

EXODUS: The Person, Promise, and Power of God

Exodus 29: Consecration of the Priests

I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God. - Exodus 29:45-46 ESV

INTRODUCTION

In Exodus 29, God tells Moses to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests. The word *consecrate* means “to make holy” or to “set apart.” The *actual* consecration is only mentioned only in passing in Exodus 40:12–16:

12 Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall wash them with water ¹³ and put on Aaron the holy garments. And you shall anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve me as priest. ¹⁴ You shall bring his sons also and put coats on them, ¹⁵ and anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may serve me as priests. And their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations.” ¹⁶ This Moses did; according to all that the Lord commanded him, so he did.

As we explore the consecration of the priests, the _____ of sacrifices that are necessary to purify ceremonially the priest for service should strike us. Another thing that should strike us is the _____ of the priest’s consecration. These realities point us to the costly nature of sin.

Notice the flow in these chapters. The people’s guilt is transferred to the priests (Exodus 28:38). The priest’s guilt is transferred to the animals. The animals die. The sin, as it were, reaches a dead end, and the end is death. But then 29:37 says, “For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy.” Sin is dealt with and now holiness flows back in the other direction. Exodus 29, of course, points to Jesus. In Christ, sin is dealt with definitively and we progressively take on his holiness.

THE ORDINATION OF PRIESTS (Exodus 29:1-21)

Bringing the priests near (vv. 1–4)

Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, ² and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil. You shall make them of fine wheat flour. ³ You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams. You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. - Ex. 29:1-4

The priests were not allowed to go in and handle anything in the Holy Place until they had been cleansed. If the priests did not wash, then God would strike them down.

Anointing the priests (vv. 5–9)

God said, “Then you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod. ⁶ And you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. - Ex 29:5–9

Generation after generation the Israelites ordained their priests by washing with water, putting on the garments, and anointing with oil.

THREE HOLY SACRIFICES

The First Sacrifice (vv. 10–14)

Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. ¹¹ Then you shall kill the bull before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting, ¹² and shall take part of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar. ¹³ And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar. ¹⁴ But the flesh of the bull and its skin and its dung you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering. - Ex 29:10–14

The significance of the sin offering was powerfully demonstrated by the action of the priests. Before Moses killed the bull, the priests would gather around to lay their hands on its head. This identified them with the sacrifice, imputing sin from the priests to the bull. According to John Currid, “What we see is a case of *transference*, in which the unholiness and impure nature of the priesthood are transferred to the animal. The animal is then sacrificed, thus making atonement for those men.” What happened to the sacrifice is what should have happened to each sinner. This is the first time that the term *sin offering* is used in the Bible, which shows that the priests needed their sins to be forgiven as much as anyone else.

The Second Sacrifice (vv. 15–18)

¹⁵ “Then you shall take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, ¹⁶ and you shall kill the ram and shall take its blood and throw it against the sides of the altar. ¹⁷ Then you shall cut the ram into pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head, ¹⁸ and burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord. - Ex 29:15–18

This was a whole burnt offering, symbolizing total dedication to God. In the same way that the ram was offered to God, the priests would offer themselves for God's service. They, too, were to be totally dedicated to God.

The Third Sacrifice (vv. 19-21)

¹⁹ "You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, ²⁰ and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar. ²¹ Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons' garments with him. He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons' garments with him. - Ex 29:19-21

This sacrifice was only for the priests. The blood shed on the altar was for their _____ as sinners. But the blood sprinkled on them was for their _____ as priests.

JESUS CHRIST ORDAINED AS PRIEST

In one way or another, everything at the tabernacle was connected to Christ. Christ is revealed in the ordination of the priests. The sacrifices that consecrated them to God pointed to the sacrifice he made for us on the cross. Jesus Christ is the sin offering that atoned for our sins. When we lay our hands on him by faith, he becomes our substitute, dying in our place. As the Scripture says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). By his blood we are also purified for the holy service of God.

Jesus is not simply the sacrifice, however; he is also the priest. This is another way the tabernacle points us to Christ. Jesus Christ is the priest who enters God's presence on our behalf. The book of Hebrews calls him "a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God" (2:17); "the high priest whom we confess" (3:1); "a great high priest" (4:14); "a high priest forever" (6:20); the "high priest of the good things that are already here" (9:11); "a great priest over the house of God" (10:21). As our great High Priest, Jesus presents our prayers to God, interceding on our behalf. He also stands before God in perfect righteousness, so that we can be accepted in God's sight.

THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN

The ordination of the Old Testament priests shows what it means to be consecrated by Christ. It does this by telling the story of our salvation. There were four main stages in the ordination of a priest. Aaron and his sons were washed with water, robed in righteousness, anointed with oil, and sprinkled with blood. Each part of their ordination service relates to a different aspect of our salvation in Christ.

First there is the washing with water. Naturally, this reminds us of _____, which signifies the washing away of our sins. The real cleansing is what God does on the inside to wash away our sin—what the New Testament calls “the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11). God makes us clean when we are born again by his Spirit. Then the Spirit continues to cleanse us, as often as we are stained by sin.

Secondly comes our robing in righteousness. God does something more than simply wash away our sin; he also clothes us with the _____. Paul says, “All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Every believer has put on Jesus Christ and thus is dressed with the perfect righteousness of Christ’s obedience to God. We do not stand on our own merits, which would never be good enough for God. Instead, God accepts us on the basis of what Jesus has done.

Thirdly, He has anointed us for _____. Aaron was anointed with oil, which consecrated him for God’s service. We too have been anointed—not with oil but with the Holy Spirit. John says that we have “an anointing from the Holy One” (1 John 2:20). To be specific, God “anointed us ... and put his Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor. 1:21b, 22a). God the Holy Spirit has set us apart for sacred service.

Finally, there were sacrifices. There was a sin offering. There was a burnt offering. Then there was the offering that was only for priests. Each of these offerings began with the priests laying their hands on the head of the sacrifice. They identified themselves with the animal, which then died in their place. The sacrifice was their substitute. We too have a substitute in Jesus. To receive forgiveness, all we need to do is lay our hands on him by faith. When we do, God imputes all our sin to him.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

God has provided full salvation in Christ. He has washed us clean, robed us in righteousness, anointed us with his Spirit, and atoned for our sins. When God did all these things in Exodus 29, it was for the ordination of the priests. So why has he done it all for us? For one very important purpose: to ordain us as _____.

The New Testament takes the word *priest* and applies it to *everyone* who has been saved from sin by the atoning work of Jesus Christ. We are “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). We are “a kingdom and priests to serve ... God” (Rev. 1:6). We are “priests of God and of Christ” (Rev. 20:6). We are priests of the living God, and we have a holy obligation to serve him. We no longer serve him in the tabernacle but in his holy sanctuary the church, and also in the world.

THE BIG PICTURE (Exodus 29:22-46)

Providing for the Priests (vv. 22-28)

²² You shall also take the fat from the ram and the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh (for it is a ram of ordination), ²³ and one loaf of bread and one cake of bread made with oil, and one wafer out of the basket of unleavened bread that is before the Lord. ²⁴ You shall put all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and wave them for a wave offering before the Lord. ²⁵ Then you shall take them from their hands and burn them on the altar on top of the burnt offering, as a pleasing aroma before the Lord. It is a food offering to the Lord. You shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's ordination and wave it for a wave offering before the Lord, and it shall be your portion. And you shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering that is waved and the thigh of the priests' portion that is contributed from the ram of ordination, from what was Aaron's and his sons'. ²⁸ It shall be for Aaron and his sons as a perpetual due from the people of Israel, for it is a contribution. It shall be a contribution from the people of Israel from their peace offerings, their contribution to the Lord. - Ex. 29:22-28

Application: God does not expect his people to serve him for _____ but promises to _____ for their (our) _____. In the Old Testament, he provided for his priests by giving them a portion from the sacrifice. Something similar happens in the church. We give our tithes and offerings to the church, and part of our giving goes to those who minister in his name. As the Scripture says, referring specifically to the work of the pastor, "The worker deserves his wages" (1 Tim. 5:18).

This blessing is not just for ministers, however. There is a wider principle here. The church is a royal priesthood, in which every believer has the priestly duty to serve the living God. Therefore, God's provision for Aaron and his sons encourages us to believe that he will provide for us as well.

Details, Details (vv. 29-34)

²⁹ "The holy garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them. ³⁰ The son who succeeds him as priest, who comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the Holy Place, shall wear them seven days. ³¹ "You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh in a holy place. ³² And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket in the entrance of the tent of meeting. ³³ They shall eat those things with which atonement was made at their ordination and consecration, but an outsider shall not eat of them, because they are holy. ³⁴ And if any of the flesh for the ordination or of the bread remain until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy. - Ex. 29:29-34

This sacred meal was the next stage in the ordination of priests. After the priests were washed with water, robed in righteousness, anointed with oil, and sprinkled with sacrificial blood, they sat down to eat a covenant meal. Just as Israel's elders ate and drank with God on the mountain (see Exod. 24:11), so Israel's priests ate with God at the tabernacle during the seven

days of their ordination. The meal they shared showed that they had fellowship with the living God, that they were bound to him in the covenant.

We have seen how each stage of ordination symbolizes a different aspect of our salvation in Christ. Eating the ram of ordination also points us to the gospel. Once we come to God through faith in Jesus Christ, we are invited to eat at his Table, communing with him in the _____.

Seven Days, Seven Bulls (vv. 35-42)

³⁵ "Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Through seven days shall you ordain them, ³⁶ and every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement. Also you shall purify the altar, when you make atonement for it, and shall anoint it to consecrate it. ³⁷ Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar shall become holy. ³⁸ "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. ³⁹ One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. ⁴⁰ And with the first lamb a tenth measure of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. ⁴¹ The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord. ⁴² It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. - Ex 29:35-42

Application: In the same way that the Israelites opened and closed the day with sacrifices, we are called to begin and end every day with _____.

But there is something deeper at work here. The Apostle Paul alluded to it when he wrote, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1, 2). The words "fragrant offering and sacrifice" refer explicitly to the twice-daily sacrifices that the Israelites offered in the tabernacle and later at the temple. As Paul reflected on the meaning of the crucifixion, he saw that the cross was connected with the offerings God's people had been making every day for centuries. When Jesus made the atoning sacrifice for our sins, it filled Heaven and earth with the perfume of his love. Now we are called to live with the same kind of sacrificial love.

Seeing the Big Picture (vv. 43-46)

⁴³ There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. ⁴⁴ I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. ⁴⁵ I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. ⁴⁶ And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God. - Ex 29:43-46

Since the beginning of chapter 25, God has been giving Moses the plans for constructing his holy sanctuary, the tabernacle. By this point it would be easy to get lost in all the details, but God steps back to reveal the big picture. At the end of the chapter he explains how the tabernacle achieves his ultimate purpose of _____

In his lectures on Old Testament theology, the British scholar Alec Motyer explains: “God’s tabernacle is the climax of redemption; he brought them out of Egypt for this very purpose that he might dwell among them. Don’t weary over all those tedious details to do with the tabernacle; they are describing to you the climax of God’s redemptive covenant programme for his people.”

The last phrase—“I am the Lord their God”—places God’s signature on this entire section of Exodus. Here God is explaining what the tabernacle was all about. And what *was* it all about? It was all for this grand purpose: so God could reveal his glory. Remember, this was the whole purpose of the exodus: God was saving his people for his glory.

CONCLUSION

“As we reflect upon the consecration of the priests, we should not be revolted by the number of animal sacrifices that had to be performed. We should not be repulsed by the amount of blood that had to be shed. We should not be disgusted by the slaughter of animals so that the people of God could be in the presence of our Lord. We should instead be ashamed of our sinfulness that has required such sacrifices. We should, however, rejoice that we have a merciful God who opened the way to reconciliation by showing us in shadows the costly nature of the sacrifice of his only Son. We should realize that the sacrifice of Christ is not only our forgiveness of sins but indeed our sustenance for life itself.” - JV Fesko