

# Sermon 99, You've Got Your Hands Full, Pt. 1, Exodus 29

**Proposition:** The priests had to be made holy in order to serve as priests.

- I. What You'll Need for the Consecration, vv. 1-4
  - A. Bring Near the Offerings, vv. 1-3
  - B. Bring Near Aaron and his Sons, v. 4
- II. How to Consecrate Priests, vv. 5-35
  - A. Clothe them with the Robes of Office, vv. 5-9
  - B. Offer the Requisite Offerings, vv. 10-25
- III. God Is the Ultimate Consecrator, vv. 43-44

## Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this evening to the chapter that describes the ordination process. At least, that's what we would call it. Most English translations (except for NET, KJV and NKJV, and NJB) contain the word "ordain" in v. 9 and again in v. 35. But the Hebrew word is better translated (as in LXX) "fill the hand." This whole chapter is God's instruction to Moses about how to fill the hands of the priests, as in the expression "You've got your hands full." To ordain a priest is to fill his hands — to give him plenty and more than enough to do. My wife and I have five children, and we hear it all the time: "You've got your hands full." Presumably when people saw Aaron trying to wrestle yet another bull into the sacrificial position, they would say "You've got your hands full." In short, the core idea of ordination as summarized in the Hebrew name for it is that ordination means you're commissioned to do a lot of work. The ordained priest is a hard-working man. Doing everything necessary to maintain the presence of God among His people is not a sinecure. Aaron did not work merely one hour per week; the junior priests did not spend most of their time watching TV or dusting the sanctuary furniture.

In our polity, it is axiomatic that there is no ordination without call to a definite work. Unless a church or mission society or school has called you to pastoral work in their midst, you cannot be ordained. This is not only a very wise principle; it is a very biblical principle. Indeed, as we will see the chapter emphasizes the ordination to a definite work by closing with a list of the priests' main tasks — and indeed, as we saw last Sunday evening, the previous chapter also implies quite a bit about the priests' tasks. The priests don't play. They work.

This chapter shows us that both priests and altar were set apart — ordained — for the religious work of maintaining God's presence among His people. Let's dig in and see the details.

### I. What You'll Need for the Consecration, vv. 1-4

As with the instructions for the tabernacle as a whole, this section opens with a list of materials. What is needed is the basic materials for the daily sacrifice — bull, rams, regular bread, and matzoh bread.

### **A. Bring Near the Offerings, vv. 1-3**

The items for consecration have to be brought near, have to come into the presence of God.

### **B. Bring Near Aaron and his Sons, v. 4**

Notice, too, that the place of bringing near is specified as the door of the tabernacle — that is, within the courtyard, between the altar of burnt offering and the tent's doorway. This is indeed what our postmodern friends love — the famous “liminal space.” Why does God ask that the ceremony take place at this spot? Because it's all about who can go into God's presence! The ideal way to show that is by locating the ceremony right at the boundary between earth and heaven, at the boundary between the common and the holy. Based on this passage, theologians believe it likely that Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to the gates of Eden and presented them there, near the cherub with the flaming sword. Whether that surmise is correct or not, the materials for ordination and the ordinands alike certainly had to be brought to the tabernacle doorway, for that was the closest they could come to the presence of the Almighty until the ordination process was complete.

## **II. How to Consecrate Priests, vv. 5-35**

The bulk of the chapter goes on to describe how Moses is to consecrate the priests. Right away, I want to stop and look at that word. “Ordain” or “fill the hand” appears only four times in the chapter (vv. 9, 29, 33, 35), but the root “holy” or “consecrate” (including both noun and verb forms) appears 17 times! Clearly, while making sure the priest had his hands full was important, it was even more important to make sure that he, and the offerings he brought, were holy. Indeed, the first verse of the chapter does not mention ordination or “filling the hand.” Rather, it begins by saying “This is what you shall do to *consecrate* them,” that is, to make them holy. The same term appears in Christ's high priestly prayer: “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth” (Joh 17:19 ESV). What is the Lord talking about when He says “I consecrate myself”? He is talking about offering Himself as the once-for-all perfect sacrifice for sin. So yes, ordination to office is part of what's going on here. But it is only part of it. The overarching category is *holiness*, and the thing that's going on is above all *consecration*, that is, the making of someone or something holy. Notice, if you would, that the same term “consecration” is applied to the altar of burnt offering in vv. 36-37. It too is made holy so that it can participate in the service of Yahweh.

### **A. Clothe them with the Robes of Office, vv. 5-9**

The first step in the ordination process is to clothe the ordinands with the robes of office. If you recall, we talked about this last week because ch. 28 describes these robes in detail. The commentators are agreed: the robes are so important because they, in a very real sense, create the priestliness of the priest. The Levitical priests derived their power from the holy garments. Remember what 28:43 says about the priestly underwear? “And they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him.” This is true not only of the underwear, but of all the robes.

Here's how I put it last week: "To approach God without being clothed in this glorious, beautiful garb is to bear your guilt and die. You cannot approach, cannot be priest, without the right clothing. That's because the Levitical priesthood is derivative. These priests are priests by an extrinsic power, the power of clothing. But our great high priest is priest by an intrinsic power, the power of an indestructible life."

So these robes of office are important. Only after the robes have been put on them does God say "They shall have the priesthood by a perpetual statute." The law provides for them to be priests in an enduring way, but only after they have put on the right clothing. These clothes marked them and in a certain sense even set them apart from common usage for the holy purpose of maintaining God's presence within the camp of Israel.

### **B. Offer the Requisite Offerings, vv. 10-25**

The second stage of the ordination/consecration process is to offer the offerings that are described here. They are a bull, two rams, and the bread that was listed at the beginning of the chapter in the materials list.

### **III. Demonstrating that God Is the Ultimate Consecrator, vv. 43-44**

The priests and tabernacle also did something passively: they demonstrated God's prowess as the ultimate consecrator. We just read nearly forty verses of instructions on how to consecrate. But the Lord adds here that the tabernacle will be made holy primarily and ultimately by the residence of His glory within it.

The same is true today. I can get you wet and pronounce the baptismal formula over you. But only Jesus can baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Only He can come and dwell within you. And when He does, He will show Himself to be the ultimate consecrator.

There is no ordination without call to a definite work. The son of David has been called to the work of saving the world. See Him and know that the Father is all about saving the world, and that's why He's put His Son on it. It will happen; the kingdom will come. Wait, hope, and worship. Amen.