



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 19, 2009
Released on Wednesday, July 15, 2009**

"Commissioning for Service"

Lesson Text: Leviticus 8:1–13.

Background Scripture: Leviticus 8:1–13.

Devotional Reading: Romans 11:33–12:2.

Leviticus 8:1–13

- 1** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
- 2** Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and a bullock for the sin offering, and two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread;
- 3** And gather thou all the congregation together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.
- 4** And Moses did as the LORD commanded him; and the assembly was gathered together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.
- 5** And Moses said unto the congregation, This is the thing which the LORD commanded to be done.
- 6** And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water.
- 7** And he put upon him the coat, and girded him with the girdle, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod upon him, and he girded him with the curious girdle of the ephod, and bound it unto him therewith.
- 8** And he put the breastplate upon him: also he put in the breastplate the Urim and the Thummim.
- 9** And he put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, even upon his forefront, did he put the golden plate, the holy crown; as the LORD commanded Moses.
- 10** And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them.
- 11** And he sprinkled thereof upon the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all his vessels, both the laver and his foot, to sanctify them.
- 12** And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron's head, and anointed him, to sanctify him.
- 13** And Moses brought Aaron's sons, and put coats upon them, and girded them with girdles, and put bonnets upon them; as the LORD commanded Moses.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

- 1.** Tell how and why Aaron and his sons were commissioned for special service.
- 2.** Explain the significance of the idea of being commissioned or set apart as it relates to his or her own service for the Lord.
- 3.** Write a note of encouragement to someone who is serving the Lord.

HOW TO SAY IT

AARON. *Air-un.*

LEVITICUS. *Leh-vit-ih-kus.*

THUMMIM. *Thum-im (th as in thin).*

URIM. *You-rim.*

YAHWEH (*Hebrew*). *Yah-weh*

INTRODUCTION

In the New Testament there were a number of people who functioned as leaders or served in specialized ministries. Many served as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, elders, deacons, and teachers (Acts 14:23; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). In addition, various spiritual gifts were given to everyone in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27-30).

While we may be familiar with most of these ministries and gifts, when we turn to the Old Testament we are confronted with a completely different religious order. At the heart of the ceremonial worship under the old covenant was the sacrificial system. Various animal sacrifices and produce and drink offerings were presented to God as a part of worship. Under the old covenant, a person served as a priest because of his Aaronic lineage. This being so, it was not up to men to decide to become priests. From birth onward, it was known that a man's destiny was the priesthood.

Lesson Background

The institution of the priesthood in Leviticus 8:1–10:20 continues the historical narrative woven through Exodus 25–40. Of those 16 chapters, Exodus 28 and 29 form the primary background to Leviticus 8 for today.

We may be amazed that Yahweh God allowed Aaron to be the high priest for the people after his participation in the incident of the golden calf of Exodus 32! Aaron's lame excuse (Exodus 32:22–24) did nothing for his character. But because God is "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6), Aaron was allowed to be Israel's high priest to God.

Instructions for making priestly garments are given in Exodus 28 and then carried out in Exodus 39. Elaborate instructions for the consecration of Aaron and his sons are found in Exodus 29, while a summary of this same ceremony is given in Exodus 40:12–16. All of these instructions and making of the sacred garments are presupposed by the narrative of Leviticus 8:1–10:20.

Thus, Leviticus 8–10 recounts how the priesthood was instituted and how the first sacrifices were offered. The fact that two of Aaron's sons died at the Lord's hand when they offered "strange fire" (Leviticus 10:1, 2) emphasized the need for strict obedience and holiness by the priests. So this ordination service for Aaron and his sons was elaborate, serious, and holy. The purpose for all these ceremonies was for God to dwell in the midst of the Israelites (Exodus 29:43–46).

SOLEMN ASSEMBLY—Leviticus 8:1-4

1. Why did Moses set apart Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8:1,2)?

God begins to speak to *Moses* in order to give him specific instructions concerning the ordination of *Aaron and his sons*. Up until this time in history, the patriarch of a family generally served as a priest to his household (cf. Gen. 8:20; 12:8; 26:25; 35:1; Job 1:5). Once Israel was established as a nation, however, a special priesthood was to be consecrated. Aaron and his sons were to be the first priests in Israel (Lev. 8:2). Other members of the tribe of Levi were to assist them in various religious duties, but only the descendants of Aaron were to actually serve as priests. Being in such a favored position always presents the possibility of allowing privilege to turn into presumption. This was apparently what

happened to two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, who "offered strange fire before the Lord" (10:1) and were struck dead as a result.

The garments that Aaron and his sons were to receive on this occasion had already been specified (Exod. 28). Their description indicates that they were both beautiful and carefully constructed.

The anointing oil had been previously described (Exod. 30:22-23). It was to be used only by the priests in their various rituals and is likely symbolic of God's Spirit.

2. Why was it necessary for a sin offering to be made?

While the priests were holy—that is, set apart for sacred duties—they were also sinners. Hence, "a bullock for the sin offering" (Lev. 8:2) was a necessary part of the ritual. When religious leaders begin to think of themselves as above sin or those following them view them in that manner, disappointment will certainly follow. Both pastors and people must take into account their propensity to sin and ever be on guard against Satan (1 Cor. 10:12; 1 Pet. 5:8). Confession of sin is necessary to receive pardon (1 John 1:7–2:2).

The unleavened bread is described in Exodus 29:2 as being mixed with oil and made with fine wheat flour. As unleavened bread was used in the Passover, so a basket of it was to be used in this ritual. Since leaven is frequently a symbol of sin in Scripture (Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor. 5:6-8), the purpose in the priests' consecration most likely stressed the holiness of the occasion.

3. How was the whole congregation involved in the consecration of the Aaronic priesthood (vs. 3,4)?

Since priests were ordained to serve the whole nation, "all the congregation" was to gather at the entrance of the tabernacle. Many think that this was accomplished by having the elders represent the people in the limited space.

The tabernacle was a beautiful tent that had been constructed for the purpose of worship.

Since it was a tent, the tabernacle could be taken down and transported by the Israelites as they camped at different points along their journey. Once in Canaan, the tabernacle served as their sanctuary until the temple was built by King Solomon. "Since the rite of ordination and consecration of the priesthood to divine service was to affect everyone in Israel, the ceremony was a public one" (Harrison, *Leviticus*, InterVarsity).

Depending on a church's polity, leaders may be ordained, elected, commissioned, or appointed. In whatever fashion church leaders are chosen, a public affirmation of their role is beneficial for both the new leader and the people who are being called upon to support that person.

That "Moses did as the Lord commanded him" (Lev. 8:4) reminds us that obedience springs from genuine faith (John 14:15, 21; Heb. 11; Jas. 1:22; 2:14-26; 1 John 2:3-5).

SANCTIFYING AARON —Leviticus 8:5-9

4. Where did the washing of the priests most likely occur? What did this symbolize (vs. 5,6)?

Today's lesson text is punctuated four times by the phrase "as the Lord commanded Moses" or very close to it (here and vs. 4, 9, 13). The vital importance of this phrase is further revealed when we see it occur at least 16 times in Leviticus 8–10. This assures the reader that all that is being done with regard to Aaron and his sons is by divine authority.

While Christians have not been commanded to follow the rituals of the Mosaic law (Rom. 6:14), we must be obedient to those commands given to us by Christ. Whether we understand why certain commands or prohibitions are given as a part of the new covenant is not the issue. As God's people, we must obey. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3).

As a part of the ritual of ordination to the Aaronic priesthood, Aaron and his sons were to be washed with water (Lev. 8:6). Water is used throughout Scripture as a symbol of cleansing, whether purging the world of sin in Noah's day (Gen. 6:5-8; 1 Pet. 3:20-21) or cleansing us spiritually through faith in Christ (Mark 1:4-8; John 3:3-5; Acts 8:35-39; 15:9; Eph. 5:26).

The priests' ritual of washing would have occurred at the laver, a large basin that had been made from the bronze mirrors of the women who ministered at the tabernacle door (Exod. 38:8).

5. How do we know if we are doing what "the Lord commanded to be done"? How do we keep from fooling ourselves in this regard?

Israel could rely on Moses, a man with whom God spoke "mouth to mouth." We too have reliable mouthpieces available to us in the form of the writers of the Bible (who include Moses). It is important for us to measure our actions by the standard of God's Word.

However, the Bible does not provide precise instructions for each and every situation we may encounter. In some instances, we are wise to seek the advice of spiritually mature people, who can keep us from talking ourselves into things that we should not. We do have the privilege of speaking to God directly, so decisions should be bathed in prayer for an appropriate period of time. Ultimately, we must trust God to guide us in the right ways by yielding our hearts and wills to Him.

6. What was the ephod (v. 7)?

The ephod is a richly colored garment that reaches from the shoulders to a little above the knees. Shoulder pieces bind back and front together. The ephod is made of fine twined linen that features the colors gold, blue, purple, and scarlet. On the shoulder pieces are set 2 onyx stones. Engraved on them are the names of the 12 tribes (Exodus 28:6-12) in order of their inception, which served as a permanent memorial before God.

There is a girdle made of the same material to hold the ephod close to the body. In the antique English of the *King James Version*, the phrase *curious girdle* signifies something like "waistband."

The Ephod is identified as a priestly garment (1 Sam. 14:3; 22:18). It was worn by Samuel (1 Sam. 2:18) and by David when he danced before God on the occasion of the transfer of the ark of the covenant to David's capital city of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:14). From its earliest forms and uses, it appears that the ephod was associated with the presence of God or those who had a special relationship with God. It is portrayed as a source of divine guidance, as when David wanted to know if he should trust the people of Keilah (1 Sam. 23:9-12) or when he wanted to know if he should pursue the Amalekites (1 Sam. 30:7-8).

7. What was the purpose of the Urim and the Thummim (vs. 8,9)?

Details about *the breastplate* are found in Exodus 28:15-30, with a parallel in Exodus 39:8-21. The first of these two descriptions is God's instructions; the second description relates how the instructions for making the breastplate are carried out.

The breastplate is square, about 9 inches long and broad (Exodus 28:16), and is connected to the ephod by means of gold rings and chains (Exodus 28:27, 28).

Within the breastplate is placed *the Urim and the Thummim* (28:30). The names of these two stones probably mean "light" and "perfection," but scholars still debate their meaning and how they are to be used. They are a means of getting a negative or positive answer from God on any given question or concern of the people (see Numbers 27:15-21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; and Nehemiah 7:65).

In addition to the already mentioned items, Aaron was also to wear a "mitre" and "holy crown" (Lev. 8:9). "Certainly the headdress was a highly visible symbol of the high priest's consecration to his office in Israel. The anointing procedure and the crown were emblematic of royalty . . . The consecration ceremony was impressive, dignified and solemn, befitting the status and responsibilities of the recipient" (Harrison).

SPECIAL ANOINTING —Leviticus 8:10-13

8. What kind of oil was used in the ceremony of consecration (vs. 10,11)?

Taking the special anointing oil (Exod. 30:22-33), which had to be prepared in the precise manner God directed, Moses was to anoint the tabernacle and all it contained. In this way, everything was sanctified, or consecrated, to the Lord.

Everything connected with worship at *the tabernacle* is now *anointed* with the special *oil* that we described earlier. The anointing sanctifies the furniture and thus reserves it for sacred use only. The furnishings of the tabernacle are also described in Exodus 30:26-28 (compare 40:9-11).

The brazen *altar* used for animal sacrifices is sanctified by sprinkling oil on it *seven times*. Compared with the anointing of the other furniture, this shows the importance of this altar. This altar and *the laver* are the two "outside" pieces of tabernacle furniture—one for sacrifice and one for washings.

9. What specific instructions did God give Moses concerning the commissioning of Aaron and his sons, and what was their function (vs. 12,13)?

As an act of consecration to the office of high priest, oil was poured on Aaron's head as well as on the objects being set apart as sacred. Now Aaron himself is *anointed*. As kings will later be anointed to symbolize the empowering by the Spirit of God (see 1 Samuel 16:3, 13), so also are priests and prophets. The scene of Aaron's ordination is marked so indelibly in the Israelite consciousness that King David can use it as a figure of speech for unity some 400 years later per Psalm 133. Only the Spirit can give unity and blessing.

The *sons* wear the simple white clothing that the high priest has on underneath the ephod, breastplate, and blue robe (Exodus 39:27, 28). Exodus 28:41; 30:30; 40:14, 15; Leviticus 7:35, 36; 10:7; and Numbers 3:3 establish that they are indeed anointed as well.

The rest of Leviticus 8 gives additional details concerning the ceremony of consecration for the priests. First, a sin offering was to be made, with Aaron and his sons laying their hands upon the head of the bull (v. 14), thus sharing their need for God's mercy. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Even so, "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (10:4). The book of Hebrews is an excellent commentary on Leviticus, showing us that the priesthood and the whole sacrificial system find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (9:28).

After the sin offering was made by Aaron and his sons (Lev. 8:14-17), a burnt offering was presented (vs. 18-21). A "ram of consecration" (v. 22) was then killed. The entire ceremony was not complete until seven days had passed (vs. 33-36).

All this anticipated the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. As New Testament saints, we can be thankful that such rituals are unnecessary for our redemption, "for Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18).

CONCLUSION:

Today, we have a high priest far greater than Aaron (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus ever lives to intercede on our behalf and save us completely (Hebrews 7:23-25).

It is a mistake to view the issue of being a priest as something that is to be restricted to the Old Testament. The New Testament teaches us that we are part of a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6), and we should understand what this means.

We recognize God's special call on a person's life by honoring that person by public recognition and celebration. This is well and good. But we may also think of a person's conversion to Christ as an ordination to priesthood. May God increase our royal priesthood!

PRAYER:

Our Father, we recognize persons of special skills and abilities that You are calling into specialized ministry. But may we also remember that You have called each and every one of us to Your royal priesthood. May we never forget that priesthood requires holiness. In the name of our great high priest, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER:

Strive toward holiness in your priestly service.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON:

Next week's lesson is "Spreading the Wealth." Jesus told His disciples, "Ye have the poor always with you" (Matt. 26:11; cf. Mark 14:7; John 12:8). The Old Testament provided for a Jubilee every fifty years to help the poor get back on their feet. What obligation should we have to help the poor today? Study Leviticus 25:8-21, 23-24.

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