

CCUA SS Initiative
 Sunday School Lesson 9-21-2025

A Priest's Role Leviticus 9,

Introduction:

As we continue this series of lessons on “living into the promises of God” we’re looking at God’s Old Testament system of the priesthood as a vital aspect of His covenant with His people. Last week I tried to post on the white board a very brief outline of Leviticus in three parts repeated in reverse order, plus a central core. Last week we looked at the first of two parallel sections about ritual (the opening and closing sections). Today we look at the first of the two parallel sections (2nd and 5th) presenting the priesthood. Next week, we will look at the central core and “Day of Atonement” (section 4). In two weeks, we will look at the second of two parallel sections about purity (3rd and 5th sections of the book).

In terms of the goal of these lessons, “living into the promises of God,” we will be looking at the role of priests in several aspects of ministry. As Christians we should be reminded of two principal issues: first, Jesus is our new High Priest; and second, God has called us to be a universal priesthood of believers. Thus, studying the role of priests should inspire us to be more accepting of our role as disciples of Jesus.

*I. The inauguration of the Jewish priesthood and the sacrificial system. **Leviticus 9:5-12***

To be thoroughly honest, we don’t know for sure when this text was written. The overall structure of the book of Leviticus indicates a product created within a well-known literary structure as well as an established history of sacrificial ritual. This chapter takes the position of recounting the inauguration of the sacrificial system at the time of Moses anointing his older brother Aaron as the first high priest, whose lineage would produce the successive high priests of Israel’s society through the time of both the split of the kingdom (after Solomon’s reign) and the period of the exile until the final destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. That’s the narrative behind this text, but the point of the text is given in v. 6, “so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.” Our lesson writers have printed in boldface type some of the verses in the third text (Numbers 6:22-27, which we will be looking at later in the lesson) as the point of this particular lesson.

However, as I look at this text, in both its literary and potential historic contexts, the point of this chapter appears rather to be that of God revealing his glory to his people, and the necessary conditions for Him to do so. Our second suggested reading from Leviticus 9 ends with v. 22. But the chapter ends at v. 24, with the phenomenal appearance of the glory of God to everyone present.

It is easy to think that, because of the text’s concentration on the meticulous processes of presenting the various sacrifices, the conditions necessary for God to appear in his glory are

related to meticulous following of the rituals. That idea carries over into the time of Jesus with attitudes we read about that are held by some if not many of the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

However, what is not given in so many words here is the proper attitude of heart required of the priests, Aaron and his sons, to fulfil the function that they have been ordained to fulfill. Chapter 8 gives a stronger hint at that than this chapter. Jesus' accusation of the priests of his day having turned the Temple into a "den of robbers" makes it clear that He expected a different attitude from them in their ministry role toward the people, both foreign and Israelite, Jew and Gentile (remember, Jesus' statement was made in the court of the Gentiles).

These verses recount the presentation of the sacrifices necessary for Aaron and his sons to receive the sacrifices from the people, as they complete this inaugural ceremony. I'm going to have us read the second reading selection before presenting a series of questions.

II. Sacrifices of God's faithful. Leviticus 9:15-22

What our lesson writers point out here is the difference between what Aaron sacrificed for himself and what he presented as sacrifices for the people was the Fellowship offering cited here in verses 17 & 18—the fellowship offering with its accompanying grain offering. Aaron was not allowed to offer this sacrifice for himself, because he was not allowed to offer anything from which he could receive personal benefit. The fellowship offering, on the contrary, was an offering designed as a communal, festival meal for all persons present, priests and lay persons alike. It was a time of celebration of the provision and the protection of God for his people.

Before we go on to the Questions for Discussion, I want us to read the last two verses of Leviticus 9, because here is where God's promise is fulfilled. I want to suggest that it is here, too, where we should begin to consider "living into" this promise from God.

Read Leviticus 9:23-24.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. From the wording of these verses, what do you see the glory of God looking like?
2. How have you seen the "glory of God" appearing at a very special time in the life and community of his people?

INTERLUDE: For most Israelites during the centuries between Solomon and the exile, the expression "glory of God" was used for the miraculous flame above the mercy seat, that is the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. That "glory" was seen by only one person, one day each year. No one else saw it. At the time of the exile, some Levites took the Ark from the Temple and hid it away before the Babylonians ransacked the Temple and confiscated all of its furniture and utensils. During the first stage of the reconstruction after the exile, when the temple was being rebuilt, people became discouraged for several reasons and

stopped the construction. One of the reasons was that the Ark of the Covenant was nowhere to be found, and the “glory of God” would not be present in this temple. The prophet Haggai, an old man somewhere between my age and John Muhm’s age, in four short, powerful messages encouraged the people to complete the building of the temple. One very powerful message was that, indeed, the glory of the LORD would come to this Temple. He obviously meant something other than just the flame on the lid of the Ark.

FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

3. Can you think of times when the “glory of the Lord” came to the temple in fulfillment of Haggai’s prophecy? What did it look like?
4. Does God appear in glory among his people today, where there is no temple in Jerusalem? What might it look like?

III. Function of priests (hold the reading for a little later) **Numbers 6:22-27**

Our lesson writers, Kevin Mellish and Thomas King, remind us that priests had several important spiritual functions, the most obvious was that of being the intermediaries between God and the people. Beyond that, their role included religious instruction of the people, which is the suggested reason some scholars give for the fact that priestly families were assigned to reside in various towns in each of the 12 tribal territories. That particular function was formalized under the reign of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. A third role is that of being involved in the healing of diseases and keeping track of persons being healed as part of the purity issues involved in who can come to worship. As part of their role of being intermediaries, they had the specific function of offering God’s blessing to individuals and the entire worshipping community.

The third reading for today’s lesson is that of the formal blessing from the book of Numbers. In terms of literary context this is a stand-alone paragraph in a section of independent instructions given by Moses about all kinds of different issues in preparation for the departure of the people of Israel from Sinai as they began their journey to the Promised Land. **Read the text.**

There’s nothing new to any of us in this reading, except v. 27 at the end. In the blessing, where we see in English “the LORD” printed in all caps, the original language has the name God said to Moses was His name to say to the Israelites. The blessing pronounces that Name on the people, and God recognizes the people as His and responds with blessing.

Some of us, where we hear these words, also hear the melody of the famous arrangement of this blessing that Orpheus choir sings at the close of every one of its concerts, the arrangement with the 12-fold “Amen” at the end.

Conclusion:

The letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus as Messiah, not in terms of the new “Son of David” on the throne of Israel, but the new “High Priest” in the order of Melchizedek, King of Salem. Hebrews insists that Jesus’ priesthood is greater than that of the descendants of Aaron, because, among other reasons, Jesus was without sin and did not need to offer sacrifices to purify himself (Leviticus 9:1-12), and that his priesthood was based on better promises. The writer of Hebrews gives a vivid word picture of Jesus offering the atoning sacrifice, not on an altar here on earth, but in the heavenly worship center before the throne of God himself, and that Jesus himself is both the priest and the sacrifice. When we hear this priestly blessing of Numbers 6, we understand the word “Lord” in reference to Jesus more than in reference to the Father. We go to Jesus for all issues for which Israel would have sought out a priest. And we understand that blessings come from God through Jesus.

In 1 Peter 2:5-9, Peter declares that the Christian community of faith is a holy priesthood. As such, our ministry, that of each of us, individually and collectively, is performing the duties of a priest for each other and for the world around us—prayer and sacrifice as intermediaries, offering refreshing and healing to each other (the “cold and hot water” of the Letter to Laodicea in The Revelation), and offering and giving blessing to one another and to the world in which we live.

ASK: How many of you were here last Wednesday evening or watched the service online?
(Wait for an answer.)

I’m going to suggest that we experienced a moment of the “glory of God” appearing among us in the sights, sounds, and spirit of hundreds of people gathered to take a stand for Christ as living sacrifices to be His light in our world and to offer His blessing to that world. Then, singing the words of this blessing for Numbers 6, with outstretched arms we blessed each other and praised God together. Yes, the LORD still appears in his glory when we meet the conditions.