

Preparations for Priests

Exodus 29:1-46

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

November 3, 2002

We have been looking at this section of Exodus that runs from Exodus 24 through 40, with one interruption in 32, 33, and 34. This whole passage has to do with the right worship of God. Now you maybe wondering about that interruption, we'll get there early next year God willing. And that interruption is about wrong worship. So the whole of the end of Exodus is about worship, both right and wrong. And so we find this series of connected chapters focusing on this subject of how to glorify God. Obviously the fact that Moses would spend a third of the book on the subject of the worship of God is some indication of how important this subject is to God.

We said that Exodus 24 is the swing chapter; it provides the description of the children of Israel confirming their agreement and obedience to the covenant of grace that had been offered by God through Moses, and richly sealed at Sinai. In Exodus 25 we saw the instructions for the sanctuary and its furnishings. In Exodus 26 we saw detailed treatment of instructions of the coverings for the tabernacle. In Exodus 27 we saw the instruction for the building of the altar of sacrifice and the courtyard around the tabernacle and the lamp that was to be before the inner sanctum, the holy of holies. In Exodus 28 we dealt with the special garments, the clothing that was to be worn by the high priest and priests, and that brings us to Exodus 29.

We'll read the first nine verses to begin with. It's a very long chapter and then as we work through the chapter we'll read the portions that we're about to comment upon so that perhaps you're better able to keep in mind the details before you. Let's hear God's Word, here in Exodus 29:1-9:

Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them to minister as priests to Me: take one young bull and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread and unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil; you shall make them of fine wheat flour. "You shall put them in one basket, and present them in the basket along with the bull and the two rams. "Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. "You shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the tunic and the robe of the ephod and

the ephod and the breast piece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod; and you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. "Then you shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. "You shall bring his sons and put tunics on them. "You shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and bind caps on them, and they shall have the priesthood by a perpetual statute. So you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

Amen, thus far God's holy Word. Let us look to Him in prayer.

"Our Lord and our God, this is Your word. Speak to Your people by it and grant that they would be built up in grace with it and to it. In Jesus' name. Amen".

So far, from Exodus 25 to Exodus 28, the focus has been on the furniture and the structure of the tabernacle. Now, when you get to Exodus 29 the focus shifts to ritual. We've been talking about the objects, the furniture the construction of the tabernacle itself. Now we look at the ordination of the priests who are going to serve in that tabernacle and use those various instruments as part of its ritual. And though there is a shift of focus from the furniture to the ritual, in some sense this passage is the logical climax of every thing that has gone before. And there are 7 or 8 things that I'd like to bring your attention to.

I. God directs that priests are to be consecrated and ordained via a ritual that emphasizes the need for cleansing.

Let's start in verses 1 through 9 and look at these initial steps of priestly ordination. There's a mention of sacrificial animals that are to be brought, and the washing of the priest and the anointing of the priest. And here's what we learn in verses 1 through 9. God directs that the priests are to be consecrated and ordained via a ritual which emphasis that they need to be cleansed. Before they can serve as priests they need cleansing, and the totality of this ritual described in verses 1 through 9, emphasizes that very point. What's the meaning of this ceremony, that the priest must be cleansed symbolically before putting on his robes and taking up his work?

Let's look at some of the highlights of it. In verse 1 you see the ceremony begins with the collection of three sacrificial animals, a bull and two rams. Now Leviticus 8 tells us, and by the way, titles are used right here in Exodus chapter 29, but, Leviticus 8 tells us what these animals were for. The bull is for a sin offering. The first ram was for a burnt offering, a whole burnt offering, the whole burnt offering spoken of in the Old Testament. And the second ram was a ram for consecration or ordination. These three sacrifices stress different aspects of the priest's need for purification and for atonement for cleansing as he enters into his service.

Then if you look at verses two and three, in addition to these three animal

sacrifices, three types of wheat bread are to be made and brought in a basket to the doorway of the tent of meeting. Now nothing else is said about these animals or the bread in this passage. You get to that later on.

Next, in verse four, comes the command for ceremonial washing. This washing is symbolic of the cleansing of the priest. It is a symbol of the purification that the priest needs to obtain in order to carry out his work. You remember the bronze laver in the tabernacle which was described in the passages that we've looked at previously. Well, that bronze laver was used for this. It was filled with water and then water was taken from that laver and poured out on, sprinkled on, the priest, and it was also used for other ceremonial washings in the Old Testament. By the way, this is the background to and the foreshadowing of Christian baptism. There are a whole variety of ceremonial washings that you'll meet not only in Exodus, but especially in the book of Leviticus and numbers. And this provides the background for the meaning of Christian Baptism.

In verses 5 and 6, you get the garments which were specifically mandated and described in Exodus 28. They are ceremonially put on as part of an elaborate ritual, whereby the priest is literally invested in his task. Then in verse 7, the priest is anointed with oil and that anointing oil is a visible marker of God's choice of Aaron and his sons, and His appointment of them to their special task. It is very interesting, that later when David is anointing as king of Israel he becomes known as the 'Anointed of the Lord,' and then this in itself becomes a metaphor for a description of the Messiah. He is the 'Anointed One,' and so the one who is looked for is anointed. And at the same time the idea of God's choosing and God's anointing becomes used as a synonym. So the chosen one is the anointed one and the anointed one is the chosen one.

"Aaron's sons" is used metaphorically here as well. The sons of Aaron are the priests. They're descended from Aaron. And of course, in the first instance they were literally his sons, but eventually they were his grandsons and his great grandsons and his great, great grandsons. The whole of the priesthood coming from Aaron and from this line of Levi are called here Aaron's sons. And they are anointed as a visible marker that God has chosen them for this particular task.

And then in verses 8 and 9, we see that in this way the priesthood of Israel was invested. It was ordained by Moses who, as the mediator, acted as the priest in this particular ceremony.

Now, what application do we learn from this particular ritual? In the first instance we learn that in order to serve in the presence of a holy God, in a holy place, in a holy work, one must be cleansed. That message comes through loud and clear and it's actually repeated several times in this passage. If you're going to serve in the service of the Lord you must be cleansed. And of course, for those of us in the New Testament, there is a beautiful application for us. Our baptism is, at least in part, though it means more than this, but at least in part, is our investiture

into the new covenant priesthood. You remember what Peter says, "You are a chosen race, you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." And in a sense our baptism serves as that ceremonial washing that ushers us in to this position, this status as priest for His kingdom. You remember what Paul says, in Ephesians 5:24-26, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word."

And so you see the background of Exodus 29 for Jesus' ceremonial baptism. Did you ever wonder why would Jesus need to be baptized? He didn't sin. Jesus responds to fulfill all righteousness. And even as the priests were consecrated in to their work through the ceremonial washing, Jesus said, "John, you baptize Me as I am entering into My ceremonial work." And then is His mercy He gives to us this sign because He is making us to be what? A kingdom of priests and washes us with water so that we might be cleansed for His service. So God directs the priests to be consecrated and ordained via this elaborate ritual that emphasizes their need for cleansing. That's the first thing we learn in Exodus 29.

II. Even the priests who served as the representatives of Israel needed a representative because of their sin.

Now look at verses 10 through 14. "Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. You shall slaughter the bull before the Lord at the doorway of the tent of meeting. You shall take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger and you shall pour out all the blood at the base of the altar. You shall take all the fat that covers the entrails and the lobe of the liver and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them and offer them up in smoke on the altar. But the flesh of the bull and its hide and its refuse you shall burn with fire outside the camp. It is a sin offering."

Now the reason for collecting that bull, and then later the rams, is made clear. Any animal rights activists who are present tonight may want to go ahead and duck for the door now, because it's going to get pretty ugly in the next few verses. The priests lay their hands on the bull's head at the door at the tent of meeting. What does that mean? It signifies identification. "That bull stands in for me. That bull is my representative. That bull is my substitute. The death of that animal will stand in for the death of the priest." The priest, because of his sin, deserves to die. By identifying himself with that animal, by laying his hands on its head, the animal serves as the substitute, as the representative, for the priest. And that principle of representation is one which we've already seen in Exodus in this passage and it won't be seen for the last time here. It's found throughout the book of Exodus.

Note that the priest is not allowed to go into the tent of meeting until the sacrifices

have been made, until the ceremonial washing has occurred. Until the purification of the blood had been administered he cannot go into the presence of God or serve in the tabernacle until he has been cleansed. The bull is slaughtered at the doorway and then some of the blood of the bull is smeared on the horns and the base of the altar. Now this is done for purification, purifying, consecrating, setting apart this altar for the holy use for which it's going to be employed. This is done also for atonement for the priest. The bull is slaughtered for the atonement for the priest and for the purification of the altar. The priest needs forgiveness and even the altar needs to be consecrated for its holy use.

Now in verse he tells you that all the fat that covers the entrails and lobe of the liver and the two kidneys and the fat on them, is to be offered up in a burnt offering. It's also significant for you to know that in the ancient Near East, other pagan cultures used those parts of animals to practice magical divination, whereby they supposedly determined what the future held. Isn't it interesting that God says to Israel, now when you sacrifice to Me go ahead and take those parts and just burn them. He contrasts the worship of His people to the pagan worship around them.

And then in verse 14, the skin, the carcass, and the refuse parts, the waste parts of the bull are to be taken outside the camp and burned. And 'outside the camp' becomes a Jewish idiom, a way to talk about the place of the defiled and the unclean.

For instance, if you look at Leviticus 13 verse 46, the leper is required to live outside the camp. In Leviticus 10, when Nadab and Abihu offer the strange sacrifice of fire and are struck down, the people are told to take them outside the camp and to take the vestments from them and to dispose of them. So the burning of the carcass outside of the camp is a graphic picture of what it means to violate the covenant and what violating the covenant deserves. It deserves being cut off from God's people and destroyed completely and put outside of the bounds of the presence of God. And it's one of the striking things, my friends, that our great high priest Jesus Christ endured that very experience on our behalf and in our place.

Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 13 and look at what the author of Hebrews says about the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews 13:10, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." You realize that there are some people, who are telling the members of this congregation that the author of Hebrews is writing to, that they can go back to the worship of Judaism and turn their backs on Jesus as the Messiah and they can have everything that they had before. So the author in verse 10 is saying, we have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. And then he goes on to say this, "for the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also that He might sanctify through His own blood suffered outside the gate. So,

let us go out to Him outside the camp.”

And there is the picture of Jesus in the place of the skull outside the city walls of Jerusalem in the place of destruction, dying for His people, experiencing the humiliation as being viewed as a castaway, as one who's been cut off from his people because of the violation of the covenant. He does this on our behalf. He endures this very experience Himself in our place. Even the priests who served as representatives of Israel needed a representative for their sin. That's what we learn in 10 through 14 of Exodus 29. But Jesus is the real representative of His people. He is the sacrifice that stands in their place. And we place our hands, as it were, on His head and He suffers in our place as our representative. That's the second thing we see in this passage.

III. Even the priests who served as the representatives of Israel needed to entreat God's mercy through sacrifice.

Now, the third thing you'll see in verses 15 through 18. You shall also take the one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram and you shall slaughter the ram and take its blood and sprinkle it around on the altar. And then you shall cut the ram into its pieces and wash its entrails and its legs and put them with its pieces and its head. And you shall offer up in smoke the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord. It is a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the Lord.

We saw the sacrifice of the bull in verses 10 through 14. And now we see the sacrifice of the first ram in verses 15 through 18. This is the ram of burnt offering. And it reminds us that even the priests who served as the representatives of Israel needed to entreat God's mercy upon themselves through sacrifice. This ram, if you look at verses 15 and 16, is to be taken and again the priest lays hands on its head. Again, clearly teaching, that this means that the death of the animal is accepted as the equivalent of the death of the individual. And after the animal is slaughtered its blood is now sprinkled all over the altar. You remember before, the blood had been put on the tip of the horns and on the base of the altar. Now, this blood is spread all over the altar once again, for atonement for the priests and for purification for the altar. And then, the whole of the ram is offered up, is sacrificed for a burnt offering.

Only part of the bull was offered as a sacrifice, but the whole of the ram is sacrificed. In the Old Testament, this *olah* is the mode in which God's mercy was entreated by His people. As priest of the new covenant Paul picks up on this very image in Romans chapter 12, verse 1, and applies this principle to us. He says, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship.” He's drawing on this picture of the consecration ceremony of the priest, when the whole burnt offering is lifted up, and he's saying to us that we are to

give the whole of ourselves to God as a sacrifice, which is our spiritual service of worship. Paul picks up on this imagery and applies it to Christians. We offer ourselves to God, the whole of ourselves, the whole of our lives in gratitude to God. God owns all of us and so we give all of ourselves to him as our spiritual service of worship.

IV. The priests who serve as the representatives of Israel are “branded” in blood in their ordination.

Look at verses 19 through 25 which record the sacrifice of the second ram. “Then you shall take the other ram and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram. You shall slaughter the ram and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the lobes of his sons' right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet and sprinkle the rest of the blood around on the altar. And then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments and on his son's and on his son's garments with him. So he and his garments shall be consecrated as well as his son's and his son's garments with him. You shall also take the fat from the ram and the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails and the lobe of the liver and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them and on the right thigh (for it is a ram of ordination.), and one cake of bread and one cake of bread mixed with oil and one wafer from the basket of unleavened bread which is set before the Lord. And you shall put all these in the hands of Aaron, and in the hands of his sons, and shall wave them as a wave offering before the Lord. And you shall take them from their hands and offer them up in smoke on the altar on the burnt offering for a soothing aroma before the Lord. It is an offering by fire to the Lord.”

Now in verses 19 and 20 you have this strange ritual, where the blood of the lamb of ordination is put on the right ear lobe on the right thumb, and on the right big toe. What's the meaning of this particular ritual act? It perhaps indicates that the priest will hear God and obey Him in what he does. His hands and his feet will be swift to obey the Lord. And it is probably an allusion to the bond slave ear-piercing ceremony which we learned about in Exodus 21:6. If you were willing to become a slave for life, the ritual required the piercing of your earlobe with the nail at the doorpost of your master's house. And the ritual smearing of the blood of the priest indicated perpetual service as a priest for God.

In verse 21 the ram's blood and the anointing oil is applied to the priest. And this is yet another cleansing and purification ritual. And in verses 22 through 24 we see yet another offering, the wave offering, the motion of which perhaps indicates it is being given up to the Lord as it swung from priest to altar, and then eventually put up on the altar and symbolically consumed. In other words, the priests who were to serve as the representatives of Israel are branded in blood in their ordination, and consecrated by the blood of this ram for their service of God.

This ceremony graphically illustrates the principle of the necessity of blood for consecration, purification and atonement. No wonder Hebrews 9:22 says, "That without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

Now though these Mosaic sacrifices foreshadowed forgiveness by blood, these sacrifices themselves could not bring about forgiveness of sin. The author of Hebrews tells you that as well in Hebrews 10:4, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Only Christ's blood can accomplish that, "nothing but the blood of Jesus," even as we have already sung. So we see here something of the foreshadowing of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ even in the branding of blood of the priest at the time of their ordination.

V. The priests who serve as the representatives of Israel are blessed with a covenant meal of communion.

Now skip down to verse 31 and 34 and let's look at another thing. Here we have the covenant meal of the priest after the ordination ceremony. The priests who serve as representatives of God's people are blessed by being allowed to sup with, fellowship with, commune with God in this covenant meal of fellowship.

In verses 31 through 34 we read, "You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh in a holy place. Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket at the doorway at the tent of meeting. Thus they shall eat those things by which atonement was made at their ordination and consecration. But a layman shall not eat them because they are holy. If any of the flesh of ordination or if any the bread remains until morning then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten because it is holy."

Now a ritual meal, a covenant meal, would not have been unusual in the ancient Near East after such a ceremony that has just been described. Very often a special relationship was sealed by the sharing of a meal, and the priests who have been brought into this special relationship, into this special work with and for God, are blessed with this privilege of a meal of covenant communion.

Now in verses 31 and 32 we see the remainder of the lamb, the lamb of ordination, the second ram and finally those three types of bread that had been put in the basket. These things finally come into play. They provide the content of the meal that is going to be shared. The ram is going to be cooked and prepared, the bread is going to be used, and they will be food for the ceremony. And in verses 33 and 34 this food is said to be just for the priests, only for those who are consecrated, and it's to be consumed or burned the next morning. Why? Because it is ritually holy, and thus it is set aside it is set apart.

Now again consider, we've been consecrated by the washing of water through baptism into this kingdom of priests of which we're a part, and God has granted

us the privilege, the inestimable privilege of entering into the sharing of a covenant meal with Him which we call The Lord's Supper. And as priests of the new covenant we have the inestimable privilege of eating that covenant meal regularly. So you see how the imagery of these commands of Christ picks up on the practice of ordination from Exodus 29.

VI. Even the altar must be atoned for and the priests consecrated over seven days.

We hasten on to verses 35-37. Here we see the seven-day ordination service. That's right friends, a seven-day ordination service. The next time you're here for an ordination service and it runs to 7:15, just remember you could be in the Old Covenant and it could last 7 days, so be thankful. Isn't it interesting that in this passage we see that even the altar must be atoned for. Previously we learned about the altar being purified. In this passage we're going to learn about the altar being atoned for. "Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons according to all that I've commanded you. You shall ordain them through seven days. Each day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement. And you shall purify the altar when you make atonement for it. And you shall anoint it to consecrate it for seven days. You shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar shall be most holy and whatever touches the altar shall be holy."

The length of that seven-day ceremony serves to emphasize just how important it is to God, and to culminate the sense of completeness, seven being a perfect number for the children of Israel. And in verse 36 we're told, stunningly, that even the altar must be atoned for. Not merely purified but atoned for. Why? Because the altar, though it was commanded by God, was made with sinful hands. And if it is going to serve as the place of perfect atonement for God's people, it must be atoned for. The application to Christ is obvious. But have you thought about this: God has made His people to be holy ones and saints through Jesus Christ. And just as there was a provision for the priest and for the altar in the Old Covenant, so also through the blood of Jesus Christ, we have been made to be holy ones and saints through His atonement.

VII. The goal of the covenant: I will be your God.

One last thing, look at verses 38 through 46. Here we see the very heart of the covenant, God with us. The Lord our God with us and we with Him. "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two one year old lambs each day, continuously. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight and there shall be one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering with one lamb. The other lamb you shall offer at twilight and shall offer it with the same grain offering and the same drink offering as in the morning, for a soothing

aroma by fire to the Lord. It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the doorway at the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak with you there. I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me. I will dwell among the sons 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.”

Just two things about this remarkable passage, let me bring to your attention. The first is, this is a description of the daily sacrifice. It was never ever to be interrupted. It was to be continuously offered. And the daily sacrifice was seen as the very heart of the law by Israel. And its interruption was viewed with horror. Do you remember in Daniel 8 when he is talking about the beast with the horns, and he gets to Daniel 8:11 and he talks about the horn itself interrupting the daily sacrifice. He's horrified at the thought that the daily sacrifice would not be offered. Think how poignant it is when that daily sacrifice comes to an end in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. No sacrifices have been offered by Israel since then.

Do you know the story of the little boy who was speaking to the rabbi? And he said, “Rabbi what is the significance of the blood in the sacrifice?” “It is for the forgiveness of sins, my son.” “Rabbi, since the temple is destroyed, there is no sacrifice.” “Yes, my son that is right.” “Then where do we find forgiveness,” the boy says? And there is no answer. That's the poignancy of Judaism with the sacrifices interrupted.

And the Christian answer to that question is that the sacrifice, the final sacrifice, the once for all sacrifice, has been offered in Jesus Christ. There are no more animal sacrifices, they have found their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is forgiveness of sins, not in a continuing sacrifice, not in the daily sacrifice but in the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

And here again we see emphasized in verse 46 the purpose of the Exodus. Why did God bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? “That I might dwell among them.” This is the heart of the covenant. God with us. The purpose of redemption is that God might fellowship with us. And how beautifully has God displayed this in Exodus 29, that there is no fellowship with Him, even with His priests who represent His people, without the atoning blood of sacrifice. And how beautifully does that point forward to the fact that we are made to be a kingdom of priests by the atoning blood of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for the beauty of Scripture and how it points to the glorious realities of the new covenant and they are confirmed and enlarged in our hearts and mind by a sight of this your plan in all its iatrical detail. Help us O Lord, we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, **subscriptions are free**. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).