

PART TWO
INAUGURATION OF THE CULT
LEVITICUS 8-10

Introduction to Part Two (8:1 – 10:20)

In chapter eight Moses consecrates the tabernacle, and he consecrates Aaron as high priest, and his sons as priests to minister in the tabernacle. The text assumes knowledge of Exodus 29 where YHWH's instructions for the consecration of the priests are given in full. Moses was not able to follow out God's instructions prior to this, for the consecration of priests could be done only in a consecrated tabernacle, and, since it involves sacrifice, only after instructions for sacrifices had been given (Leviticus 1-7). The ritual for the sacrifices that are special to the consecration of the tabernacle and its priests are given in chapter eight (see also 6:19-23).

In chapter nine we witness the first public sacrifices led by the newly ordained priests, who must first make a public purification offering and burnt offering for themselves (9:2-14), and only then minister as priests at the various public offerings of the people (9:15-21). Details of the priest's role in the sacrificial offerings of the people have already been given in Part One. A summary may be useful here. The following actions can be carried out only by a priest.

1. The role of the priest in the mandatory Purification Offering (see 9:15)
 - rites concerning the blood (4:5-7, 16-18, 25, 30, 34 and 5:9)
 - turning the offering into smoke on the altar (4:10, 19, 26, 31, 35 and 5:10, 12)
 - eating the portion assigned to him (6:26-30)
2. The role of the priest in the voluntary Burnt Offering (see 9:16)
 - dashing the blood against the altar (1:5, 11, 15)
 - turning the offering into smoke on the altar (1:8, 12, 17)
3. The role of the priest in the voluntary Cereal Offering (see 9:17)
 - turning the offering into smoke on the altar (2:2, 9, 16 and 6:14-15)
 - eating the portion assigned to him (2:3, 10 and 6:16-18)
4. The role of the priest in the voluntary Communion Sacrifice (see 9:18-20)
 - dashing the blood against the altar (3:2, 8, 13 and 7:14)
 - turning the offering to smoke on the altar (3:5, 11, 16 and 7:31)
 - eating the portion assigned to him (7:32-35)
5. The role of the priest in the mandatory Reparation Offering
(this is not mentioned in chapter nine as it is private, not public)
 - dashing the blood against the altar (7:2)
 - turning the offering to smoke on the altar (7:5)
 - eating the portion assigned to him (7:6)

The priests' role in teaching is implied in Part One, as well as their collective role in protecting the sanctuary against pollution. It is stated explicitly here:

You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that YHWH has spoken to them through Moses.

– Leviticus 10:10-11

It is important to repeat an observation made earlier: apart from the offering of incense and the lighting of the lamp (actions which take place inside the tent, and so are necessarily unseen by the people), all the other services provided by the priest are in the public eye. The priesthood in Israel is hereditary, but, unlike the equivalent role in the surrounding cultures, it is not in the hands of an esoteric group committed jealously to protecting its secrets.

¹YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: ²Take Aaron and his sons with him, the vestments, the anointing oil, the bull of sin offering, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; ³and assemble the whole congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁴And Moses did as YHWH commanded him.

When the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting, ⁵Moses said to the congregation, "This is what YHWH has commanded to be done."

⁶Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water.

⁷He put the tunic on him, fastened the sash around him, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him. He then put the decorated band of the ephod around him, tying the ephod to him with it. ⁸He placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. ⁹And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden ornament, the holy crown, as YHWH commanded Moses.

¹⁰Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them.

¹¹He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its base, to consecrate them.

¹²He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him.

¹³And Moses brought forward Aaron's sons, and clothed them with tunics, and fastened sashes around them, and tied headdresses on them, as YHWH commanded Moses.

As noted on page 206, YHWH's instructions are found in full in Exodus chapter 29 (see also chapter 28). Knowledge of these chapters is assumed here.

It is important that the consecration be witnessed by the whole community, 'the congregation' (8:4, 'ēdâ). Compare the consecration of Solomon's temple (1Kings 8:1).

The ceremony begins with washing (8:6), an obvious symbol of removing everything of their former life.

Then the focus is on the high priest who is clothed in the appropriate vestments (8:7-9; see Exodus 28:2-39).

The tabernacle (miškān) is consecrated first, for priestly consecration removes a person from the realm of the ordinary and enables him to operate in the realm of the sacred; that is, to minister in YHWH's consecrated dwelling.

The first step in Aaron's consecration is described in verse twelve. Only the high priest is anointed on the head.

In verse thirteen 'Aaron's sons' are clothed in the appropriate vestments 'as YHWH commanded Moses' (see Exodus 28:40).

The Ordination Sacrifices offered by Aaron and his sons (8:14-29)

Note that in this ordination rite it is Moses who is exercising his mediatory role, which includes priesthood (Psalm 99:6). Those who are going to minister as priests must first make a purification offering (Exodus 29:14). For this to be possible, Moses must first purge the altar of the contamination it has acquired by unconsecrated touch, and then consecrate it by sprinkling the blood of the sacrificial bull.

¹⁴He led forward the bull of *purification offering*; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bull of *purification offering*, ¹⁵and it was slaughtered. Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it, to *make it fit for atonement*. ¹⁶Moses took all the fat that was around the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and turned them into smoke on the altar. ¹⁷But the bull itself, its skin and flesh and its dung, he burned with fire outside the camp, as YHWH commanded Moses.

They then make a voluntary burnt offering (see 1:10-13), followed by the special ordination offering of a second ram and unleavened bread (see Exodus 29:1-2).

¹⁸Then he brought forward the ram of burnt offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, ¹⁹and it was slaughtered. Moses dashed the blood against all sides of the altar. ²⁰The ram was cut into its parts, and Moses turned into smoke the head and the parts and the suet. ²¹And after the entrails and the legs were washed with water, Moses turned into smoke the whole ram on the altar; it was a burnt offering for a pleasing odour, a *food gift* to YHWH, as YHWH commanded Moses.

²²Then he brought forward the second ram, the ram of ordination. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, ²³and it was slaughtered. Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. ²⁴After Aaron's sons were brought forward, Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet; and Moses dashed the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar. ²⁵He took the fat—the broad tail, all the fat that was around the entrails, the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat—and the right thigh.

²⁶From the basket of unleavened bread that was before YHWH, he took one cake of unleavened bread, one cake of bread with oil, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat and on the right thigh. ²⁷He placed all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and raised them as an elevation offering before YHWH. ²⁸Then Moses took them from their hands and turned them into smoke on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering for a pleasing odour, a *food gift* to YHWH. ²⁹Moses took the breast and raised it as an elevation offering before YHWH; it was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, as YHWH commanded Moses.

³⁰Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his vestments, and also on his sons and their vestments. Thus he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and also his sons and their vestments.

³¹And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I was commanded, 'Aaron and his sons shall eat it'; ³²and what remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn with fire.

³³You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the day when your period of ordination is completed. For it will take seven days to ordain you; ³⁴as has been done today, YHWH has commanded to be done to make atonement for you.

³⁵You shall remain at the entrance of the tent of meeting day and night for seven days, keeping YHWH's charge so that you do not die; for so I am commanded."

³⁶Aaron and his sons did all the things that YHWH commanded through Moses.

Aaron has already received the special anointing and consecration for the high priest (8:12). Now having offered the appropriate sacrifices, he and his sons are consecrated by the sprinkling of blood that has come from the consecrated altar. They are now priests and so can eat the portion of the sacrifices that is set aside for the priest.

Such is the sacredness of their ministry that they must spend seven days in the sanctuary, absorbing the fullness of holiness from the consecrated dwelling.

The Inaugural Service offered by Aaron and his sons (9:1-24)

Aaron inaugurates the public cult, offering all the sacrificial rites (see 1-5), except the reparation offering (5:14 – 6:7), which is a private, not a public, offering.

¹On the eighth day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. ²He said to Aaron, "Take a bull calf for a *purification* offering and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before YHWH. ³And say to the people of Israel, "Take a male goat for a *purification* offering; a calf and a lamb, yearlings without blemish, for a burnt offering; ⁴and an ox and a ram for a *communion sacrifice* to sacrifice before YHWH; and a grain offering mixed with oil. For today YHWH will appear to you.'" ⁵They brought what Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting; and the whole congregation drew near and stood before YHWH. ⁶And Moses said, "This is the thing that YHWH commanded you to do, so that the glory of YHWH may appear to you."

⁷Then Moses said to Aaron, "Draw near to the altar and sacrifice your *purification* offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people; and sacrifice the offering of the people, and make atonement for them; as YHWH has commanded." ⁸Aaron drew near to the altar, and slaughtered the calf of the *purification* offering, which was for himself. ⁹The sons of Aaron presented the blood to him, and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; and the rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. ¹⁰But the fat, the kidneys, and the appendage of the liver from the sin offering he turned into smoke on the altar, as YHWH commanded Moses; ¹¹and the flesh and the skin he burned with fire outside the camp.

¹²Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. Aaron's sons brought him the blood, and he dashed it against all sides of the altar. ¹³And they brought him the burnt offering piece by piece, and the head, which he turned into smoke on the altar. ¹⁴He washed the entrails and the legs and, with the burnt offering, turned them into smoke on the altar. ¹⁵Next he presented the people's offering. He took the goat of the *purification* offering that was for the people, and slaughtered it, and presented it as a *purification* offering like the first one. ¹⁶He presented the burnt offering, and sacrificed it according to *edict*.

¹⁷He presented the grain offering, and, taking a handful of it, he turned it into smoke on the altar, in addition to the burnt offering of the morning.

¹⁸He slaughtered the ox and the ram as a *communion sacrifice* for the people. Aaron's sons brought him the blood, which he dashed against all sides of the altar, ¹⁹and the fat of the ox and of the ram—the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat on them, and the appendage of the liver. ²⁰They first laid the fat on the breasts, and the fat was turned into smoke on the altar; ²¹and the breasts and the right thigh Aaron raised as an elevation offering before YHWH, as Moses had commanded.

²²Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he came down after sacrificing the purification offering, the burnt offering, and the communion sacrifice.

²³Moses and Aaron entered the tent of meeting, and then came out and blessed the people; and the glory of YHWH appeared to all the people.

²⁴Fire came out from YHWH and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

The first exercise of Aaron's high priestly ministry takes place 'on the eighth day' (9:1), the day concluding the seven days of ordination (8:34). At its conclusion, Aaron calls down God's blessing on the people (9:22). Then he and Moses enter the tent of meeting. At the conclusion of their prayer they emerge from the tent and mediate to the people God's blessing.

In verse four Moses made an extraordinary promise: 'Today YHWH will appear to you' – all the more extraordinary when we note that this is the only time in the Priestly writings that YHWH's self-revelation is mentioned without also mentioning the mediation of his 'glory'. Here in verse twenty-three the word 'glory' is present, but there is something extraordinary and unique about what happens here.

Clearly, YHWH is legitimising the priestly mediation of Aaron. But there is more. Let us go back to the first time the people experienced God's 'glory':

Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of YHWH settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of YHWH was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain.

– Exodus 24:15-18

God's 'glory', God's self-manifestation, was shrouded in cloud. From this day onward it will be the same:

The cloud of YHWH was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

– Exodus 40:38

On this day of the inauguration of the sacrificial cult in the Tabernacle, however, the fire bursts forth from the inner shrine, out into the courtyard, for all the people to see, and 'consumes the burnt offering and the fat on the altar' (9:24).

Already on Sinai an extraordinary thing happened when Moses, Aaron and his sons (not yet ordained), and seventy of the elders of Israel 'saw the God of Israel' and lived (Exodus 24:10-11). This is even more wonderful, for 'all the people saw it' (9:24). It is this fire that is symbolised by the eternal flame that burns day and night on the altar, a witness to the extraordinary communion with God that is granted to Israel in God's dwelling.

To offer incense in the sanctuary on common coals (not made holy by coming from the altar) is sacrilege. Divine punishment is immediate: an unforgettable lesson in the absolute necessity in the cult of strict compliance to God's instructions. This story may be aimed at a widespread practice of private incense offering, with the accompanying danger of idolatry (see Jeremiah 32:19; Exodus 30:37-38).

If God can say of Israel: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities' (Amos 3:2), how much greater is the obligation on priests, who have direct access to the sanctuary ('those who are near me'), to demonstrate God's holiness and to evoke awe and praise from the people (10:3).

Mishael and Elzaphan (10:4) are Levites (Exodus 6:22). Bodies cannot be buried in the camp; that would pollute the sanctuary.

Eleazar and Ithamar were included in the instructions given to Moses concerning consecrating priests (Exodus 28:1), but this is the first mention of them by name in Leviticus. Because of the anointing they received at their ordination (10:7), Aaron and his two sons are forbidden to mourn or to accompany the dead bodies outside the sanctuary.

This is the only time God's 'wrath' (qāṣaḥ) is mentioned in Leviticus (see page 336-339). We have already been told that a high priest's sin, even when inadvertent, harms all the people (4:3).

Unusually, verse nine is a command given directly to Aaron. Usually messages are mediated through Moses. It appears to be an insertion. Isaiah's comment is relevant:

The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment.

– Isaiah 28:7

¹Now Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered unholy fire before YHWH, such as he had not commanded them. ²And fire came out from the presence of YHWH and consumed them, and they died before YHWH. ³Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what YHWH meant when he said, 'Through those who are near me I will show myself holy, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron was silent.

⁴Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come forward, and carry your kinsmen away from the front of the sanctuary to a place outside the camp." ⁵They came forward and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had ordered.

⁶And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not dishevel your hair, and do not tear your vestments, or you will die and wrath will strike all the congregation; but your kindred, the whole house of Israel, may mourn the burning that YHWH has sent. ⁷You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the anointing oil of YHWH is on you." And they did as Moses had ordered.

⁸And YHWH spoke to Aaron: ⁹Drink no wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons, when you enter the tent of meeting, that you may not die; it is a statute forever throughout your generations.

¹⁰You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; ¹¹and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that YHWH has spoken to them through Moses.

¹²Moses spoke to Aaron and to his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar: Take the grain offering that is left from the *food gift* to YHWH, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy; ¹³you shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, from the *food gift* to YHWH; for so I am commanded. ¹⁴But the breast that is elevated and the thigh that is raised, you and your sons and daughters as well may eat in any clean place; for they have been assigned to you and your children from the offerings of the *communion sacrifices* of the people of Israel.

¹⁵The thigh that is raised and the breast that is elevated they shall bring, together with the *food gift* of the fat, to raise for an elevation offering before YHWH; they are to be your due and that of your children forever, as YHWH has commanded.

¹⁶Then Moses made inquiry about the goat of the *purification* offering, and—it had already been burned! He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and said, ¹⁷"Why did you not eat the sin offering in the sacred area? For it is most holy, and God has given it to you that you may remove the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement on their behalf before YHWH. ¹⁸Its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded."

¹⁹And Aaron spoke to Moses, "See, today they offered their *purification* offering and their burnt offering before YHWH; and yet such things as these have befallen me! If I had eaten the *purification* offering today, would it have been agreeable to YHWH?"

²⁰And when Moses heard that, he agreed.

What is 'common' can be clean or unclean. The 'holy' must be clean. Israel is called to be a 'holy nation' (Exodus 19:6). Anything that threatens this must be purged by a purification offering (4:1 – 5:13). It is the priests' responsibility to see to this, and to teach (10:10-11).

The lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of YHWH of hosts.

– Malachi 2:7

Verses twelve to fifteen list the portions of various sacrifices that are to be eaten by the priests. They are obliged to do so, because they are holy, and, so long as they are ministering in the sanctuary, they alone are immune from the polluting influence of the sacrificed animals. Their consuming of the food eliminates any pollution attached to it.

Hence Moses' anger. Here is another priestly sacrilege! However Aaron objects and Moses is satisfied (10:19-20). This seems to be the Priestly School's way of recognising an alternate tradition, while securely limiting it to this one off occasion of the death of Aaron's sons in the tabernacle compound. As with the sacrifice of Yom Kippur, the level of pollution required an exception to the rule by the whole animal being incinerated (10:16), and not eaten as required by 6:24-30.