

Prayer

Save us, O Lord, from being consumed by our own concerns and interests. Direct our hearts towards others, so that we may offer genuine concern for all those who need our love, our help, our care, our fellowship and our friendship. May we find fulfilment by doing this, for You are the greatest friend we can ever have; AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: 'Anointing'

Pray that God will come afresh and anoint you for worship and for service. The Lord has a purpose and a call for each of us, so seek the confirmation of God's Spirit on your life.

On-going prayers

- Ask the Lord to help us agree about how to look after our world
- Give thanks to God for those you know who show God's love
- Pray for local migrant workers

Meditation

If you face events that seem mysterious,
Do not fear; hand them over to the Lord
And let Him guide the way you handle them.

If you face problems that are your fault,
Repent; hand them all to the Lord your God
And let Him bless you with His forgiveness.

If you face a callous attack of the enemy,
Stand firm, to resist this affront to the Lord
And let Him do what you cannot, and defeat him.

If you face the nagging pains of doubt,
Believe; hand these dire feelings to the Lord
And let Him feed your soul; receive His peace.

If you face questions that never fade,
Stop dwelling on these problems; think on Him
And let the Lord your Saviour reign in you again.

Bible Study - Exodus 29:1-35 (1-9,19-21,31-35)

¹ Now this is what you must do to them to consecrate them in service to me as priests. Take a young bull and two rams without defect, ² and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil; you are to make these of the finest wheat flour. ³ You are to put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, together with the bull and the two rams.

⁴ You are to bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and wash them with water. ⁵ Take the vestments, and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastpiece, and fasten the ephod on him with its decorated band; ⁶ and you are to set the turban on his head, and put the holy crown over the turban. ⁷ Take the anointing oil, and

pour it on his head and anoint him. ⁸ Then bring his sons, and put tunics on them, ⁹ and gird them with sashes and tie headdresses on them; and the priesthood shall be theirs by statute forever. You will then ordain Aaron and his sons.

¹⁹ Take the second ram; and Aaron and his sons must lay their hands on the head of the ram, ²⁰ and you are to 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 the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet, and dash the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar. ²¹ Then you are to take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments and on his sons and his sons' vestments with him; then he and his vestments shall be holy, as well as his sons and his sons' vestments.

³¹ Take the ram of ordination, and boil its flesh in a holy place; ³² and Aaron and his sons must eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ³³ They themselves must eat the food by which atonement is made, to ordain and consecrate them, but no one else is to eat of them, because they are holy. ³⁴ If any of the flesh for the ordination, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you must burn the remainder with fire; it is not to be eaten, because it is holy. ³⁵ Thus you must do to Aaron and to his sons, just as I have commanded you; through seven days you shall ordain them.

Review

In today's reading, we face some issues in the Old Testament that Christians find most difficult, mainly the slaughter of animals in sacrifice to God. Many prefer to ignore these sections of the Bible, but however distasteful we find the idea, all this was highly symbolic for ancient people. We must try and understand it for two reasons. Firstly, we must seek to comprehend what other people and cultures do, however foreign and distasteful, because part of our God-given calling is to relate to people of all times and places for the sake of the Gospel. Secondly, and more importantly, the sacrificial system expresses truths about life and death, and we need to understand them if we are to know why Jesus died as a sacrifice for our salvation. The quest to appreciate the depths of God's love demands that we put sensitivities aside to explore this subject.

In the 'going deeper' section of this study, I explain how this chapter fits together, but for our reading, I have selected three of its sections because of the themes they introduce. The first describes God's instructions in preparation for Aaron's ordination to the priesthood (29:1-9). It introduces the ideas of offering sacrifices and other offerings to make people holy and acceptable to God (29:1f.), of washing to symbolise purity (29:4), and of being clothed with God's garments to demonstrate priesthood (29:5f.). The second describes a ritual that demonstrates how 'blood' given to God can make a person clean (29:19-21). Both these sections also introduce 'anointing' (29:6,7,21) as an expression of God's commissioning and blessing for a chosen task. The third section describes the eating of a shared meal to conclude the ordination (29:31-35), and along with 'ordination', this last section also tells us about 'atonement' and 'holiness' (29:33,34).

Although we already know about holiness, purity, sacrifice and priesthood from earlier in the Bible, the following are introduced to us in this very chapter; 'washing', 'ordination', 'anointing' and 'atonement'. These four are all highly significant, of course, and they play an important role in the New Testament. We therefore need to look closely what they

mean here in Exodus. They are mentioned because the extraordinary individual leadership of Moses was gradually being passed on to others, so that Israel might be properly led and also fulfil their role of demonstrating the redeeming and saving power of God to the whole world. So although the initial reason for this passage is to explain the ordination of Aaron and his family, the more God says about the priesthood, the more He reveals about His redeeming and saving power! If God is to save sinful people, He must enable His own people to come into His presence and not be condemned because of sin, and this gives us an insight into the heart of God for all people.

Ordination is the formal blessing of God on those chosen by Him for His work, and so the ritual here is elaborate, involving all the features of sacrificial worship known to Israel (the sacrifices described in other parts of Exodus 29 are the same as the range of sacrifices found in Leviticus 1-5). Washing is an earthly symbol of preparing to meet God by getting rid of earthly impurity, and so Aaron and his sons had to wash (29:4) to prepare to be ordained. The highlight of the ordination is the anointing of Aaron, in which symbols of new life (blood) and purity (anointing oil) are sprinkled on him (29:21). Lastly, scripture reveals that the whole ceremony is designed for 'atonement' (29:33). In other words, it makes it possible for Aaron to serve as a priest in the presence of God (29:1f.), including laying his hands on the sacrificial ram to remove his sins (29:19).

The whole purpose of God's work in the world is to enable people to come into His presence. Now that this is possible because of the atoning sacrificial death of Jesus, washing, anointing, and ordination remain an important part of His on-going work, and the roots of what they mean, including atonement itself, begin here.

Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- A summary of the contents of all Exodus 29:1-37.
- What do the references to ordination mean in this passage?
- What do the references to sacrifice mean in this passage?
- What does the anointing of Aaron by sprinkling mean in 29:19-21?
- What can we learn about atonement in this passage?

Notes on the text and translation

V5 ***'and fasten the ephod on him with its decorated band'** The Hebrew says here 'and dress him with the ephod by the decorous band of the ephod'. The expression 'dress with the ephod' was clearly important, but the whole expression only shows how little we know about the ephod. Here, it seems to act as the primary 'badge of office' of the High Priest.*

V6 ***'and you are to set the turban on his head, and put the holy crown over the turban.'** We can only assume that the 'crown' mentioned here is one and the same as the 'headband' mentioned in 28:36, which had the words 'Holy to the Lord' written on it. It was a sign of holy office; a turban of this kind and the crown were usually associated with royalty. These were gifts to the priesthood from God.*

V9 ***'gird them with sashes and tie headdresses on them'** The term for 'turban' used earlier for the High Priest (as in verse 6) refers to a royal headdress. Here in this verse, a slightly different word is used which refers to a standard conical headdress used by ancient priests, but less significant than the high quality turban used by the High Priest.*

Going Deeper

A summary of the contents of all Exodus 29:1-35.

If you read the whole of Exodus 29:1-35, it breaks down like this:

1. **(29:1-9)** The first section is about preparing for ordination, animals are prepared for sacrifice together with the finest baked and cooked products (29:2). Aaron and his sons are prepared firstly by ritual washing as a sign of purity, and then Aaron is dressed with specially made vestments (Exodus 28). His sons are also clothed for priesthood (29:9), but only Aaron wears the ephod as High Priest (29:5), his sons wear tunics and sashes of priestly office, together with simple headdresses, unlike the turban of 'royal' worth worn by Aaron (see notes above).
2. **(29:10-14 and 15-18)** The next two sections are not included within the selected reading today, and they describe the offering of a sacrificial bull and then a lamb, exactly as prescribed in Leviticus. We will analyse this when we study Leviticus; for now, all we need to know is that they are 'whole burnt offerings' for the sin of the people (29:14).
3. **(29:19-21)** The offering of the second sacrificial ram is included in our reading today because it describes the use of blood and anointing oil to symbolise ordination. This is sprinkled on Aaron (see below).
4. **(29:22-28)** The chapter goes on to describe something that is not well understood today, for parts of the second sacrificial ram are 'waved' before the Lord, and the Hebrew suggests this is very important. Firstly, parts of the meat are 'waved' before God and then burnt as an offering, and then the rest of the meat is 'waved' before God (29:26) and then used as a meal for Aaron and his sons (29:27f.). It is possible that the 'waving' was required because part of the animal was eaten by people, and not offered to God.

I mention this because some churches still practice 'waving' during the Lord's Supper, when the bread and wine are consecrated, but there is no clear scriptural indication of what this might mean beyond signifying offering to God.
5. **(29:29-30)** These verses describe the passing on of the vestment from one generation to another, and define a ceremony for the handing over of the office of High Priest that lasts for seven days, just like the original ordination of Aaron (see next section). It is clear that God intended the priesthood to continue forever. It certainly continued until the time of Christ; but since then, Christians believe that Christ has completed the office of High Priest, and the Jews have changed the ritual, because from 70 AD until today there has been no High Priest in Jerusalem.
6. **(29:31-35)** The whole passage concludes with a description of an 'atonement' meal eaten from the 'holy' meat of the second offering, called the 'ram of ordination' (29:31f.). The feast for ordination is to last for seven days.

Incidentally, the whole of Exodus 29 is virtually the same as Leviticus 8 and 9. There is no consensus about what this means, apart from emphasising the importance of the High Priestly office and its continuance.

What do the references to ordination mean in this passage?

The word 'ordination' means an act of commissioning, in which God sets someone apart to do a certain work for Him. In this passage, Aaron is 'ordained' for the work of High Priest but the word 'ordination' is only used towards the end from verse 31 onwards, with the description of the second offering as the 'ram of ordination'. The word 'ordination' means 'setting' or 'installation', and scripture only uses it when all the pieces are in place for Aaron's role as a priest. Aaron was ordained when He had been washed and clothed

that was raised as an elevation offering and the thigh that was raised as an elevation offering from the ram of ordination, from what belonged to Aaron and his sons. ²⁸ These things shall be a perpetual ordinance for Aaron and his sons from the Israelites, for this is an offering; and it will be an offering by the Israelites from their sacrifice of offerings of well-being, their offering to the LORD.

²⁹ The sacred vestments of Aaron shall be passed on to his sons after him; they will be anointed in them and ordained in them. ³⁰ The son who is priest in his place shall wear them seven days, when he comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the holy place.

³¹ Take the ram of ordination, and boil its flesh in a holy place; ³² and Aaron and his sons must eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ³³ They themselves must eat the food by which atonement is made, to ordain and consecrate them, but no one else is to eat of them, because they are holy. ³⁴ If any of the flesh for the ordination, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you must burn the remainder with fire; it is not to be eaten, because it is holy. ³⁵ This is what you are to do to Aaron and to his sons, just as I have commanded you; ordain them throughout seven days.

The full text of Exodus 29:1-35

¹ Now this is what you must do to them to consecrate them in service to me as priests. Take a young bull and two rams without defect, ² and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil; you are to make these of the finest wheat flour. ³ You are to put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, together with the bull and the two rams.

⁴ You are to bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and wash them with water. ⁵ Take the vestments, and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastpiece, and fasten the ephod on him with its decorated band; ⁶ and you are to set the turban on his head, and put the holy crown over the turban. ⁷ Take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head and anoint him. ⁸ Then bring his sons, and put tunics on them, ⁹ and gird them with sashes and tie headdresses on them; and the priesthood shall be theirs by statute forever. You will then ordain Aaron and his sons.

¹⁰ Bring the bull in front of the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons are to lay their hands on the head of the bull, ¹¹ and you must slaughter the bull before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, ¹² and take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and all the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar. ¹³ Take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and turn them into smoke on the altar. ¹⁴ But the flesh of the bull, and its skin, and its dung, you must burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.

¹⁵ Then take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons must lay their hands on the head of the ram, ¹⁶ and you are to slaughter the ram, and take its blood and dash it against all sides of the altar. ¹⁷ Then cut the ram into its parts, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its parts and its head, ¹⁸ and turn the whole ram into smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering to the LORD; it is a pleasing odour, an offering by fire to the LORD.

¹⁹ Take the second ram; and Aaron and his sons must lay their hands on the head of the ram, ²⁰ and you are to 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 the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet, and dash the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar. ²¹ Then you are to take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments and on his sons and his sons' vestments with him; then he and his vestments shall be holy, as well as his sons and his sons' vestments.

²² Take the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the appendage of the liver, the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh (for it is a ram of ordination), ²³ and one loaf of bread, one cake of bread made with oil, and one wafer, out of the basket of unleavened bread that is before the LORD; ²⁴ and place all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and raise them as an elevation offering before the LORD. ²⁵ Then take them from their hands, and turn them into smoke on the altar on top of the burnt offering of pleasing odour before the LORD; it is an offering by fire to the LORD.

²⁶ Take the breast of the ram of Aaron's ordination and raise it as an elevation offering before the LORD; and it shall be your portion. ²⁷ Consecrate the breast

(29:4-7), the sacrifice had been offered and Aaron had placed his hands on the head of the animal so that its death could remove his sin (29:19), the blood had been placed symbolically on him (see below), and the festive meal to celebrate the consecration had begun.

It is possible to confuse the terms 'ordination' and 'consecration'. At the beginning of the passage, God declares that Aaron is to be 'consecrated' (29:1), meaning that he will be 'made holy' and acceptable to God. This is only the first step of many by which Aaron is 'ordained'. These terms are part of the human experience of what God does with people. We never hear of Jesus being 'ordained' or even of being 'consecrated', but this is because He was sinless and did not need to be consecrated or 'made holy'. In addition, His whole life was 'ordained' since before time began for the salvation of the world (John 1:1f.); so He did not need to go through a ritual for consecration or ordination. These words continue in Christian tradition to express the holy calling of an individual to special office within the church, but through the saving work of Christ, there is no reason why they cannot refer to all Christians. We are both consecrated and ordained in our baptism, but there is no Biblical reason why we cannot be consecrated and ordained to special tasks, and not just 'ministry'.

What do the references to sacrifice mean in this passage?

The sacrifices in this passage emphasise the significance of the giving up of life for the removal of sin. The story of what happened in the Garden of Eden expresses the fact that all sin leads to death, and all people and the whole world are afflicted with sin and its consequences. Death is the ultimate curse of separation from God and it is God's intent to give all people an opportunity to overcome sin and death so that they might be re-united with their Maker. Because of the connection between sin and death, sin can only be removed by death. The philosophy of all this is something Christians have pondered over for centuries, but there is no doubt that the message of the whole Bible rests on this.

Before Christ came to die for us and remove the penalty of our sins, the people of Israel were given an example of how sin could be removed through the system of sacrificial worship. People used sacrifice generally in ancient times, but God gave it this special meaning uniquely to the people of Israel, hopefully, so that they would learn from it. However, the sacrificial system did not have its intended effect, as the prophet of the Old Testament perceived (Amos 4:4, Hosea 8:13). The prophets foretold that God would send His servant to suffer and die for us (Isaiah 53) to fulfil what the old sacrificial system had failed to do for the people of Israel. The work of the Messiah would be for all people.

What does the anointing of Aaron by sprinkling mean in 29:19-21?

When Aaron was ordained, blood from the second sacrificial offering was used firstly to indicate the removal of sin from Aaron. This was essential, because Aaron would be required to go into God's presence to offer ministry in the 'Holy of Holies', and without the removal of his sin, he would die (remember that Aaron's sons died by failing to observe similar commands – Leviticus 10:1). The blood was placed on Aaron's right ear lobe, thumb and big toe. These were about the only parts of Aaron's body that were accessible for the anointing, and the simplest explanation is that they indicate the anointing 'from head to toe', and the inclusion of the thumb indicates a central part of Aaron's body. There is no clear evidence from scripture that the ear, thumb and big toe represent anything else though it is relatively easy to imagine some spiritual significance for them.

Some of the blood from the altar was then mixed with anointing oil. Practically, because it was to be used for 'sprinkling', a sample of blood poured over the altar (29:21) would not be sufficient unless something else was added. The blood represents the removal of sin and the oil represents purity, and the combined mixture would have been mostly oil. The

sprinkling of the two, and even the smallest amount of blood, was sufficient to indicate the effective removal of sin from Aaron and his purity before God. It also purified the vestments as well as the people who wore them. Yes, it was symbolism, but it was important and we should be aware of what it means rather than be fascinated by the ritual for its own sake.

What can we learn about atonement in this passage?

Towards the end of the passage, the word 'atonement' appears for the first time in scripture, along with 'ordination' (29:33). Just like 'ordination', the word 'atonement' sums up what has been happening in this ritual. Atonement means the removal of a person's sin by means of death in sacrifice to God. Atonement is made effective by the preparation of the sinful person (29:1-9), his taking part in sacrifice and laying his hands on the slaughtered animal to take away his sins (29:19), his symbolic anointing with the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkling with the blood and oil to make him pure before God. The eating of a meal dedicated to God completes the atonement.

From this, you can easily see the elements of atonement offered to us by scripture, though how we interpret them today is much disputed amongst the different churches. Preparation by repentance and desire to participate in God's mercies, the handing over or washing away of sin, the anointing not just for a 'task', but for purity in God's service, the pursuit of a path of holiness, and the taking part in the worship of God, and the eating of a meal (communion) dedicated to God. You may have heard some more simple definitions of atonement, such as 'the removal of sin through the work of Christ', but we should consider all that scripture has to say about this.

Application

There is plenty within this text for us to think about. The issue of sacrifice is difficult enough for many of us apart from 'anointing', 'atonement', 'ordination' and 'washing'! It is of course hard for us to accept the ancient stories of sacrificing animals to worship God, however, it is important that we study the details of what was done in Israel so that we may understand God's intentions and His power to save today. Exodus 29 is helpful because this is the very first detailed description of sacrifice in the Bible, and we are told that God used this to show that human sin could be removed to enable people to come into God's presence. What was possible for Aaron would one day be possible, through Christ our High Priest, for all people! Lots of ancient people sacrificed animals, but they did it to 'feed' their gods! There is a dramatic difference between this and what Israel did, and sacrifice that represented God's desire to remove human sin and restore His relationship with people! Everything in this passage describes atonement, and atonement is our key to salvation. It links Old Testament sacrifice to the death of Jesus Christ, and works so that we might have life!

All the other important words in this passage relate to this. Ordination means setting someone apart to work for the Lord, and although we tend to use this word to refer to commissioning someone in Christian leadership, it seems odd that the New Testament has no word for 'ordain'. It simply uses the term 'laying on of hands' for the commissioning of someone for a special work of God, often alongside the word 'anointing'. Instead of thinking that these words refer to special things for special Christians, it may be better to accept that God has a purpose for each one of His servants, and 'ordination' is best thought of as an inauguration into the 'priesthood of all believers'. Put like this, what Scripture says about ordination refers more like baptism than anything else!

Of course, we also use the terms 'washing' and 'anointing' in conjunction with baptism, and sometimes we remember that it also has something to do with atonement. Washing refers to the washing away of our sins after repentance, and anointing refers to the blessing of

God upon our faith. It seems that just as Christ has taken on Himself the full weight of sacrifice for our sins, baptism in Him now holds together everything we mean by washing, anointing and ordination into the priesthood of all believers. We can find out a great deal about all these things in the New Testament, but as soon as we look, we will find that much of it is focussed around ideas found in Exodus 29 (see John 1:26, Romans 6:4f. 1 Cor 12:13, Ephesians 4:5 etc.). The Old Testament helps us understand the New!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What do the words 'ordination' and 'anointing' mean to you, and why do we use them in very different circumstances?
2. What does the word 'atonement' mean to people today, and discuss whether it is something that should be understood better by God's people.
3. What does 'sacrifice' mean to people today and how may they best be helped to understand what the sacrifice of Jesus means?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is extremely hard to try and write about sacrifice and atonement from the starting point of this passage of scripture, and yet these ideas are an important part of how we understand our salvation and what Jesus did to obtain it for us. Some dislike the idea of death, and I have come across people in the church who advocate dispensing with 'atonement', or the idea that 'Christ died for our sins'. I cannot accept this however, because I believe that I am only saved through the death of Christ as a sacrifice for my sins. Unless we believe this, we are left with a religion that says God loves us without cost, which seems to me to be rather meaningless. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, I know God loves me.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Take one or more of the featured words in this study, 'atonement', 'ordination', 'anointing' and 'washing', and reflect on what they mean to you, and how you might explain them. Talk to others about them if possible to help you become more familiar with what these words mean.*
- *Pray for the Jewish people, who have the heritage of God's Word but do not accept that it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Pray that they might see the Messiah through scripture, as did Jews of the first century who became Christians.*

Final Prayer

Lord, I turn my eyes towards You, I look for Your help, I seek Your advice, and I long for Your presence within every moment of my life. Remove the unseen barriers, O Lord, and break into my consciousness with Your liberating power, to both challenge me and inspire me. Thank You, O Lord my God: AMEN