one must always properly prepare for a king's arrival. The sacrifices followed the usual order. Because of the Lord's holiness, the sacrifices began with a purification offering, which atoned for sin and impurity, followed by the burnt offering, which not only atoned for general sinfulness but also acknowledged that this King (the Lord) is worthy of all worship. The sacrifices ended with fellowship offerings, which served as a covenant meal, affirming and celebrating the fact that Israel's covenant King was now in her midst receiving her worship.

Aaron, his sons and the elders obediently brought the things Moses had commanded and the entire assembly of Israel came near and stood before the Lord. This is royal language. One stands before a ruler or person in authority, often to seek their favor or await their decision. In the same way, the Israelites stood before the Lord, their covenant King, to offer Him sacrifice and to await His favorable response.

the Lord would appear – This is what the entire chapter is building towards, the appearance of the covenant King. There had already been a theophany

(physical appearance of God) where the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle at its completion, recorded in **Ex 40**. Now, there's a promise made of another theophany that will occur in response to the first offerings of the newly ordained priests. There is excitement and great anticipation as the priests, elders and the Israelites prepare themselves for this royal appearance. There is also a measure of drama! Will Aaron and his sons do everything just as they are supposed to? Will the King actually appear? It is not a foregone conclusion. It will depend on the successful completion of the very first priestly sacrifices to be offered by Aaron and his sons.

In the end, the chapter reaches its climax with the King appearing in all of His glory and accepting their sacrifices. This ultimately made it clear to all of Israel that He was dwelling in their midst and, what's more, that they were welcome to draw near to Him in worship!

**6-7** – With all principal parties now gathered, Moses explains exactly what the Lord commanded to be done in order that the glory of the Lord would appear to them – in order that the Lord may demonstrate His presence to them in a spectacular way. Such a display of His presence is described as the glory of the Lord for the simple reason that those who beheld it ascribed glory and greatness to Him. When mortal people see the power of the immortal God, they can't help but offer Him praise.

The altar here is that of the burnt offering in the courtyard, not the altar of incense in the Holy Place, which was for incense only. Moses gives Aaron the basic command he must follow in order for the Lord's glory to appear: offer sacrifices of atonement for yourself and for the people. Aaron's ability to make these sacrifices demonstrates that he was now a fully functioning priest. Aaron's need to begin with sacrifices of atonement also demonstrated that the sin and impurity of himself and the people had to be dealt with before the holy King would appear.

**8-14** – Aaron runs the sacrificial gamut in this section; offering the purification offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the fellowship offering. He offers everything described in **ch 1-7**, including the wave (elevation) offering with the exception of the restitution offering, which was an individual, rather than public, offering. So, on his first day of official duty,

Aaron practically carries out the entire priestly sacrificial job description.

Notice here that Aaron presents all of these offerings on behalf of himself (and his household). Again, this was after spending an entire week in the tabernacle, before the Lord, undergoing their consecration ceremony. All that time spent in the tabernacle and they still had sin to atone for during that week! Clearly, the consecration ceremony didn't make Aaron perfect. During the 7 days of just sitting in the tabernacle, Aaron added more sin to his account that had to be cleared. His need to atone for priestly sin shows that the priests were just as sinful as the other Israelites, a point the NT emphasizes when contrasting these priests with Jesus, our great High Priest, who was without sin.

There are some minor differences between the description of the purification offering in 4:3-12 and the performance of it here in ch9. This could be because the events of ch9 are seen as foundational rituals, which might differ in various ways from the regular procedure. Because of time, we'll turn our attention to just one of these discrepancies.

Many commentators take note that in 4:3-12, the prescribed purification offering for the priest is a bull but here in our text it's specified that the offering is to be a bull calf. While not all agree, it seems the accepted reason for this major difference, an understanding that goes back to the ancient rabbis, is that it is meant to remind Aaron of the golden calf story on Ex 32; which in the grand scheme of time in ch9, wasn't very long ago. It wasn't a distant memory for Aaron or Israel. Aaron is being purposefully reminded, as he provides an offering for his own sins, exactly how egregious his sins actually were. In fact, it's only because of God's great mercy that Aaron was even alive on this day, let alone entering on the privilege of high priesthood. Many other Israelites had died for their sins on that day.

As we pointed out last time, the tabernacle represented a new Garden of Eden, a new creation filled with the glory of God. Adam was the priest in the original Garden of Eden but he failed in that role (Gen 3). Now a new garden of God has been built. God has once again taken up residence among His people. Aaron has been designated and chosen as priest, but his sin in connection with the golden calf incident should have almost certainly disqualified him for the position. But God, in an incredible act of

mercy and grace, not only did not have Aaron killed for his act of rebellion but affirmed His choice of Aaron as high priest.

No wonder there's drama in this chapter as to whether Aaron will be able to successfully complete the assigned priestly tasks. And let's not forget, there is concern in the minds of the people as well. Aaron sacrificed not only for his own sins but also for the sins of the people, many of whom, almost certainly, had been among the golden calf worshippers. Would the sacrifices be accepted or would retribution be handed out indiscriminately among the guilty? I'm sure you could cut the tension in the air with a dull knife.

**15-21** – After presenting offerings on behalf of himself and his household, Aaron presented offerings on behalf of Israel. The order is important: Aaron had to first deal with his own sin and only then could he truly function as a priest ready to serve others; for that was his purpose. Aaron's priesthood existed for the glory of God and for the benefit of the people – not for his own personal benefit. The atonement gained through the sacrifice of the calf, while it was for the sake of Aaron and his sons, it was not for their sakes alone. It was to make them fit to be priests for the people's offering. It was so that they could serve the people of Israel, not just to be holy for their own sake. The office of high priest was one of great authority but that was only because it required an even greater responsibility.

**22** – Aaron performs all the required sacrifices on behalf of the people and with the offerings now complete, he lifts his hands towards the people to bless them. To bless the people was the specific duty of the priests (**Deut 10:8**) and **Num 6:24-26** gives us a good example of that blessing. Although the priest said the blessing, it's important to note that it is always the Lord who carried out or fulfilled the blessing. This is because the blessing was really a prayer, implied by Aaron lifting his hands, which in the OT was a typical action of those who were praying. So, the priest's words of blessing to the people were actually a prayer for the people – it was a blessing prayer. Aaron is clearly asking the Lord to shine His favor on His covenant people.

Still, the blessing appearing at this point in the narrative is significant. Aaron has offered the sacrifices and he has apparently done so in accordance with the God-commanded prescriptions. When he lifts his hands to bless the people, he does so as a newly installed and apparently God-approved



priest, one who is now empowered to mediate between God and the people and to impart divine blessings to the assembled congregation.

**23** – We're not told exactly why Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle. At least Aaron's entering the tent was a sign to the Israelites that the Lord had accepted him as their mediator. We should also note that Moses often went into the tent to speak directly with the Lord or for the Lord to speak directly to him. The same may be true here, with Moses and Aaron entering together to pray that the Lord would receive these offerings and be pleased with Israel's worship. Most likely, there's a kind of hand off taking place, with the full authority and responsibility over the work and protection of the tabernacle now being transferred from Moses to Aaron.

Regardless of their reason for entering, when they exit the tent and bless the people together it is immediately said that the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, almost as if the Lord is accompanying them as they exit and as such, validating their ministry – in particular Aaron's, as he blesses the people a second time. Aaron now officially has the stamp of approval of the covenant King upon him. If other appearances of the Lord are a guide, then the picture here is of a fiery cloud descending on the tent but that fiery cloud did more than just descend.

**24** – The appearance of the glory of the Lord is the fire that comes out from the Lord though it's likely that the glory and the fire was a 2-stage appearance. In any case, the fire fulfills the expectations that were set up earlier in v4 and 6. And, while it answers the dramatic question of whether Aaron will be accepted or not, it fails to eliminate the drama completely as seen by the people's response. But first, let's talk about the fire...

Note that this fire didn't fall from heaven, as in the case of other OT occurrences, but from inside the tabernacle, where the Lord has now taken up residence. This fact assures the on-looking congregation that the Lord has not only decided to dwell among them inside His royal tent, but that He is pleased to do so. This fire is the one that is to be kept burning as commanded in 6:9-13. It will continually remind Israel that the Lord accompanies them. The tabernacle has, in effect, become a portable Mt Sinai, a visible assurance of the presence of God in Israel's camp. This fire from the Lord didn't light the altar; it was already lit by Aaron for the various sacrifices he offered that day. But, this fire is added to Aaron's fire and

makes quick work of the remaining sacrifices, vaporizing them instantly.

The response of the people is both logical and telling. Initially, upon seeing the fire, they shout for joy because they understand what this fire represents but then, they fall on their faces before the Lord, an indication of reverence and worship since they also recognize that if this devouring, fiery divine presence can consume what is on the altar, it can also consume them. There is great joy because the Lord has manifested His presence among them. He has validated the ministry of His servant Aaron. He has accepted the atonement for their sins.

But, there is also prostration before Lord. They now recognize the distance between themselves as creatures and the Lord as Creator. They recognize the gap between the holiness of the Lord and their own lack of holiness. They also know that this fiery revelation from the Lord, as glorious and joy inducing as it is one day, can have disastrous effects another day. What they didn't realize was just how soon that day would come – that it would, in fact, be that very day.

Fire from the Lord, how exciting! It meant that the priesthood was working, that both the sacrifices offered and the Israelites themselves, had been accepted by the Lord with His favor. The fire also demonstrated that the Lord desired Israel to know Him as their covenant King and to experience the blessing for which they had been created: relationship with the Lord Himself. The Lord's desire for us to know Him as our King shines through all the more clearly when Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, comes to dwell in our midst, revealing to us afresh the glory of God and providing a way for us to enter into a relationship with Him.

While the appearance of the glory of the Lord is significant whenever it occurs, what's significant about it here is the time and place in which it occurs. What reminds you most of the glory of God? Some would pose scenes from nature: majestic mountains, panoramic vistas, the expanse of stars, new born babies, etc. This is not wrong as [Ps 19:1](#) clearly tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God... What about in God's Word? Where in the Bible do we most see the glory of God; in the OT or NT? The OT has such dramatic events and miracles: creation, the flood, the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, etc. The NT is not so dramatic but it's no slouch either.

What is significant about the appearance of the glory of the Lord in our text is that it occurs particularly at that place and time where sacrifice takes place, in fact, it occurs in response to those sacrifices. We should understand that it is primarily through sacrifice that the glory of God is revealed. No wonder the NT writers came to understand that the glory of God was most fully revealed at that time and place when Jesus submitted Himself willingly to be the ultimate and perfect sacrifice which God required for the sin of all mankind.

In our study of John's gospel, we saw how John took special pains to point out that it was in His death that Jesus would bring glory to God and that Jesus Himself would be glorified. In His High Priestly prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son that Your Son also may glorify You" (John 17:1). This narrative in Leviticus, which shows the glory of God being especially displayed at the point of sacrifice, prepares us for the message in the Gospel of John: that God is glorified in the death of Jesus Christ. How do we apply the message of Lev 9? We do so by giving God great praise for what He has done in the atoning work of His Son. Of course, our praise will only be great after we first accept the work of Christ on our behalf and then honor His work by living in faithful obedience to Him as we walk in Christian faith. 😊