

Exodus 29: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Exodus chapter 29 Then you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod and the breastplate, and gird him with the skilfully woven band of the ephod.

And you shall set the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban. You shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head, and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons, and put coats on them.

And you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes, and bind caps on them. And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. Then you shall kill the bull before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

And shall take part of the blood of the bull, and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger. And the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar. And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar.

[1 : 32] But the flesh of the bull, and its skin, and its dung, you shall burn with fire outside the camp. It is a sin offering. Then you shall take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram.

And you shall kill the ram, and shall take its blood, and throw it against the sides of the altar. Then you shall cut the ram into pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head, and burn the whole ram on the altar.

It is a burnt offering to the Lord. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord. You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram.

And you shall kill the ram, and take part of its blood, and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar.

Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons' garments with him.

[2 : 37] He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons' 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 long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh, for it is a ram of ordination, and one loaf of bread, and one cake of bread made with oil, and one wafer out of the basket of unleavened bread that is before the Lord.

You shall put all these on the palms of Aaron, and on the palms of his sons, and wave them for a wave offering before the Lord. Then you shall take them from their hands, and burn them on the altar, on top of the burnt offering, as a pleasing aroma before the Lord.

It is a food offering to the Lord. You shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's ordination, and wave it for a wave offering before the Lord, and it shall be your portion.

And you shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering that is waved, and the thigh of the priest's portion that is contributed from the ram of ordination, from what was Aaron's and his sons. It shall be for Aaron and his sons as a perpetual Jew from the people of Israel, for it is a contribution.

It shall be a contribution from the people of Israel from their peace offerings, their contribution to the Lord. The holy garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him. They shall be anointed in them, and ordained in them.

[3 : 59] The son who succeeds him as priest, who comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the holy place, shall wear them seven days. You shall take the ram of ordination, and boil its flesh in a holy place.

And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram, and the bread that is in the basket in the entrance of the tent of meeting. They shall eat those things with which atonement was made at their ordination and consecration.

But an outsider shall not eat of them, because they are holy. And if any of the flesh for the ordination or of the bread remain until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy.

Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Through seven days shall you ordain them, and every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement.

Also you shall purify the altar when you make atonement for it, and shall anoint it to consecrate it. Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy.

[5 : 00] Whatever touches the altar shall become holy. Now this is what you shall offer on the altar. Two lambs a year old, day by day, regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight.

And with the first lamb a tenth measure of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord.

It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you to speak to you there. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.

I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people 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. Exodus chapter 29 concerns the ordination of Aaron and his sons.

[6 : 14] This follows very naturally from the previous chapter, in which the clothing of the high priest and the other priests was described. This corresponds to the sixth day of creation. It's the formation of a new humanity.

It corresponds with the day in which man was created as the image of God within the creation, charged with exercising stewardship over it. And the priests are anointed just as the spirit of life was breathed into Adam and his creation.

So this follows very naturally from what has just gone before. There are close parallels here with Leviticus chapter 8, where the actual performance of this ritual is described, also in Exodus chapter 40, which is another description of the same performance.

What is the priest? The priest is the household servant in the divine palace. His task is to do all the things that would be the responsibilities of such a household servant within a palace, a steward within the house.

He's supposed to guard the house. He's supposed to serve at the table. He's supposed to maintain and clean the house. He's supposed to represent the authority of his master to the guests and also to serve and minister to the guests.

[7 : 23] But then he also represents the people in some ways to God. He maintains not just the house of the temple, but the house that that house represents, the house of Israel.

Ordination, this rite that's described in this chapter, is a filling of the hand, quite literally. It's the way it's described. And that's literally what happens in verse 20. The priest is filled with his hand with the things that he will minister to the Lord with.

The rite begins with the gathering of different materials and then the washing with water. The ordination ritual is a seven-day process. The first day involves washing with water, being invested with priestly garments, and being anointed.

And we maybe can see some parallels between this and the logic of baptism. There are three sacrifices that need to be brought forward. There's the purification or sin offering, the whole burnt offering, and the consecration offering.

So the first one is a bull for the sin offering. Then there's the two rams, one for the whole burnt offering and another for the consecration offering. They must wait in the entrance of the tent of meeting.

[8 : 30] The purification or sin offering for the priest here is different from the regular one. As in the case of the regular rite, it is performed with a bull that represents the high priest. But it seems as if the blood is placed at a different point.

For the regular sin offering or purification offering, the blood is placed on the altar of incense in the holy place. We see this in Leviticus chapter 4. But here it seems as if the blood is placed on the bronze altar in the courtyard.

Now when we look through these rituals, we'll see, particularly in this case, a number of ways in which it diverges from the typical ritual. And those divergences are important to notice because they help us to understand the logic of this one.

This is a very unusual sacrifice because it's performed for the sake of priests that are not yet ministering in the holy place. And because the priest is not yet a minister in the holy place, he can't defile it.

So the blood of the sacrifice is not taken in there. Later on, when he does minister within the holy place, the blood of the sin or purification offering will be taken into the holy place and it will be placed on a different altar.

[9 : 35] This also suggests that there is some analogy between the bronze altar and the altar of incense. The altar of incense represents something about the priest and the bronze altar more maybe commoners of Israel.

There are two rams involved in the rite. There's the ram of the burnt offering and the ram of consecration. And in both of these cases, as with the bull, Aaron and his sons put their hands on the animals, but they do not kill the animals, which is unusual for a sacrifice.

Moses, rather, is the one who performs the role of the priest in these rituals. He is the prophet who's establishing this whole system. After the offering of the whole burnt offering, the consecration ram is offered.

Now, the consecration ram is like the peace offering in many respects, but there are significant differences. This is a rather anomalous rite. Moses, for instance, received the breast of the ram of ordination and the wave offering of the thigh is established as the perpetual Jew of Aaron and his sons.

However, they do not receive it as they usually would, as a sort of direct contribution. In Leviticus chapter 7 verses 29 to 34, we get a sense of the more usual, typical practice of this rite.

[10 : 52] Speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the Lord shall bring his offering to the Lord from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. His own hand shall bring the Lord's food offerings.

He shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the Lord. The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons. And the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice of your peace offerings.

Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offering and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion. For the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed I have taken from the people of Israel out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons as a perpetual Jew from the people of Israel.

In the case of that rite, it seems that Aaron and the priest receive meat from two different quarters as a direct contribution from Israel and then also as a wave offering from the Lord.

They wave it up to the Lord and then it's received back as it's lifted up and then received back from him. Here, however, Moses gets the priest portion of the wave offering of the breast and the thigh goes to Aaron and his sons.

[12 : 08] Stepping back a bit, as we look at the practice of the consecration offering, blood is placed upon both the priest and the altar. It's placed on the horns of the altar, the four horns, and then other parts of the blood are placed on the right ear of Aaron and the tips of the right ears of his sons and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet.

When you include the fact of circumcision with this, it seems as though the four tips of the human body are touched with this blood, representing the connection between the altar and the priest who serves it.

We've already seen connection between the clothing of the priest and the tabernacle. And the particular places that are touched are connected with specific functions, with hearing, with the action of the hands, with the going of the foot, and then with the procreative purpose of the genitalia.

Perhaps we should see the priest as a sort of living altar, one whose soul should ascend in service and also in prayer and worship. And we see that connection with the altar of incense perhaps there.

A similar right of touching blood to different extremities of the body is found in the cleansing of the leper right in Leviticus chapter 14. The filling of the hand of the priest is also something that equips him to serve God.

[13 : 31] And the bread that is placed in his hand, perhaps we should see that as representing human beings. The bread placed before the Lord, the twelve loaves, represents Israel. And here perhaps we're supposed to see human beings anointed with the spirit as being represented by bread anointed with oil.

This process is not just anointing and preparing and consecrating Aaron and his sons. It's also preparing the tabernacle and its realm as a realm of service. So it's a setting apart of the altar as we see in verses 35 to 37.

Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. And the altar shall be most holy. Whoever touches the altar shall become holy. That connection between the holy altar and the holy people who are connected with it and that way in which the priest and the altar are connected by having blood touched to the four tips of themselves helps us to see something of the logic of this system.

Now with the reference to seven days here, I think we've moved into the stage of the Sabbath, of this new creation week. This is establishing the rest where finally the service of the tabernacle is established and Israel knows the presence of God in their midst.

And this consecration of the altar and the tabernacle and the priests connects with God's consecration of the Sabbath day. This is the Sabbath realm. And at the end of this, we're having the statement of coming to rest.

[14 : 59] I will dwell among the people 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.

It's a coming to rest of the story. And that practice of the daily sacrifices, evening and morning, again is this perpetuation of the rhythm of creation.

There's been a new creation and a new humanity and that humanity is delegated with the task of continuing this pattern of the original creation, evening and morning, evening and morning, and the sacrifices that correspond to that.

A question to consider. There are a number of passages in the New Testament that seem to allude back to the practice of priestly ordination and particularly the washing involved in referring to baptism.

Can you think of some of those passages and how might they help us to understand the meaning of baptism?