

# Preparation of the Priesthood - Leviticus 8

To read:

1. Exodus 29
2. Zechariah 3

## I. Introduction

### A. This morning we're starting the second section of Leviticus

1. So first, we can recall what Leviticus is about - Leviticus is answering the question, "how can Israel dwell with a holy God?" And, as we apply it to ourselves, "how can we dwell with a holy God?"
- 1 1 2. And, if we put our outline up on the screen, we're still in the first half of the book, Judicial Holiness, dealing with the question, "how do we become holy?"
- 1 1 ✕ 3. We just finished the first section, the sacrifices, and we saw how we would be made holy by the perfect sacrifice - the sacrifice that would satisfy God's wrath, that would bring us back into fellowship with God, that would wash us from sin, that would pay back our debt, and that would make us worthy to worship God again

### 1 B. This morning we are going to start the second subsection, the mediator of holiness, and we're going to see that the sacrifices are enough

1. The sacrifice is absolutely necessary, but it cannot stand on its own because we aren't able to bring our sacrifice - we are so exiled from God's presence that we can't bring a sacrifice to God that would make us right with God again, that would make us holy enough to be in His presence
2. If the sacrifice is necessary to bring us into God's presence, then we need a mediator, a priest, to offer the sacrifice on our behalf
3. So that's what this second section of Leviticus focuses on, the priesthood, and we're going to look at the priesthood in three sections over the next three weeks
  - 1 a. First, we'll see the Preparation for the Priesthood - a mediator will be appointed - in Leviticus 8
  - 1 b. Then we'll see the first Purpose of the Priesthood - to represent man to God - in Leviticus 9
  - 1 c. Finally, we'll see the second Purpose of the Priesthood - to represent God to man - in Leviticus 10

### 1 C. We'll start in Leviticus 8 - if you have your Bibles turn with me there and we'll read it together

- 1 D. **Proposition:** God's people needed a perfect mediator able to stand between them and God. Unfortunately that was impossible until Christ came and became our mediator, which calls us to rejoice in our perfect mediator.
- 1 1. What did it teach the ancient Israelites about God?
  - 1 2. How should this point us to Christ?
  - 1 3. How should this be applied to the New Testament believer?

## 1 II. What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?

- 1 A. As we start our passage this morning the first thing we might notice is that these chapters of Leviticus make a significant change from the first several chapters - instead of being written as law, there is a ceremony described
1. Our passage starts with the Israelites gathering together to watch the ceremony
    - 1 a. Leviticus 8:1-3 - *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "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. And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting."*
      - b. God told the people to gather together, because they were going to have a big ceremony
  2. So to understand this section well we first need to consider, "What is a ceremony?"
    - a. We can think through ceremonies that we know - perhaps the most well-known ceremony that we still have is the marriage ceremony, a wedding, where a man and a woman who previously were not related are joined together in the closest bond - so what is the purpose of a ceremony?
- 1 3. As I look at ceremonies, I see three purposes, three things that any ceremony is trying to do
- 1 a. First, it is meant to change the status of those participating
    - i. A wedding is an excellent example of this - the bride and groom walk in unrelated and walk out in the closest of relationships, their status had been changed
    - ii. So a ceremony is meant to change something about those participating, to give them a new position or a new relationship or a new status
  - 1 b. Second, it is meant to display truths for those watching
    - i. There is no ceremony where someone walks in, stands for 30 seconds and walks out - theoretically that would be enough to accomplish our first objective, but that's not the only objective
    - ii. So ceremonies are filled with prescribed activities and these activities are carefully chosen to teach the participants and the audience about the change
    - iii. So a wedding often has Scripture about marriage read, a charge given about marriage, it has the exchange of rings and the exchange of vows, all which teach us about what marriage is
  - 1 c. Finally, it is meant to highlight the solemnity of the change
    - i. Generally ceremonies aren't frivolous events - the most important ceremonies are formal, sober events - that is not to say without joy, that is to say with joy partnered with a realization of how important the change is
    - ii. Again, a wedding is an excellent example - generally weddings are slapdash activities, they are carefully planned, carefully orchestrated, formal pageantry and there's a reason for this
    - iii. This isn't just because we're uptight people but because we recognize how significant the outcome of the ceremony is - this isn't a small meaningless change being enacted here, but a permanent, life-changing event with extreme importance and ceremonies are designed to highlight that fact
- 1 4. If this is what a ceremony is, then we need to ask, "What is the purpose of this ceremony?"
- a. Like any good ceremony, it's first purpose is to change someone's status
    - 1 i. In this ceremony, Aaron and his sons are going to be installed as priests to mediate the sacrificial system set up in Leviticus 1-7 - his status changes from general Israelite to mediator priests for Israel
  - b. And, like any good ceremony, this was a solemn occasion to mark an important event
    - 1 i. This ceremony is designed to highlight how important the priesthood was - the installation of a priest was not a common activity but a momentous activity, one witnessed by the entire congregation
  - c. And, like any good ceremony, the activities of this ceremony are designed to teach us something
    - 1 i. This ceremony is designed to display what a priest is, what a priest needed to be - the activities in this ceremony aren't just meant to highlight solemnity, but to display specific truths - and that's what I want to dig out this morning, "what are those specific truths?"
- 1 B. So the first step is simply to ask, "What happened?"
1. I don't know about you, but at least for me personally, reading through Leviticus can sometimes cause my brain to skim - Aaron and the congregation showed up, there were a bunch of sacrifices, Aaron's a priest now
    - a. That's a decent summation but sometimes it's hard to sort out the details of the ceremony - it's very foreign to us and the meaning behind the different steps isn't always obvious
    - b. So when they keep doing sacrifice after sacrifice, sometimes all we get is that there were a lot of sacrifices, but these sacrifices make up the meat of this ceremony and they are the teaching portion of this ceremony
    - c. In fact, as we look at this ceremony we're going to see that there is a mirror in this passage, everything is going to happen twice, and this is going to help us understand what the point of this ceremony is

- 1 2. First, we see that the priests were washed
- 1 a. We see this acted out in Leviticus 8:5-6 - *And Moses said to the congregation, "This is the thing that the LORD has commanded to be done." And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water.*
    - i. This was simple and straightforward, Aaron and his sons took a bath - they were dirty and they needed to be made clean
  - 1 b. This is then repeated in sacrifice in Leviticus 8:14-17 with a purification offering - *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. 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.*
    - i. If we think back a few weeks ago, we studied the sin offering and saw that its main purpose was to wash the offeror from the stain of sin and wash the sanctuary from its pollution
    - ii. So there is a sin offering offered for the priests and the altar is consecrated, or literally declared to be clean - the priests and the sanctuary were made clean
- 1 3. Second, we see that the priests were clothed
- 1 a. We see this acted out in Leviticus 8:7-9 right after Aaron's bath - *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. And he placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. 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.*
    - i. After having a bath, Aaron got dressed - but he didn't dress in the same clothes he walked in with, he dressed in the priestly garments that had been described and prepared back in Exodus
    - ii. Since Dan preached on this in Exodus some time ago, I'm not going to go through each piece mentioned here, but each piece is full of meaning related to the priestly office
    - iii. The clothing marked him off for his office and indicated his ability to perform the priestly functions
  - 1 b. The middle section has a weaker parallel than the other two, but the second step in the sacrifices is related, although almost antiparallel, Leviticus 8:18-19- *Then he presented the ram of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. And he killed it, and Moses threw the blood against the sides of the altar.*
    - i. After offering a sin offering, Aaron offers a burnt offering for himself and his sons
    - ii. Now, if we recall from a few weeks ago, the burnt offering emphasized propitiation, turning aside and absorbing the fire of God's wrath - so at first glance it's not very clear how this is parallel
    - 1 iii. But the burnt offering was associated with clothing the priests, Leviticus 7:8 - *And the priest who offers any man's burnt offering shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered.*
    - 1 iv. The skin of the burnt offering was not burned with the offering, but was given to the priest, which recalls something much earlier, Genesis 3:21 - *And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*
    - v. So we have parallel acts focused on clothing, but while being parallel there is a contrast between these middle passages - clothing Aaron focuses on his ability to be the mediator, the burnt offering focuses on his inability, his necessity to be clothed because he is woefully inadequate on his own
- 1 4. Third, we see that the priests were anointed
- 1 a. We see this acted out in Leviticus 8:10-12, right after clothing Aaron - *Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. 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. And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him.*
    - i. The anointing oil that was described back in Exodus was taken and sprinkled on Aaron and on the things Aaron would use in his priestly mediation in order to set them apart for the priestly service
  - 1 b. This is then repeated in sacrifice in Leviticus 8:22-24- *Then he presented the other ram, the ram of ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. 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... And Moses threw the blood against the sides of the altar.*
    - i. The final offering was an ordination offering - literally the word means a gem setting - it was a sacrifice to set apart Aaron and his sons to their priestly function
    - ii. And like the anointing oil, the blood was put on Aaron, on his sons, and on the altar that Aaron would offer sacrifices on to set them apart to service

- 1 C. **Like any good ceremony, these things didn't just happen, they were meant to teach, so I want to finish with a final question, "What did it all mean?"**
1. As we look at this ceremony, I want to pull out five important teaching points, five principles the Israelites should have understood from this ceremony
  - 1 2. First, God's people needed a mediator to mediate between them and God
    - a. This idea has been in the background throughout Leviticus so far, but it comes to the forefront as the priesthood is inaugurated with Aaron and his sons
    - b. The sacrifice was absolutely necessary, but on its own it was not enough - not only did the people need a sacrifice to make them right with God, they needed a mediator to present that sacrifice on their behalf
    - c. They needed someone who could represent them before God, offer sacrifice and plead on their behalf
  - 1 3. Second, the mediator must be clean
    - a. Aaron and his sons were washed and then, to emphasize, a sin offering was made for Aaron and his sons - to be a mediator they must be clean, they must be free from the stain of sin
    - b. This was integral to what the mediator was - he was to stand before God to represent the people, so he had to be without sin, otherwise he would be destroyed with the people
    - c. If a sacrifice was to be brought to God, they needed a mediator who was free from sin
  - 1 4. Third, the mediator must be competent
    - a. Not only was Aaron washed, he was clothed with the vestments of his office - the various pieces of his uniform that represented or even enabled him to perform his priestly duties
    - b. The mediator must be able to do the task that is set before Him - he must be able to serve in the holy place - the robes, he must be able to represent the people before God - the breastpiece, and he must be able to represent God to the people - the Urim and the Thummim
    - c. If a mediator was to stand between God and Israel he must be competent for the task
  - 1 5. Fourth, the mediator must be consecrated
    - a. Aaron and his sons were called out by name by God in verse 2, they were anointed with oil, and then marked with the blood of the ordination offering to set them apart for service to God
    - b. A mediator could not appoint himself, no, he must be appointed by God, holy, set apart to do his work
  - 1 6. Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, there was no such man
    - a. The pageantry surrounding the installation of Aaron and his sons as priests emphasized what a priest needed to be, but Aaron and his sons failed every test
    - b. As we go through this ceremony, this what should really stand out to us - there were requirements to be a priest and neither Aaron nor his sons met those requirements
    - c. They weren't sinless, they weren't clean - they needed to be washed, they needed to be purified by the sin offering - at best they were a temporary and cloudy substitute
    - d. Aaron and his sons weren't competent, they weren't able to stand before God and perform their duties - they needed to be clothed, they needed a burnt offering to provide them a status before God - at best they were a temporary and cloudy substitute
    - e. And as we go on in Leviticus, we see that this ceremony didn't really fix those things - every time Aaron and his sons approach God they are going to need to perform these acts and offer these sacrifices again because they weren't qualified to be mediators
    - f. In fact, no one was qualified - there was not a man in Israel who could claim the right to stand between God and man - God provided a substitute, but it was a poor substitute - it longed for something better

**D. So Kid's, here's your kid question**

- 1 1. What does the ordination of the priests teach us?
- 1 2. We need a sinless high priest who is able to represent us before God

### 1 III. How should this point us to Christ?

#### 1 A. Jesus is clean

1. The first requirement for the mediator was cleanness, being unstained by sin so he could stand in the presence of God without being destroyed and the great downfall of the Aaronic priesthood was that there was no such man
2. But Jesus appeared to be the sinless mediator, which is attested to all across the New Testament
  - 1 a. I John 3:5 - *You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.*
  - 1 b. Hebrews 4:15 - *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*
  - 1 c. Hebrews 7:26 - *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.*
3. Jesus never sinned, He was unstained by its filth and thus He could enter boldly into God's presence to bring the sacrifice - He could be the mediator, He could be the perfect priest

#### 1 B. Jesus is competent

1. Not only did the priest need to be clean, he also needed to be competent, equipped for his task - and though God provided for men in their weakness to act as high priest, none of them ever truly were able to perform the role
2. But Jesus appeared to be the perfect mediator, the one who could represent God to man and man to God
  - 1 a. So Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus was the perfect representative of God, Hebrews 1:1-4 - *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*
  - 1 b. And Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus was the perfect representative of man, Hebrews 2:17-18 - *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*
  - 1 c. So Jesus is the perfect priest, completely able to complete His duties, Hebrews 7:25 - *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*
3. Jesus was able to be the priest, He was able to intercede, to represent, to offer perfect sacrifices and thus He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to Him

#### 1 C. Jesus is consecrated

1. The process of ordaining the priests emphasized that not just anyone could call themselves priests - a man had to be called by God and set apart to the task, which Aaron and his descendants were
2. But when Jesus comes, the author of Hebrews emphasizes that He received a greater call than Aaron ever did
  - 1 a. Hebrews 5:1, 4-6 - *For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins... And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."*
  - 1 b. Hebrews 7:26, 28 - *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens... For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.*
3. Jesus was known and beloved of God from eternity past and was appointed by His Father to be the perfect priest - He has been eternally set apart for this mission and His call supersedes all other calls

#### 1 D. So Jesus is the perfect mediator between God and man

1. God's people needed a mediator, and Jesus came to be that mediator; as Paul so poignantly puts it, I Timothy 2:5-6 - *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*
2. Jesus came to be what Aaron could not be, Jesus embodied the truths that Aaron and his sons had to obtain in ceremony - the ceremony was pointing to Jesus, only He could fulfill that role

## ① IV. How should this be applied to us?

### A. Honestly, a lot of this passage isn't about us - we aren't called to be the high priest, nor will we ever be called in that capacity and no one we know will ever be called either

1. One of the glories that Hebrews celebrates is that we will never have to appoint a new priest, the final priest has already been appointed, the One who will remain in office forever because He will never die
- ① 2. Hebrews 7:23-24 - *The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.*
3. So there are limits on how we could possibly apply these instructions to ourselves - obviously we will never need to pull them out and use them directly, but that doesn't mean there isn't great application here
4. And I see two ways that we should apply this to ourselves, so let's look at those briefly

### ① B. First, this passage should affect us emotionally - We should have joyful confidence in our mediator

- ① 1. Listen to how Hebrews calls us to react to the glorious truth that we have a perfect, a sinless high priest, Hebrews 4:14-16 - *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*
2. Our first response to this passage should be joyful confidence - we have a better mediator, One who fulfills everything in this passage in a way that Aaron never could
3. So we should rejoice in that, and we should act on that - we should avail ourselves of our greater mediator, boldly approaching God's throne of grace to plumb the depths of God's mercy and grace towards us in Christ
4. That ought to be our joyful and awestruck pursuit - to, though we stand as strikingly unworthy, yet to present ourselves before God in prayer, in adoration, in praise to see His glory and to seek His grace because we have a perfect mediator who has brought us into God's presence - may we not neglect so great a salvation
5. So go out with joy and seek God's face, you have a perfect mediator standing between you and God

### ① C. Second, this passage should affect us practically - We also have been called to be priests, so we also should be cleansing ourselves to be competent to serve God

1. A lot of commentaries will strongly focus on the fact that we no longer need a mediator because every believer is a priest and can approach God directly
  - a. And there is a great truth there, but every time I read that I cringe and want to yell out "no! we still need a man to mediate between us and God!" - it's just that we have a perfect and deathless man who has entered into the true holy places to mediate for us forever
  - b. But there is a truth in this oft repeated statement, like the whole of Israel, we are called to be a priesthood - not like the high priest, but as God's people, a recreated humanity, we are to take mankind's rightful place - we are to represent God to the earth and the earth to God
  - ① c. So Peter emphatically calls us a priesthood as well, people called to represent God, I Peter 2:4-5, 9 - *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*
2. So we are a priesthood, not the high priest, but lesser priests under the headship of our great priest, Jesus Christ
  - a. But if we have been called, consecrated as lesser priests, then there is some small way in which these instructions are for us as well - if we are priests, we should also pursue cleanness and competence as well
  - ① b. Paul puts it this way, II Timothy 2:20-21 - *Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*
  - c. We shouldn't apply this passage to ourselves with any confusion that we are taking the mediatory role that only the high priest, and specifically only Jesus could ever fulfill - but we should imitate our perfect high priest and like Him we should pursue cleanliness so that we are competent to serve
  - d. So we should be scouring our lives to discard everything that is unholy, everything that is dishonorable, everything that might disqualify, everything that is distracting from God's glory so that we will be ready, we will be equipped, we will be able to well-represent the glories of our God to a watching world