

The Ordination of Priests

Erica shifted in her chair again. She was uncomfortable. She was sitting in the hospital cafeteria with two other coworkers from the radiology department.

Erica didn't mind when Sarah sat down, but when Rebecca spotted them, Erica had become a little deflated. Rebecca loved to gossip.

Erica never participated in these conversations, but she came to realize that it wasn't enough. She had politely tried to steer the conversations elsewhere to no avail. Besides, Erica had been talking to Sarah about the Lord.

"I'm sorry, ladies," Erica said, as she gathered up her tray, "I'm going to head out."

"Where are you going?" inquired Rebecca. "We have a whole 20 minutes left for lunch."

"Yes, I know," Erica said. "I'm going to find a quiet place and read." She pulled her book out of her bag and showed it to the two women.

"What's that?" Rebecca asked.

"It's a Christian devotional," replied Erica. "I can bring you one if you like."

"Oh no, that's okay," said Rebecca.

"Erica?" Sarah said, as she also moved to get up. "Mind if I go with you?"

As the two women were walking out, Erica turned to Sarah, "I'm sorry, but I just had to leave. God is not pleased with me listening to and contributing to gossip."

1. Why is it important that God makes us holy and set apart?

2. In what ways have you seen God's holiness in your life?

3. How have you seen God work through you to bring change to the world around you?

LESSON FOCUS: Be holy as God is holy.
--

Consecration of the Priests

Exodus 29:1–9 KJV

1 And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them to hallow them, to minister unto me in the priest's office: Take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish, 2 And unleavened bread, and cakes unleavened tempered with oil, and wafers unleavened anointed with oil: of wheaten flour shalt thou make them. 3 And thou shalt put them into one basket, and bring them in the basket, with the bullock and the two rams. 4 And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water. 5 And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod: 6 And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre. 7 Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him. 8 And thou shalt bring his sons, and put coats upon them. 9 And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them:

Exodus 29:1–9 NIV

¹ "This is what you are to do to consecrate them, so they may serve me as priests: Take a young bull and two rams without defect. ² And from the finest wheat flour make round loaves without yeast, thick loaves without yeast and with olive oil mixed in, and thin loaves without yeast and brushed with olive oil. ³ Put them in a basket and present them along with the bull and the two rams. ⁴ Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them with water. ⁵ Take the garments and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breastpiece. Fasten the ephod on him by its skillfully woven waistband. ⁶ Put the turban on his head and attach the sacred emblem to the turban. ⁷ Take the anointing oil and anoint him by pouring it on his head. ⁸ Bring his sons and dress them in tunics ⁹ and fasten caps on them. Then tie sashes on Aaron and his sons. The priesthood is theirs by a

and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

lasting ordinance.
"Then you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

Exodus 28–29 says to clothe and consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests for the people. In the ancient world, priests had the job of mediating between humans and the world of heaven. For Israel—a whole nation of priests (Ex. 19:6, see Lesson 1)—special clothing would give Israel's own priests dignity and honor in the eyes of others, and—more importantly—it would prepare them for the weighty task of approaching God's holiness. The priests would be ritually set apart for divine service, down to their clothes and appearance. God is expressing a desire to dwell among His people because of His faithful love, and to meet with them.

Moses would instruct the Israelites to bring a young bull and two rams without any defects, along with unleavened bread mixed with oil (Ex. 29:1–2). These offerings, which remind us of the bread of Passover, were to be prepared and placed inside a "basket" (v. 3), almost like how we might wrap a gift. Aaron and the priests would then approach the tent of meeting, for they alone among the people shall enter. The priests are washed and clothed for their work, with a tunic, robe, ephod, and breastpiece (v. 5). The ephod was an ornate vest with shoulder pieces, precious stones, and fine gold chains (Ex. 28:6–14). Both the ephod and breastpiece contained engraved stones naming all the tribes of Israel, a "continuing memorial before the Lord" (Ex. 28:29). Each time that God would look upon the high priest, God would be reminded of His covenant and His promises.

Finally, a turban would be placed on Aaron's head, and a sacred crest or medallion tied on the turban (v. 6). Moses would pour anointing oil on Aaron, setting him apart for his sacred duties. Then Moses would bring Aaron's sons to the entrance of the tent, ready for their work.

4. *What is the job of Aaron and the other priests?*

5. *What offerings did the Israelites need to bring to the tabernacle entrance before readying the priests?*

6. *What do the priests' garments represent about their role among the Israelites?*

Consecration of the Altar

Exodus 29:35–37 KJV

35 And thus shalt thou do unto Aaron, and to his sons, according to all things which I have commanded thee: seven days shalt thou consecrate them. 36 And thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin offering for atonement: and thou shalt cleanse the altar, when thou hast made an atonement for it, and thou shalt anoint it, to sanctify it. 37 Seven days thou shalt make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy.

Exodus 29:35–37 NIV

³⁵ "Do for Aaron and his sons everything I have commanded you, taking seven days to ordain them. ³⁶ Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement. Purify the altar by making atonement for it, and anoint it to consecrate it. ³⁷ 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.

At the entrance of the tent of God's sacred presence, Aaron and his sons would offer a bull as a "sin offering" (v. 36). Leviticus 4:1–35 gives more details about this sacrifice, which seeks purification from sin. Leviticus 4:3 says that this is required when "the anointed priest sins." Even the priests—those who had been selected by God, ritually washed and anointed, and clothed in the finest garments—would offer sacrifices for their own guilt, as well as the ignorant sins of the community (see Lev. 4:13, 22).

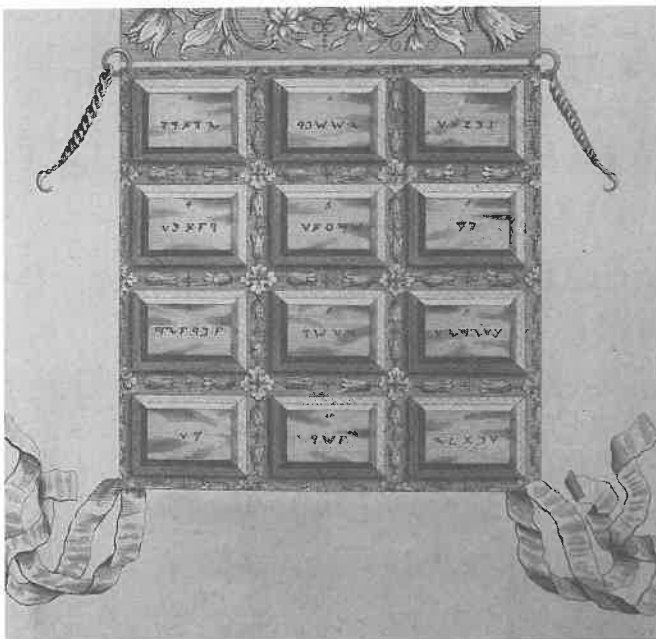
Then God directs Moses and the Israelites to "consecrate" (KJV) or "ordain" (NIV) these priests, which are translations for the Hebrew that means "fill their hands"

(v. 35). Part of the ceremony includes placing a portion of the sacrifice into the hands of the priests as a symbol of their role and responsibility to serve in the tabernacle.

In this text, God requests a sacrifice for atonement for seven consecutive days (v. 37). The number seven signifies completeness and wholeness. Just as God created a good world and rested on the seventh day, God is creating a nation of chosen people and giving them a way to seek forgiveness for sin. The priests would be cleansed, and the altar would also be ceremonially set apart from any corruption. Objects which were created for service to God, like an altar, could be polluted by sin and improper use. To be an effective tool for seeking forgiveness, the altar would need to remain holy, and a weeklong ritual of sacrifice ensured that the priestly representatives would find favor with God, who would welcome their worship. In a surprising turn, anyone or anything that came in contact with the altar would be considered "holy" (v. 37).

7. *What is the purpose of the "sin offering" mentioned in verse 36?*

8. *For what purpose does God request seven days of sacrifices?*



A modern artist has imagined what the twelve precious stones on Aaron's ephod might have looked like, each inscribed with a name of a tribe of Israel (as the language might have been written in the days of Moses). Most people could not enter the tabernacle, but the priest would enter on their behalf, wearing their names on his chest.

Artwork: Philip De Vere

Reflection of the Great High Priest

When I was a teenager, people often described being set apart as a specific set of “don’t” rules: don’t dress a certain way, don’t listen to certain music, and don’t watch certain movies. Being set apart and holy was something I could only define by what I wasn’t: I wasn’t like the rest of the world. Or so I thought.

But that only sets us apart from the culture where we find ourselves. I was a homeschooled girl living in California, and I didn’t know the latest pop culture references. But I don’t think that made me holy.

I’m still learning what it means to live as one made holy by Christ’s sacrifice. I’ve learned that being “set apart” isn’t just a list of cultural prohibitions. I want the holiness of God to mark out what I do, not just what I avoid. Jesus’ death was the one sacrifice I needed: I don’t need to be consecrated in the same way as Aaron and his sons. Jesus has saved me, and He is making me holy.

So I want to live like Jesus is most important in my life. And I want to have unfathomable joy, even in a world filled with darkness. I want to be kind to my neighbor, even though a person might be uncharitable to me. I want to praise Jesus, even when I feel embarrassed at the thought of sharing my voice.

Sure, there are plenty of things that I avoid. But I want holiness to be visible by what I say and do. So that is my prayer: to live according to what Jesus has done for me, and what He is continuing to do.

9. *How has Jesus’ sacrifice altered the ways that we think about sin and holiness?*

10. *How should believers, followers of Christ, look different from the world?*

11. *How might holiness include the things that we actively do, not just what we avoid?*

Surrender to God's Holiness

While their garments and rituals set the priests apart, what sets today's believer apart is not any outward attire but a heart clothed in Christ's righteousness.

► *Identify behaviors or attitudes that you have not surrendered to God. Have you been seeking only the good of others and placing their needs above your own? Take some time this week to write a prayer of confession for any ways that you have fallen short of God's holiness. You might find it helpful to contact a friend, mentor, or your group leader to ask for support as you seek God's holiness in these areas.*

KEY VERSE

And thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

—Exodus 29:9 KJV

Fasten caps on them. Then tie sashes on Aaron and his sons. The priesthood is theirs by a lasting ordinance. "Then you shall ordain Aaron and his sons."

—Exodus 29:9 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 17 through March 23

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. 1 Peter 2:1–5—Building a Spiritual House.

Tues. Psalm 141—Prayer like Incense.

Wed. 2 Corinthians 2:12–17—The Fragrance of Knowing Christ.

Thurs. Zephaniah 3:14–20—God's Delight.

Fri. Romans 12:1–8—A Holy and Acceptable Sacrifice.

Sat. Romans 12:9–21—Worship through Loving Genuinely.

Sun. Leviticus 1:3–17—An Acceptable Offering.

A SACRIFICE THAT SAVES

Have you ever stopped to ponder the sacrifices of ancient Israel? In those days, many people sacrificed animals to their gods. But Israel's God was supposed to be different.

Other nations offered sacrifices to get something in return—an abundant harvest, children to carry on their name, success in battle—but that didn't apply to Israel's sacrificial system at all. Instead of twisting God's arm, sacrifices in the Bible allowed people to live in close relationship with the holy God—a God radically unlike the disordered and sinful people He had chosen. In other words, sacrifice is about a relationship.

Humans disobeyed their creator and wandered from the order of His design, but God longed to be near them, just as He had once walked beside humans in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8). God chose a group of people—not perfect by any stretch—but ordinary people who became special because God chose them. They would be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). They would bring blessing to the whole earth, just as God had promised their ancestor Abraham (Gen. 12:3).

But to be with His people, God would need to set boundaries and ground rules. If God's very presence was going to dwell in their midst, they would have to keep the standards of a covenant agreement. Most of all, they would carefully separate God's holy presence from the sin and disorder of their own lives. God asked them to construct a tabernacle, a place for the divine presence to “dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8).

To tend to the tabernacle, Israel would need representatives called priests (see Ex. 29:1–9). Not just anyone could enter the presence of a holy God, but Aaron's sons would have this important task. They would offer burnt offerings, “an aroma pleasing to the LORD” (Lev. 1:9). And once each year, the high priest would offer a separate kind of sacrifice, a goat whose blood would be required to “cleanse . . . from the uncleanness of the Israelites” (Lev. 16:19).

But over time and through the centuries, the corruption of human priests became harder to ignore. Even Aaron's sons could not be trusted to be faithful and to observe all that God had asked (see Num. 3:2–4). How could any high priest represent the nation before God? How could priests offer proper sacrifices and ask God to forgive, especially when priests were flawed and culpable? Could the sacrifices performed in an earthly temple ever be enough to reach the heights of heaven, and could those sacrifices actually rid people from the entanglements of sin?

But the mystery of God's plan had yet to be unveiled; God's designs cannot be derailed. God would establish a relationship like never before. God would transform the hearts of His people, dwelling with them—first in the ministry of Jesus and later in the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 9:26 says, “He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Not only was Jesus a fitting sacrifice to take away sin, but He was also a superior priest—one who had no sin and who can stand blameless, appearing before God in heaven (Heb. 9:24).

Something dramatic changed through the ministry of Jesus. Instead of seeking the atonement of sin through repeated sacrifices—a constant reminder of human powerlessness to overcome sin—God's people could rely on their “advocate” before God the Father (1 John 2:1). The new way to find relationship with God is through the Son of God, the “Righteous One” sent to earth (1 John 2:1). Obedience to His word and message shows the love of God and redemptive power of His sacrifice (1 John 2:5–6). Sacrifice was always about relationship, but the Spirit of God dwells within all those who follow the way of Jesus and receive forgiveness for sin. The love displayed by Jesus and through His followers is the ultimate sign of redemption for the world.



Albrecht Dürer, a sixteenth-century master artist of the German renaissance, created this woodcut depicting the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus' offered Himself as a sacrifice, cleansing for sin with His own blood (Heb. 9:25–26).

Albrecht Dürer/National Gallery of Art



This modern altar is created to be like the altar in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. The priests maintained a regular burnt offering, creating “an aroma pleasing to the LORD” (Lev. 1:9). Through the sacrifices from one day to the next, God was invited to dwell with His people and to meet with them.

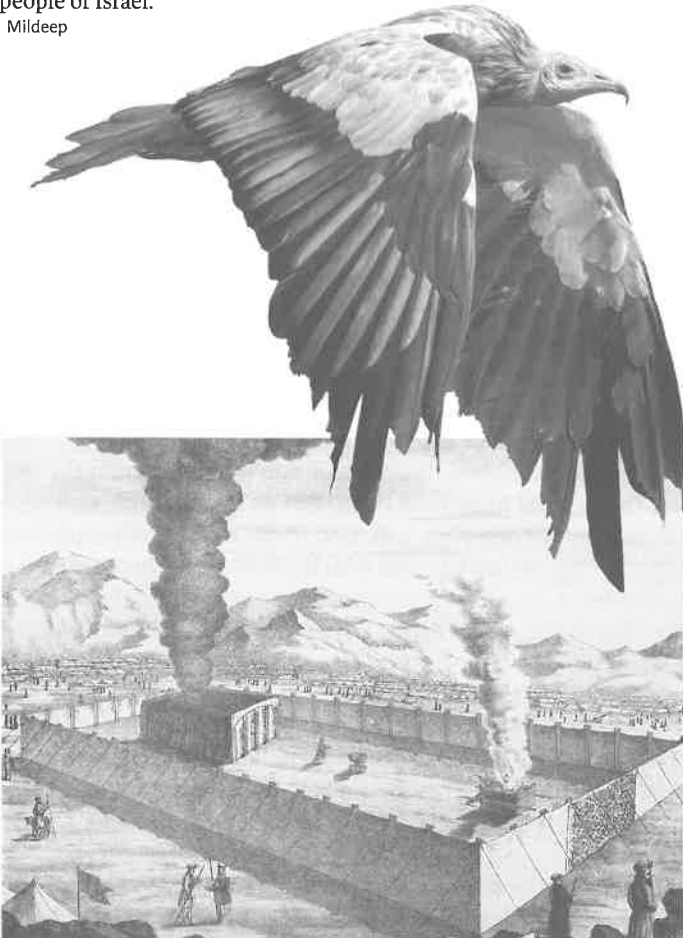
gugganij



The *Christo Redentor* statue (Portuguese for “Christ the Redeemer”), with its outstretched arms of invitation, has become an international symbol of Christianity where it stands in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In the words of 1 John 4:16, “God is love.”

© Peter Adams/Getty Images

God delivered the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt and brought them out “on eagle’s wings,” (Ex. 19:4). This miraculous deliverance set the stage for a covenant relationship that God would give to the people of Israel.



God provided all of the raw materials that the Hebrews would need to construct a mobile sanctuary in their midst. This nineteenth-century illustration places the tabernacle in the middle of the tribes of Israel. It was a visible manifestation of God’s presence with them.

Internet Archive Book Images



This cathedral’s window depicts Aaron’s job of choosing a goat to offer once a year on the Day of Atonement. This once-a-year offering was necessary “because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins [had] been” (Lev. 16:16).

Jules & Jenny, UK



This mosaic which was created by the contemporary Jewish artist, Yael Portugheis, has twelve sections of stones to represent Israel’s twelve tribes. This reminds us of a special garment, called the ephod, which was worn by the high priest Aaron and the high priests (Ex. 29:5). It had twelve stones to represent each tribe of Israel, since the priest was representing the whole nation before God.

Djampa

An Altar and a Table

In many Christian churches, the table for communion is called an altar, which connects the Last Supper to the lesson from Exodus 29, when the priests are being prepared to enter the presence of God. Using the prompts below, see whether you can't find other connections between Jesus' last supper and what you read from Exodus 29.

Passover is also called the Festival of Unleavened Bread. When you think of Jesus and His disciples eating unleavened bread together, what connections do you notice with the gifts described in Exodus 29:2-3?

In John 13:2-17, the disciples receive a ritual washing, and Jesus calls them "clean." Do you see any connection to the washing of Aaron and his sons in Exodus 29:4? What is different about the washing that Jesus gives?

In Matthew 26:26-28, Jesus invites His followers to receive bread and wine as a sign of a covenant that grants "forgiveness of sins." What connections do you notice with the "sin offering" described in Exodus 29:36?