THE ORDIATION OF THE PRIESTS

Leviticus 8:1-36

Key Verse: 2

“Bring Aaron and his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams and the basket containing bread made without yeast.”

Chapters 1-7 are about the five offerings and the offering system, how the offerings had to be made for sinners to come to God. In these chapters, solely God spoke, except for the last four verses, 35-38 of chapter 7, which are the author Moses’ comment. Chapters 8-10 are about the priests and priesthood, the priest system, how they were ordained and how they carried out their priestly duty at the beginning. Chapter 8 is specially about the ordination of the priests. Through the process of the ordination, we see the glory and solemness of the priests, and the blessing and responsibilities of the priests.

In verses 1 and 2, it says: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Bring Aaron and his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams and the basket containing bread made without yeast.” First of all, God chose Aaron and his descendants as the line of the priesthood. This is God’s sovereignty, which is unquestionable and irresistible beyond human reason and qualification. Hebrews 5:4 says, “No one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.” And Jesus was chosen as our great and perfect high priest (Heb 5:3). For the offices of God no one is qualified. God’s sovereign choice always turns out good and right, though humanly often not understandable. Jesus said to his disciples in John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit.” In 1 Peter 2: 9, Apostle Peter said to the early Christians who were undergoing fiery persecution, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” God’s calling as priests is God’s deep grace with a clear purpose.

And Moses was to bring their garments and the anointing oil, which had already been prepared. In Exodus 28, God gave detailed instructions concerning the garments of the priests. The priestly clothing were not of human design but God’s design. God also gave instructions on how to make the anointing oil. The bull was prepared for the sin offering and the two rams, one for the burnt offering and the other with the basket of bread for the ordination offering. We will think of these one by one.

In Exodus 40, when the tabernacle was completed, the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35). Now, the LORD commanded Moses to gather the entire assembly at the Tent of Meeting for the ordination of the priests, and the assembly gathered as the LORD commanded. This was a historical moment for the people of God.

Moses said to the assembly, “This is what the LORD has commanded to be done.” Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. It was for their cleansing. Without cleansing, no one can serve God. When we refer to Exodus 30:18, there was a bronze basin with its stand between the altar of the burnt offering and the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. It was for washing hands and feet. The LORD said to Moses in Exodus 30:20-21, “Whenever they (Aaron and his sons) enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die” Cleansing was that serious for the priests. As for us, the word of God and the Holy Spirit cleanse us, on top of Christ’ blood that washes away our sins. According to Ephesians 5:26, Christ makes the church his bride holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” And Jesus said to his disciples in John 15:13, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” It is important to know that the word of God is our spiritual bread and also for the cleansing of our souls and the renewal of our minds.

After washing Aaron and his sons, what did Moses do? In verse 7 it says, “He put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him. He also tied the ephod to him by its skillfully woven waistband; so it was fastened to him.” Three clothes are mentioned: the tunic, the robe and the ephod. The tunic was woven of fine linen (Ex 28:39). Particularly, the robe and the ephod for the high priest, Aaron. The robe was made entirely of blue cloth (28:31). As for the ephod, God says in Exodus 28:6, “Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen—the work of a skilled craftsman.” It has two pieces, front and back, joined at its two edges on the shoulders. So the ephod was glittering and colourful, not too much, but moderately. God says to Moses in Exodus 28:2-3, “Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honour (for glory and for beauty in other translations). Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration/set apart, so he may serve me as priest.” The LORD God is glorious and beautiful. His glory and beauty are reflected on the clothes of Aaron the priest so that he might have dignity and honour and display God’s glory and beauty in the ministry of the priesthood.

We are reminded of what Paul said in Romans 13:14, “…clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ…” God wants us to resemble the inner beauty of Jesus. And it affects our outward clothing. Our wearing clothes also should be for the glory of God, not just following the fashions of the world.

And in verse 8, it says, “Moses placed the breastpiece on him and put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece.” The breastpiece which was to be put on the ephod was square—22 centimeters in length and width—and folded double, and four rows of precious stones were mounted on it. And the names of twelve tribes were written on the four rows. And the Urim and Thummim which were like dices were put in the breastpiece. According to a Bible scholar, the first letter of Urim and the last letter of Thummim were like A and Z in the English alphabet, and through the combination of the letters, decisions were made. It is written in Exodus 28:29-30, “Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision…Also put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron’s heart whenever he enters the presence of the LORD. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD.” What a sacred duty Aaron the priest had! The expression “over his heart” is written three times. It seems that the priest and the people are one, regarding them as so precious and keeping them in their hearts through prayer and helping them to make right decisions before God. We are reminded of Jesus, our high priest, who prayed just before his crucifixion for all the believers including all the future believers (Jn 17:20), and now is interceding for us at the right hand of God (Ro 8:34).

Then here in verse 9, Moses placed the turban on Aaron’s head and set the gold plate, the sacred diadem, on the front of it, as the LORD commanded Moses. The turban was made of fine linen (Ex 28:39). And the LORD said to Moses in Exodus 28:36-37, “Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: HOLY TO THE LORD. Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban.” The LORD continues in verse 38, “It will be on Aaron’s forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron’s forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the LORD.” What a responsibility Aaron the priest has! God desired to work together with the priests to deal with the sins of his people so that they might be acceptable to God as his holy people.

When we think about the tabernacle, the five offerings, and the priestly garments, we see that the LORD is very delicate and very considerate, full of meanings in each thought and in each of his works. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Moses confessed in Exodus 15:11, “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” We can confess, “Who is like the LORD even in all these designs?” The LORD is outstanding and matchless in all he does.

Verses 10-13 are related to the anointing oil. The anointing oil was specially blended as a sacred one. The LORD said in Exodus 30:32-33, “Do not pour it on men’s body and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. Whoever makes perfume like it and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people.” Here in this ordination, the tabernacle and everything in it and the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand were anointed with the anointing oil and thus consecrated. And in verse 12, Moses poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him to consecrate him. What is stressed is the consecration for everything, definitely including Aaron the priest. Apostle John said in 1 John 2:20, “you have an anointing from the Holy One” and in 2:37, “…the anointing you received from Him remains in you.” And Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” God wants us to know that the Holy Spirit is in us and we should not live against the Spirit. And he wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit in serving the Lord and his people. Consecrating also has the meaning of setting apart. The Holy Spirit consecrates us and sets us apart to serve the LORD.

In verses 14-17 the bull was presented for the sin offering. The procedure was the same as written in chapter 4:1-5:13 with the blood sprinkled on the horns of the altar and all the fat burned on the altar, and the bull with its hide and its flesh and its offal burned up outside the camp. Any sin problem of the priests had to be resolved. We need to be sensitive to our sins before him so that no sin of ours may block our relationship with God.

And the ram was presented for the burnt offering, in which the ram was cut into pieces and the head, the pieces and the fat were burned, and the inner parts and the legs were washed with water and the whole ram was burned on the altar. It is a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire. The burnt offering indicates the total dedication to God.

And here the particular offering was the ordination offering. In this offering, we are to notice in verses 23 and 24, “Moses slaughtered the ram and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron’s right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. Moses also brought Aaron’s sons forward and put some of the blood on the lobes of their ears, on the thumbs of their hands and on the big toes of their right feet.” Here, “right” can refer to the representative of the whole. Most importantly the priest’s ears to be cleansed and be sensitive to hear the voice of God. When Samuel was a boy, he did not know how to respond to God’s calling. When God called him while he was lying down in the temple of the LORD, saying, “Samuel!” he thought that the priest Eli was calling him and went to Eli. It happened three times. Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” When God called Samuel at the fourth time, Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:10). He has been always read, saying “Here I am.” How important it is to have such an attitude with the consecrated ears. Jesus said in his teaching of parables, “He who has ears to her, let him hear” (Mk 4:9). Jesus also said in John 10:27, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” The whole point of Christian life is to listen to the voice of our good shepherd and follow him, distinguishing all human voices of this world from his.

Hands are a symbol of labour. With feet, people stand and walk. Our feet, hearing, working and walking all matter in our Christian life. Nahum 1:15 says, “Look, there on the mountain, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!” These feet are beautiful feet. So Isaiah 52:7 says, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation…” Paul quoted the words of Isaiah and said in Romans 10:15, “how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” And Paul said in Ephesians 6:15 that our feet should be fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Thank God for sending Paulina to Sao Paulo, Brazil to preach the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus. May God continue to bless her beautiful feet. Our feet faithfully may go to U of T campus with the good tidings of Jesus Christ.

The ordination lasted seven days. It is stressed in verses 33-35, “Do not leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination ae completed, for your ordination will last seven days. What has been done today was commanded by the LORD to make atonement for you. You must stay at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days and do what the LORD requires, so you will not die; for that is what I have been commanded.” So Aaron and his sons did everything the LORD commanded through Moses. For seven days these three offerings, the sin offering, the burnt offering and the ordination offering had to be made each day. The LORD said in Exodus 29:35-36, “Do for Aaron and his sons everything I have commanded you, taking seven days to ordain them. Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement.”

Seven days of ordination shows the seriousness and solemnity of God in establishing the priests. And changing of one’s sinful nature takes time. But we should not give up for ourselves and others. How important the role of the priests is! It is leading the people of this world to God in consideration of their eternal destiny.

Thank God for his precious words regarding the ordination of the priests. We realize more and more that the LORD is outstanding and matchless among all gods. He is holy, so delicate and so considerate in the deep thoughts of leading the people of this world to himself. May we participate in the heart and mind of God as those who have been called as royal priests in Jesus Christ in our time! May we be clothed with Christ Jesus in the anointing of the Holy Spirit, having our hearts, ears, hands and feet consecrated.