

Leviticus

Lesson #5

The Ordination of Aaron and His Sons

(Leviticus 8: 1 – 9: 24)

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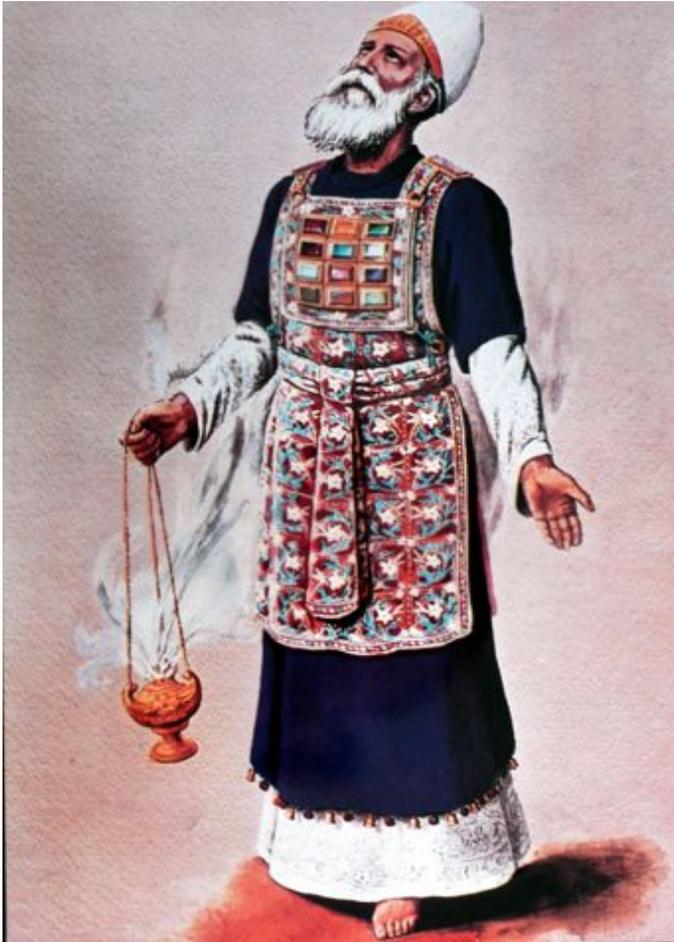
Review

Whereas Lessons 2 & 3 addressed God's covenant people, introducing the sacrificial system with its "5 Great Sacrifices" (the burnt offering, grain offering, peace offering, sin offering and guilt offering), Lesson #4 addressed God's priests, delineating their role in the sacrificial system, and examining the mechanics of how each of the "5 Great Sacrifices" is to be offered.

In addition, we discovered imbedded deeply within chapters 6 & 7 two concepts that will become increasingly important as we continue our journey through Scripture:

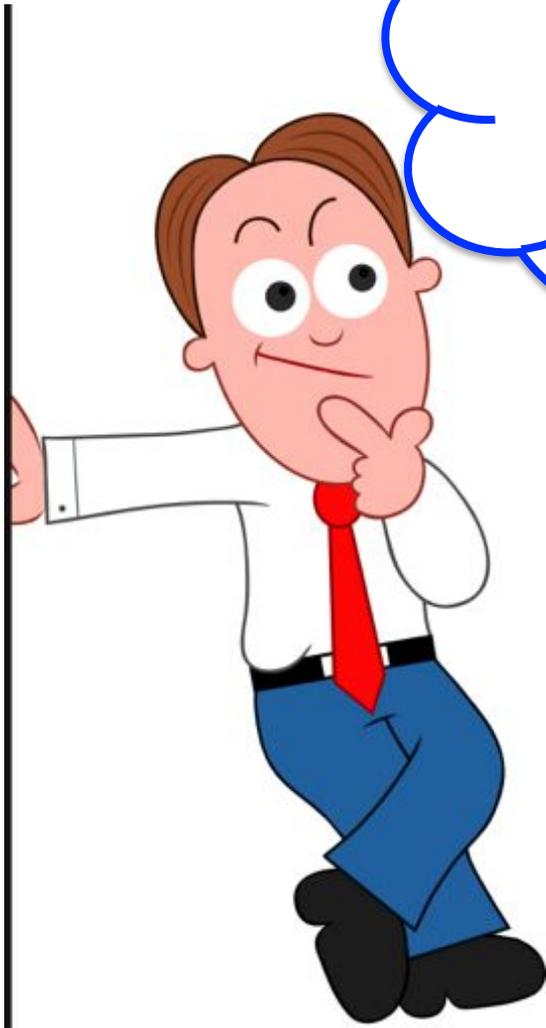
- 1) sanctum contagion, the idea that whatever touches something holy becomes holy itself, and
- 2) Karet [KAH'-rhet], the idea of being cut off from the community, either in this life or throughout eternity.

Preview



Aaron, the High Priest

Now, with the Tabernacle built, the sacrificial system in place and the mechanics of how the sacrifices are to be offered defined, Lesson #5 turns to the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests, those who will administer the sacrifices and serve as mediators between man and God.

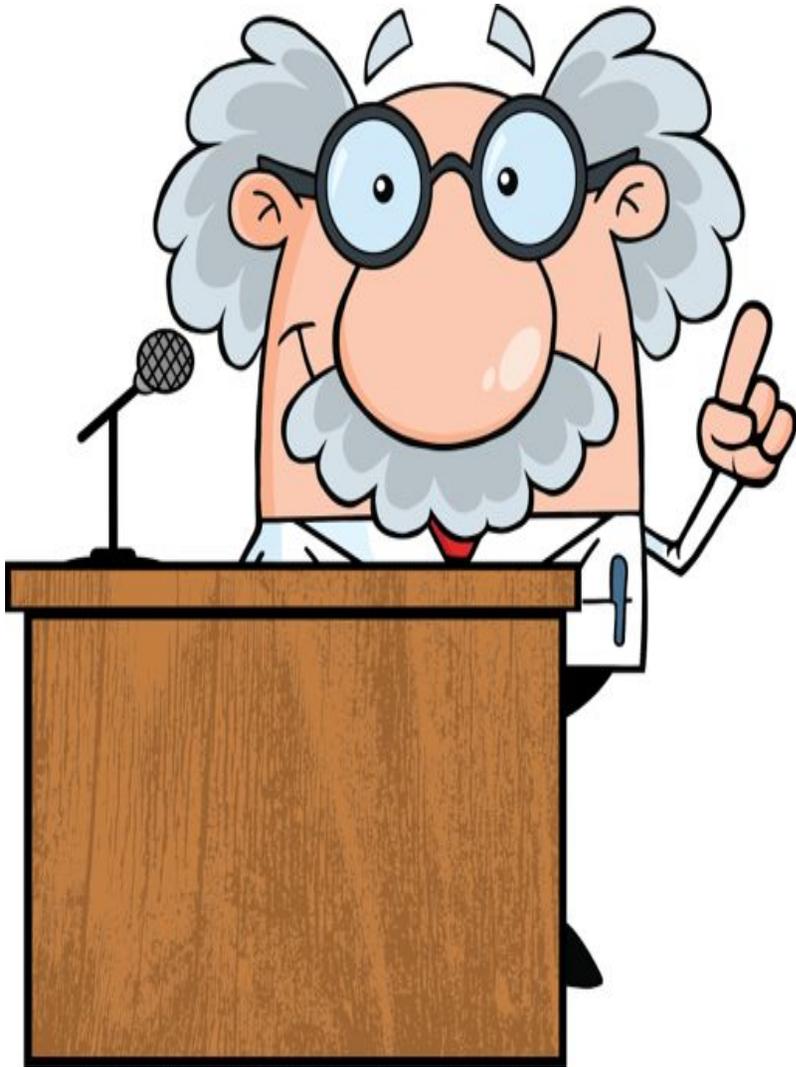


But wait! I'm confused!
Didn't we read all the way
back in Exodus 29 that God
commanded Moses to
"install Aaron and his sons"
as priests? So, why did it
take us 19 chapters to get
here?

You're very
observant!



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You get an A+ for that observation!

Indeed, God commanded in Exodus 29: 9 to consecrate Aaron and his sons. But recall:

- 1) We learned in Lesson #1 that Leviticus is a continuation of Exodus, read together as one cohesive, narrative unit;
- 2) Moses is to consecrate Aaron and his sons by means of a series of sacrifices; and
- 3) Moses will have to consecrate the Tabernacle and all its articles before the sacrifices can be made.

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But first:

- 1) **The Tabernacle must be built (Exodus 35-40);**
- 2) **We readers must learn what the sacrifices are (Leviticus 1-5); and**
- 3) **Aaron and his sons must learn how to offer the sacrifices (Leviticus 6-7).**

Only then can Aaron and his sons be consecrated; hence, the consecration takes place in Leviticus 8-9.

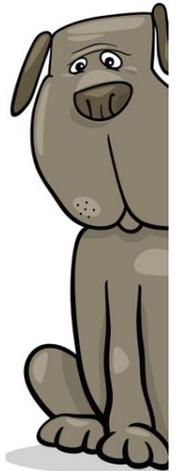


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**So, let's move on.
Let me begin by saying that life
is a remarkable journey, albeit a
very brief one!**

**I hope
mine's not
brief!**



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**William Blake. "Moses Receiving the Law" (pen and ink drawing), 1780.
Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.**

Psalm 90

A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

O Lord, you have been our refuge
from one generation to the next.
Before the mountains were born
or the earth or the world brought forth,
you are God, without beginning or end.

You turn men back into dust and say:
"Turn back, sons of men."

To your eyes a thousand years
are like yesterday, come and gone.
no more than a watch in the night.
You sweep men away like a dream,
like grass which springs up in the morning;
in the morning it springs up and flowers,
by evening it withers and fades . . .

Our span is seventy years
or eighty for those who are strong
and most of these are emptiness and pain;
they pass swiftly and we are gone.

(90: 1-6, 10)



John Taylor [?]. *William Shakespeare*
(oil on canvas), 1610.
National Portrait Gallery, London.

The Seven Ages of Man

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;
And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth.

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“Seven Ages of Man” (woodcut),
15th century.

And then the justice
 In fair round belly with good capon lined,
 With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
 Full of wise saws and modern instances;
 And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
 Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
 With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
 His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
 For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
 Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
 That ends this strange eventful history,
 Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
 Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans
 everything.

“Jaques” in *As You Like It* (II, 7, 1-28)



There are practical reasons for delaying the ordination of Aaron and his sons (i.e., the building and consecration of the Tabernacle and the explanation of the 5 Great Sacrifices), but there is another, more important, reason for delaying—and thus drawing attention to—the ordination of Aaron and his sons:

Scripture highlights the importance of ritual markers as we pass through the trajectory of our lives.

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Jacob Milgrom, 1923-2010.
*Rabbi, biblical scholar and Professor
Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies,
U.C. Berkeley.*

As Jacob Milgrom points out:

“The Bible is reminding us not to let important moments slide by unnoticed, but instead to mark occasions with rituals that establish the significance of the moment and emblazon them on our collective memory.”

Leviticus

(A Continental Commentary), p. 78

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All of us have such moments, from the commonplace, such as—

- Birth
- Baptism
- Confirmation
- Graduation
- Marriage
- Anniversaries
- Death

to moments that are life-altering, moments that fundamentally and forever change who we are.

**In the Roman Catholic Church
ordination to the priesthood is such an event.**



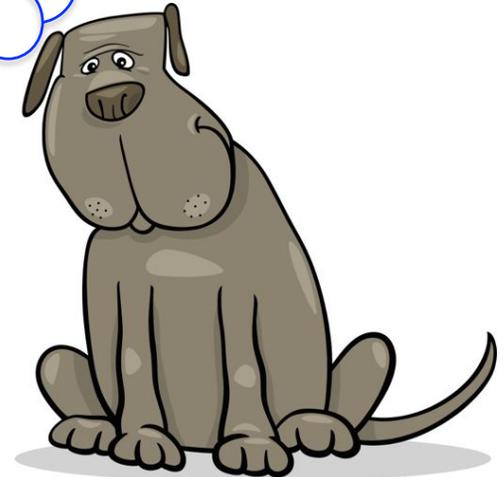
“Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate” (1 Timothy 4: 14)

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**And so it is with Aaron
and his sons!**

I get it!



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The ordination of Aaron and his sons is a rite of passage, a 3-stage movement from one state in life to another:

- 1) Rite of separation from the previous state;**
- 2) Interval (a 7-day period of isolation within the Tent of Meeting); and**
- 3) Full exercise of priestly functions and obligations.**

We'll examine each in turn.

The Ordination of Aaron and His Sons

- 1) Rite of separation from the previous state;
- 2) Interval (a 7-day period of isolation within the Tent of Meeting); and
- 3) Full exercise of priestly functions and obligations.



Rite of Separation from the previous state (8: 1-36)

The phrase, “As the Lord commanded him” occurs seven times in Leviticus 8 (vv. 4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29, and 36), subdividing the chapter into seven cohesive sections, the scaffolding upon which Leviticus 8 is built.

Interestingly, the same phrase—**“As the Lord commanded him”**—occurs seven times introducing both the making of the priestly vestments (Exodus 39: 1-31) and the assembling of the Tabernacle (Exodus 40: 17-38).

This is a beautiful example of the intricate craftsmanship and structural cohesion of Exodus/Leviticus!





**Rite of Separation
from the previous state (8: 1-36)**

Seven Sections

- 1. 8: 1-4a**
- 2. 8: 4b-9**
- 3. 8: 10-13**
- 4. 8: 14-17**
- 5. 8: 18-21**
- 6. 8: 22-29**
- 7. 8: 30-36**

Section 1

(8: 1-4a)

*“The Lord said to Moses: Take Aaron¹ along with his sons,² the vestments,³ the anointing oil,⁴ the bull for a purification [sin] offering,⁵ the two rams,⁶ and the basket of unleavened bread,⁷ then assemble the whole community at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Moses did **as the Lord had commanded [him].**”*

Since the priests will act on behalf of the entire community, the entire community assembles for the consecration. And notice that the 7 items mentioned are listed in the order in which they will be used. Very nice!



**Rite of Separation
from the previous state (8: 1-36)**

Seven Sections

1. 8: 1-4a
2. 8: 4b-9
3. 8: 10-13
4. 8: 14-17
5. 8: 18-21
6. 8: 22-29
7. 8: 30-36

Section 2

(8: 4b-9)

*“When the community had assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting, Moses told them: ‘This is what the Lord has ordered to be done.’ Bringing forward Aaron and his sons, Moses first washed them with water¹. Then he put **the** tunic on Aaron², girded him with **the** sash³, clothed him with **the** robe⁴, placed **the** ephod on him⁵, and girded him with the ephod’s embroidered belt, fastening the ephod on him with it⁶. He then set **the** breastpiece on him⁷, putting **the** Urim and Thummim in it⁸. He put **the** turban on his head⁹, attaching **the** gold medallion, the sacred headband on the front of the turban¹⁰, **as the Lord had commanded [him] Moses to do.”***

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Notice in Section 2 that Aaron's vestments consist of 8 items: 4 undergarments and 4 outer garments. Each item is preceded by the definite article "the," reminding us that the items were already stipulated in Exodus, subtly reinforcing the structural cohesion of Exodus and Leviticus.



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7. 8: 30-36

Section 3

(8: 10-13)

*“Taking the anointing oil, Moses anointed and consecrated the tabernacle and all that was in it. Then he sprinkled some oil seven times on the altar, and anointed the altar, with all its utensils, and the laver, with its base, to consecrate them. He also poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him. Moses likewise brought forward Aaron’s sons, clothed them with tunics, girded them with sashes, and put skullcaps on them, **as the Lord had commanded him to do.**”*

The Hebrew word translated “anoint” is *mashach*, the root of the word “Messiah.” Mashach means literally “to smear.” “Anointing” is a ceremonial method of elevating a person or thing to a higher status. Here, Aaron and his sons are “anointed,” raising them to the higher status of priests. Likewise, the Tabernacle and the items in it are also “anointed,” raised to a higher status from profane to sacred.



“Anointing” is not a legal proceeding, but a sacred rite, indicating that the person or thing anointed has received divine sanction.

By anointing Aaron and his sons and “consecrating” them, they are raised from the realm of the profane and empowered to live and function in the realm of the sacred.

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**Rite of Separation
from the previous state (8: 1-36)**

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1. 8: 1-4a
2. 8: 4b-9
3. 8: 10-13
4. **8: 14-17**
5. 8: 18-21
6. 8: 22-29
7. 8: 30-36

Section 4

(8: 14-17)

“He brought forward the bull for a purification [sin] offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. When it was slaughtered, Moses took the blood and with his finger he put it on the horns around the altar, thus purifying the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it so that atonement could be made on it. Taking all the fat that was over the inner organs, as well as the lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with their fat, Moses burned them on the altar. The bull, however, with its hide and flesh and dung he burned in the fire outside the camp, as the Lord had commanded [him] Moses to do.”

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1. Aaron and his sons place their hands on the head of the sin offering. Before continuing the ordination rite, they must address their own inadvertent sins.
2. As Jacob Milgrom points out, blood has a “detergent” affect, ridding the altar of its impurities.
3. “. . . so that atonement could be made on it [the altar]”; that is, in the future. This refers to the permanent function of the altar from this point onward.





**Rite of Separation
from the previous state (8: 1-36)**

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1. 8: 1-4a
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4. 8: 14-17
5. 8: 18-21
6. 8: 22-29
7. 8: 30-36

Section 5

(8: 18-21)

*“He next brought forward the ram of the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. When it was slaughtered, Moses splashed the blood on all sides of the altar. After the ram was cut up into pieces, Moses burned the head, the cut up pieces and the suet. After the inner organs and the shanks were washed with water, Moses burned these remaining parts of the ram on the altar. It was a burnt offering for a sweet aroma, an oblation to the Lord, **as the Lord had commanded [him]** Moses.”*

The Burnt Offering





**Rite of Separation
from the previous state (8: 1-36)**

Seven Sections

1. 8: 1-4a
2. 8: 4b-9
3. 8: 10-13
4. 8: 14-17
5. 8: 18-21
6. 8: 22-29
7. 8: 30-36

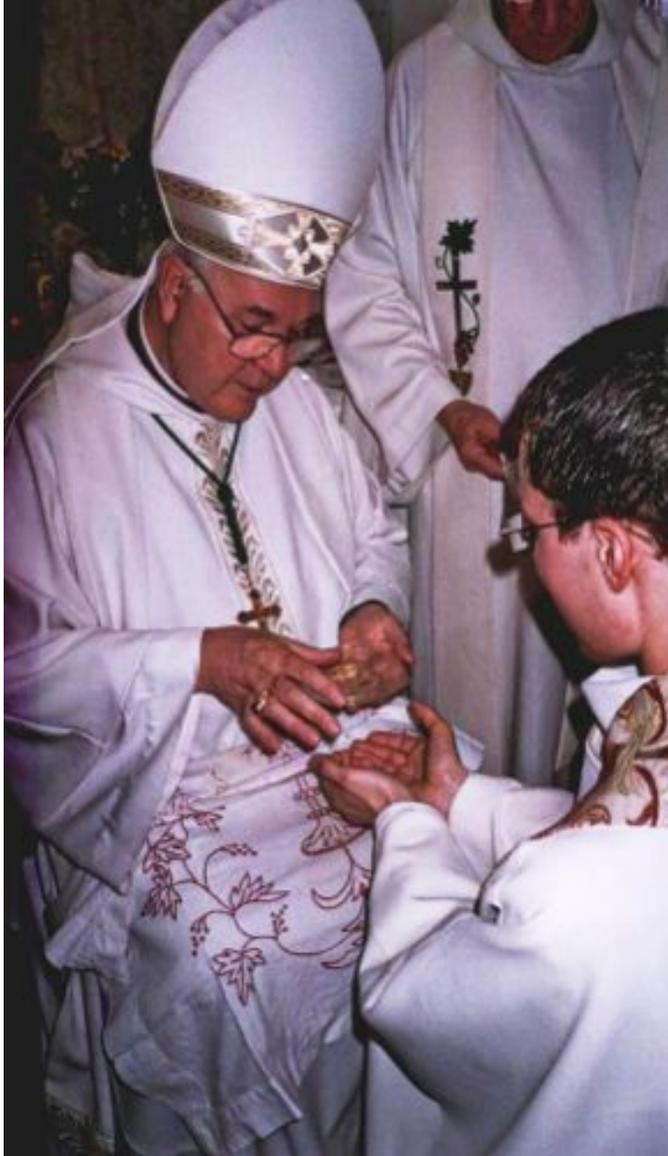
Section 6

(8: 22-24a; 24b-29)

*“Then he brought forward the second ram, the **ordination ram**, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. When it was slaughtered, Moses 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 had the sons of Aaron also come forward, and he put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet.”*

This is a VERY interesting part of the ordination rite, daubing blood on the right earlobes, thumbs and big toes of those being ordained. Robert Alter insightfully observes that this is an example of what Mary Douglas in *Leviticus as Literature* calls “correspondences”: as the horns of the altar are daubed with blood, so are the extremities of the priest—the right hand and foot being the emblems of human agency and the ear being the emblem of listening and obedience.





Viewing the ritual through a Christian interpretative lens, I would go one step further and say:

1. **Earlobes**—to hear the word of God;
2. **Thumbs**—to do the word of God;
3. **Big toes**—to walk the word of God.

Following this line of thinking, when a person is ordained a Roman Catholic priest his hands are anointed with oil by the officiating bishop.

Section 6

(8: 22-24a; 24b-29)

*“The rest of the blood he splashed on the altar. He then took the fat . . . [and the best parts of the offering] one unleavened cake, one loaf of bread made with oil, and one wafer . . . He then put all these things upon the palms of Aaron and his sons, whom he had raised them as an elevated offering before the Lord. When Moses had removed them from their palms, he burned them on the altar with the burnt offering. They were an ordination offering for a sweet aroma, an oblation to the Lord. He then took the brisket and raised it as an elevated offering before the Lord; this was Moses’ own portion of the ordination ram, **as the Lord had commanded [him] Moses.**”*



**Rite of Separation
from the previous state (8: 1-36)**

Seven Sections

1. 8: 1-4a
2. 8: 4b-9
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6. 8: 22-29
7. 8: 30-36

Section 7

(8: 30-36)

“Taking some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar, Moses sprinkled it upon Aaron and his vestments, as well as his sons and their vestments, thus consecrating both Aaron and his vestments and his sons and their vestments”

When Moses takes some of the oil and blood that was on the altar and sprinkles it on the vestments of Aaron and his sons, we have an example of *sanctum contagion*: The oil and blood that was on the altar is holy, therefore sprinkling it on Aaron, his sons and their vestments makes them holy.

Section 7

(8: 30-36)

*“Moses said to Aaron and his sons, ‘Boil the meat at the entrance of the tent of meeting and there eat it with the bread that is in the basket of the ordination offering Moreover, you are not to depart from the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the days of your ordination are completed; for your ordination is to last for seven days So Aaron and his sons did **all that the Lord had commanded through [him] Moses.**”*



As we noted earlier, the ordination of Aaron and his sons is a 3-stage movement from one state in life to another. At the end of Section 7, we move from the “Rite of Separation” to the “Interval,” a period of waiting at the threshold of the priesthood:

- 1) Rite of separation from the previous state;
- 2) **Interval (a 7-day period of isolation within the Tent of Meeting);** and
- 3) Full exercise of priestly functions and obligations.



Leviticus is silent on the reason for this 7-day waiting period, but it has parallels with other rites of passage: 1) 7 days after birth a male child is circumcised (Genesis 17: 12); 2) the 7 days of a marriage celebration (Genesis 29: 27); and 3) the 7 days of mourning after a death in the family (Genesis 50: 10.

In all cases these 7-day periods mark the transition from one state in life to another. For Aaron and his sons each day moves them farther from their profane state and closer to the ranks of the sacred. On the 8th day they emerge from the tent of meeting as full-fledged priests.

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We now move to Stage 3, the “Full exercise of priestly functions and obligations” (9: 1-24):

- 1) Rite of separation from the previous state;**
- 2) Interval (a 7-day period of isolation within the Tent of Meeting); and**
- 3) Full exercise of priestly functions and obligations.**



On the 8th day, after Aaron and his sons emerge from 7 days of isolation in the Tent of Meeting, Moses instructs them to prepare for themselves a calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

Then they are to tell the Israelites to prepare: 1) a male goat for a sin offering; 2) a calf and a lamb for a burnt offering; and 3) an ox and a ram for a peace offering—the three “sweet savor” offerings.

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**After the sacrifices are prepared,
Moses and Aaron bless the people,
and . . .**

***“Then the glory of the Lord appeared to
all the people. Fire came forth from the
Lord’s presence and consumed the burnt
offering and the fat on the altar.”***

**And with that the Tabernacle and
the priesthood are open for
business! The gaping chasm
between God and his people has
been bridged.**

Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

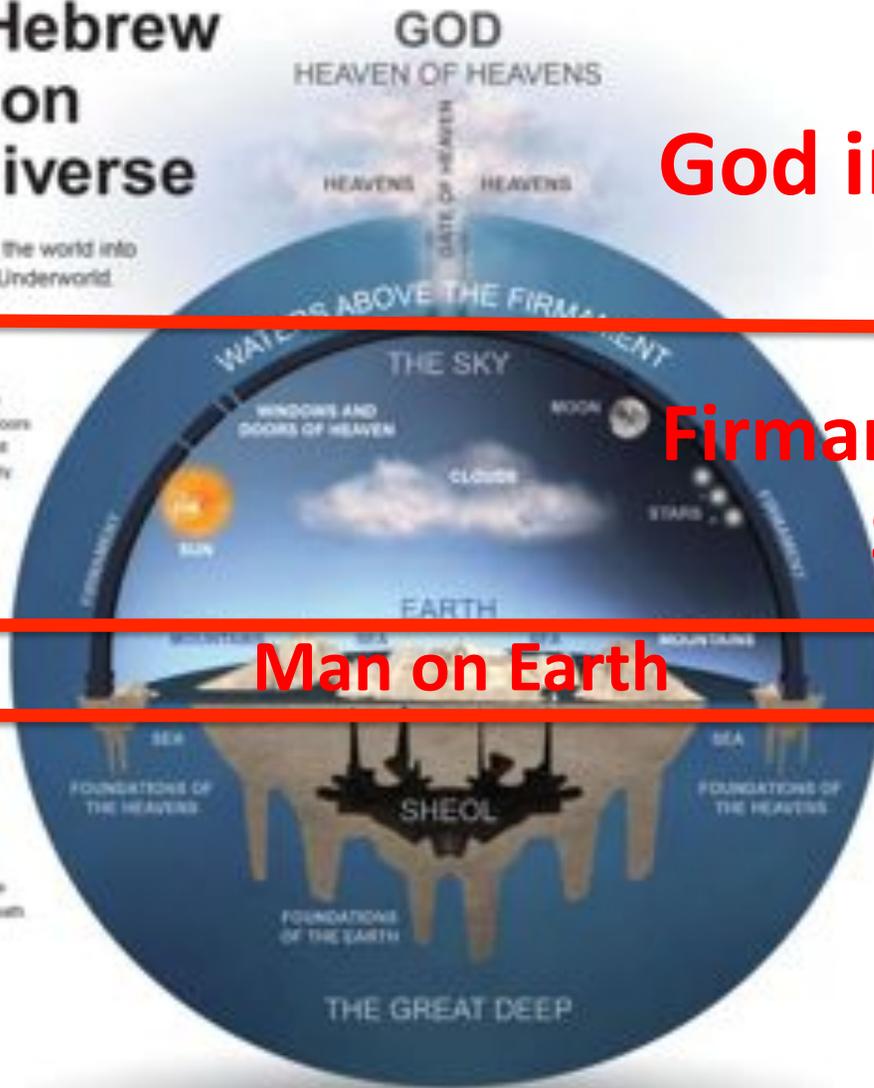
The ancient Israelites divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea, and the Underworld.

They viewed the sky as a vault resting on foundations—perhaps mountains—with doors and windows that let in the sun. God dwelt above the sky, hidden in cloud and majesty.

The world was viewed as a disk floating on the waters, raised or moved by pillars. The earth was the only known domain—the realm beyond it was considered unknown.

The Underworld (Sheol) was a watery or dusty prison from which no one returned. Regarded as a physical place beneath the earth, it could be reached only through death.

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God in Heaven

Firmament and Sky

Man on Earth



Moses/God

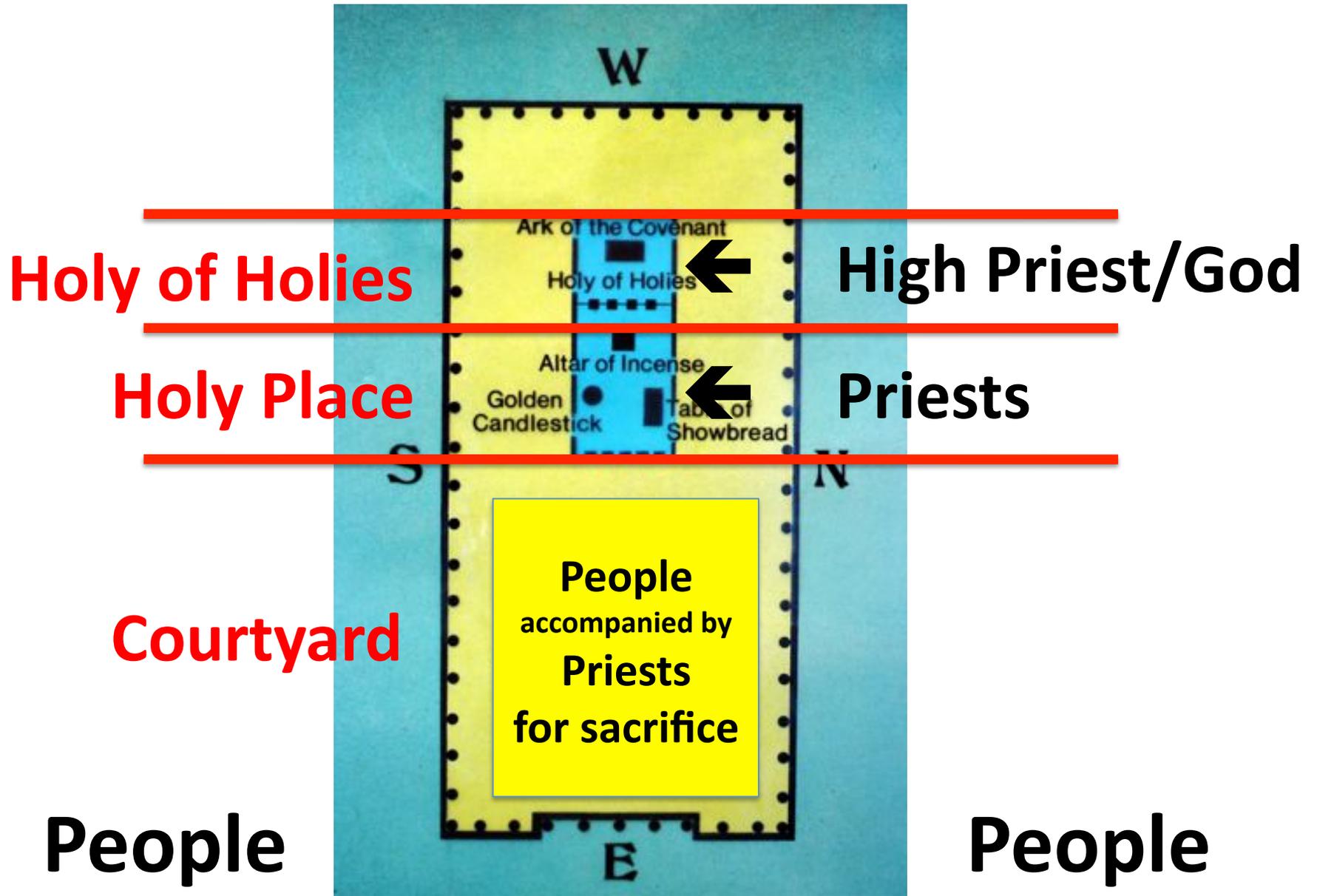
Priests

People

Mt. Sinai

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Questions for discussion and thought

- 1. Why is it important to mark the ordination of Aaron and his sons with ritual?**
- 2. Are there events in the trajectory of our lives that are marked with ritual?**
- 3. What are the origins of those rituals?**
- 4. Are there rituals that are common across all cultures and all times in history? If so, what are they?**
- 5. If we eliminate ritual from our lives, what effect does it have on us?**

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trans. by John S, Crandall. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan
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