

Parashah Eighty-One

Leviticus 8:1–36; Ezekiel 43:27–44:8; Hebrews 7:11–28

notes by Tim Hegg

The Ordination of Aaron and his Sons

Our Torah section this Shabbat concerns itself with the ordination ceremony of Aaron and his sons. We have in this chapter and the next a different genre—a narrative telling us what happened rather than legal lists and commandments pertaining to the Tabernacle and priesthood. In fact, one of the overarching purposes of this chapter and the next is to reassure the reader that Moses, Aaron and his sons did all that God had commanded (note the recurring phrase, “just as the Lord had commanded”).

An obvious second purpose of this chapter is to show the reader that atonement cannot be effected by priests who are unfit or unclean. The work of the priest may be summed up in the term “reconciliation” or “propitiation.” The sinner is estranged from God, for God dwells in perfect holiness and will not—cannot—be contaminated by impurity. Mankind, on the other hand, exists in a state of sinfulness or impurity. To effect a cleansing so that the sinner may dwell in the presence of God is the duty of the priest, an office which clearly prefigures the final work of Yeshua as High Priest.

The whole picture is laid out in some detail. The garments of the priests bespeak their duties and office. Conspicuously missing are shoes or sandals—they doubtlessly ministered barefoot, a reminder of the “holy ground” that Moses encountered, and that required the removal of his shoes. The *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) along with its courtyard is holy ground, for it is the place where God and man would meet in reconciliation.

There were eight vestments of the High Priest, of which four were unique to him. They are 1) linen breeches, 2) fringed linen tunic, 3) sash to tie the tunic, 4) a robe over the tunic [also called the ephod tunic, since the ephod was attached to it] made of purple wool to which were attached golden bells alternated by pomegranates at the hem, 5) the ephod, attached to the robe with a decorative band called *הַחֹשֶׁן*, *haChoshen*, 6) breastplate [made of wool and linen] into which were woven threads of gold, and stones set in a metallic base were attached to it. The breastplate held the Urim and Tummim, 7) a headdress (called *הַמִּצְנֶפֶת*, *haMitsnefet* (the ordinary priests wore a turban called *מִגְבַּעוֹת*, *migba'ot*, cf. Lev 8:13; Ex 28:40), and 8) a crown of gold (*צִיץ*, *tzitz*) attached to the headdress on which was inscribed *קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה*, *kodesh l'Adonai*, “holy to the Lord.”

Of these eight, the ordinary priests wore four: 1) linen breeches, 2) tunic, 3) a sash to tie the tunic, and 4) a cap.

The High Priest is distinguished further from the ordinary priests in that he was anointed with the special oil, the same oil used to consecrate the altar and the Tabernacle and its sacred vessels. While the ordinary priests were his helpers, the ordination ceremony shows clearly that reconciliation of the sinner is fully in the hands of the High Priest. In a way, the High Priest is the human counterpart of the altar itself. Note the order of events in our passage: Moses clothes Aaron, anoints the altar, the Tabernacle and its vessels, then he anoints Aaron. Only after this are the ordinary priests clothed, and there is no anointing ceremony. The order itself functions to set Aaron apart and to connect him and his duties with the altar and Tabernacle in a way different from that of the ordinary priests. The lesson is obvious: while the ordinary priests may have a part in assisting the work of reconciliation, only the High Priest can actually accomplish it. Once again, the foreshadowing of Yeshua is obvious. God may use different means to draw us to Himself, but only Yeshua can expunge our impurities and make us fit to stand in His presence.

The next event in our section is the offering of sacrifices for Aaron and his sons. They, like all the others, needed to be made clean before they could perform the sacred duties of their office. Even the portions of the sacrifice that normally would belong to the priests as their portion to eat, are given to the Lord, for it would be inappropriate for them to benefit from a sacrifice that was offered for their sins. Instead, they take their portions and, waving them before the Lord, offer them back to Him as a fitting token of gratitude. In a sense, they are allowed to benefit from their office only when they are serving others, not when they are serving themselves.

It should be noted that leavened and unleavened bread are combined as part of the ordination ceremony. Verse 26 uses both *לֶחֶם* *lechem* and *מַצָּה* *matzah* as part of the sacrificial ceremony. Here, as in other places in the Scriptures, leaven is not a picture of sin, but a symbol of freedom, hearkening back to the exodus and the subsequent festival at Sinai. Being slaves in Egypt, the people were not allowed to order their own schedules. Even their leaving Egypt was accomplished at midnight, and done in a hurry. The Shavuot celebration, in contrast, incorporates leavened loaves (Lev 23:17), symbolizing that the redeemed people were now free from slavery, and the constraints of the taskmaster. They had time to let the bread rise! They were

now free to voluntarily order their schedules in accordance with God's commands.

If this same symbolism pertains to our *parashah*, it would emphasize the same two aspects: the priests belonged to God, since the Levites were taken by Him as substitutes for the firstborn of Israel (Num 3:12ff). As such, they were enslaved (as it were) in the service of their Master, and this answers to the use of unleavened cakes in their ordination ceremony. But they, like all of Israel, were redeemed, and thus their service to God was not to be under the constraint of a slave, but given voluntarily from their hearts as free men, thus the use of leavened bread.

This is similar to Paul's use of the slave/free metaphor in Romans 6, in which he teaches that once we were slaves to sin, but have now been redeemed, making us slaves of righteousness. Yet as slaves of righteousness, we are still admonished by the Apostle to offer ourselves voluntarily unto God as His grateful servants. We long to obey God, not merely because we are owned by Him, but because it has become the joy of our hearts. In this we are as indentured slaves, in that we have voluntarily offered ourselves to the service of the Most High.

The lessons to be learned from this section are many. Let me suggest in outline form just a few:

1. Reconciliation with God is effected through sacrifice, administered by a High Priest who himself is worthy of the job.
2. Those who are consecrated to serve before the Lord must take their office seriously. Their thoughts, actions, and leading must be in a consecrated fashion as unto the Lord.
3. There is no fellowship with God outside of holiness. God longs to dwell among His people, but He will not dwell with those who are unclean. The heart of the gospel is that Yeshua has made the sacrifice for us, so that through His work we are reconciled to Him. Our fellowship with Him is by our coming into the place of holiness, because He has made us clean through the washing of His own blood.
4. Unclean High Priests cannot effect reconciliation, emphasizing that Yeshua Himself died not for His own sin, but for ours.
5. Reconciliation with God must be accomplished according to His methods (the recurring phrase "as the Lord commanded..."). It is fool-hearty to think that one can develop one's own way to become reconciled to God.

Some Additional Thoughts from this Parashah

1. The verb לָקַח, "to take" used in v. 2 suggests an official status of Moses. He carries out the demands of Adonai in this regard without asking Aaron and his sons if they are willing.
2. For the sacrifices prescribed, cf. Ex 29.
 - bull = sin-offering (atonement)
 - one ram = elevation-offering (praise)
 - one ram = inauguration offering (אֵיל מִלְאִים = service)
3. V. 6, וַיִּרְחֹץ אֹתָם בַּמַּיִם indicates a *mikvah*, a ceremonial washing. Not merely part, but the whole of the person is required to be cleansed for the Lord's service.
4. The term אֶפֶד, "ephod" is from the verbal root (used in v. 7) אָפַד, "to bind on tightly." The ephod was, perhaps, the most important part of the High Priest's garment. It signified the primary work of the High Priest, i.e., bearing the names of the tribes over his heart.
5. The oil of anointing is said to "sanctify" (קָדַשׁ) the objects upon which it is poured (3 times in vs. 10-12). If oil is symbolic of the Ruach (also spoken of as being "poured out" upon people), then it is clear why the Ruach is referred to as רוּחַ הַקְּדוֹשׁ, the Spirit who sanctifies, or "makes holy."
6. The hide, flesh, and waste of the sin-offering was burned outside of the camp (v. 17). This most likely symbolizes that which is defiled through contact. The hide represents contact with the common, and the waste or refuse a symbol of that which is without value. Both of these may be foundational for the later use of "flesh" to represent metaphorically the sinful nature.

7. The ceremony of putting the blood upon the ear, right thumb, and right big-toe is interesting and obvious. “Hearing” translates into “obeying” in the Hebrew; the right hand is the place of power; the right foot that which leads as one sets out to walk. All must be “sanctified” by the blood if the work is to be done unto the Lord. This is very significant, for it means that apart from cleansing by the blood, the service the priest intends to offer is rendered unacceptable.

8. The offerings which Moses presents on behalf of Aaron and his sons are first laid upon their palms and then put upon the altar (v. 27). This was to show that in the work of the priest, though the sacrifice is from a given individual, it is acceptable to God only when it comes via the hands of the priest. God has prescribed the way we must come to Him—nothing else will suffice.

9. V. 30 - a second anointing, this time with blood and oil mixed. (The blood appears to be from the inauguration offering, wiped from that which was sprinkled upon the altar). Why the need for a second anointing? The initial anointing was primarily for Aaron and his sons—for their own beings. The second anointing was for “Aaron and his vestments.” That is to say, not only must the person be sanctified unto God, but his service (represented by the special garments) must also be sanctified. It is not enough to have a clear conscience before HaShem, we must be certain that our service is done as He prescribes, i.e., that it is His method and not our own.

10. In v. 33, the phrase “you shall be inaugurated” is in the Hebrew **יִמְלֵא אֶת-יְדֵיכֶם**, “the filling of your hands.” There is an obvious but important lesson to be learned from this terminology: Being consecrated to the Lord’s service means being set apart for honest work. It seems that often in our times leaders see their inauguration as being put in a place of prominence where they can simply demand others do the work. In like manner, Paul speaks of those who “work hard at preaching and teaching” (1Tim 5:17).

11. The inauguration ceremony took seven days, foreshadowing the continual service the priests were to render. “Dwelling at the doorway of the tent of meeting day and night” in their inauguration ceremony foreshadows the fact that our High Priest would “always live to make intercession” (cf. Heb 7:25).

