

Sunday, May 12, 2024 pm

JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE (27)

Israel at Mt. Sinai (4)

Priests and Sacrifices

We are continuing our study of Israel in the wilderness. Currently our focus is Mt. Sinai. We have noted their arrival at Mt. Sinai, the giving of the Law, both spoken by YHWH and given to Moses while on Mt. Sinai for 40 days (twice), the golden calf they built while there the first time. In our last lesson we addressed the tabernacle and related it to God's plans including the church. Today, we want to address the priesthood and sacrifices Israel was to offer.

I. The Aaronic Priesthood

- a. Instructions for the priesthood was given while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, at the same time he was given instructions concerning the tabernacle. Exodus 28-29 records the various garments associated with the priesthood and their consecration. Exodus 39:1-31 records the making of their garments. Leviticus 8 records their consecration and Leviticus 9 records the beginning of their ministry.
- b. Concerning the priesthood
 - i. The Baker Bible Encyclopedia identified "priests and Levites" a fulfilling "a variety of essentially religious duties... They were professional men and were supported for their fulltime religious work."¹
 - ii. The priesthood consisted of Aaron and his sons. All priests were to be descendants of Aaron. Aaron had 4 sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar (Numbers 3:10, Exodus 28:1, 29:9, etc.). Nadab and Abihu would perish for unauthorized worship (Leviticus 10:1-4), so the priests would be based on the line of Eleazar and Ithamar.
 - iii. The work of the priesthood served as mediators between God and the Israelites. They were to offer the various sacrifices that were demanded, study and teach the law to the people and judge matters related to the law. They also determined the cleanliness of the people (cf. Lev. 13-15 – leprous spots, etc.).
 - iv. The Levites, were appointed to assist the priests in their work.
 - v. Exodus 19:6, Israel if faithful was to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." We will address this later.
- c. The High Priest
 - i. He was in essence the primary priest. His work was like that of all the priests, except he had extra important responsibilities. Primarily among these was on the day of Atonement, He would offer the annual sacrifice for the sins of the people, entering into the Holy of Holies with blood of the sacrifices.
 - ii. The High Priest – His clothing was special and highly ornate. He wore 4 layers as he conducted his special service.
 1. The most inside layer was linen trousers (undergarments) – Exodus 28:42-43. These were to reach from the waist to the thighs to "cover their nakedness". (MODESTY was important)

¹ Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Baker Book House, 1988. Pp. 1574ff

2. Next was a tunic (Ex. 28:39, 39:27) – made of fine linen with a sash, artistically woven. We have no other details.
3. A robe was next (28:31-35, 39:22-26) – it was to be blue with an opening for the head in the middle and a woven binding around its opening so that it would not tear. On its hem was to be pomegranates (likely balls) of blue, purple and scarlet interspersed with bells of gold. As Aaron (the HP) moved around he could be heard.
4. Next was an ephod (Ex. 28:6-14, 39:2-7) – made of gold, blue, purple & scarlet thread and fine linen, artistically woven (likely 2 pieces – a front and a back). It had 2 shoulder straps joined at its edges, also intricately woven. On each shoulder strap, an onyx stone was fastened with the names of 6 tribes of Israel, in birth order (all 12 tribes). They were fastened in gold settings with chains.
5. There was also a sash that was woven of fine materials to secure the ephod to the body.
6. Above the ephod, there was a breastplate (Ex. 28:15-30, 39:8-21). It was called “the breastplate of judgment”. Artistically woven like the outer ephod. It was to be doubled up into a square (~9 inches). There was to be settings of 12 stones in 4 rows of 3 on it (again representing the 12 tribes with their names on individual stones). It was attached with chains of pure gold. Also there were gold rings attaching the 2 sides of the breastplate (it was a pocket). Inside the breastplate were the Urim and the Thummim. They were to be over Aaron’s (the HP) heart.
7. On his head, he would wear a turban (Ex. 28:36-40, 39:27-31), with a golden plate on front engraved with the words, “Holiness to the LORD”

d. The priests –

- i. They would assist the HP in his duties and could offer sacrifices, work with the tabernacle, etc. But clearly they could not participate in the special duties of the High Priest (day of Atonement, etc.).
- ii. Their garments were similar to that of the High Priest, but not as ornate (Ex. 28:40-43). They had tunics with sashes, and hats (“for glory and beauty”). They also wore linen trousers (for modesty).
- iii. To serve as priest came with various restrictions. They could not marry one who had been divorced or a prostitute (Lev. 21:7). If they had certain defects they were excluded from serving (Lev. 21:16-23).
- iv. Deuteronomy 33:8-10 gives us an appreciation of their duties in Moses’ farewell blessing to Levi’s descendants. It could involve managing the incense, the sacrifices AND teaching the people the Law.

e. The priesthood was consecrated

- i. Exodus 29:1-37 records Moses’ instructions on Mt. Sinai to consecrate Aaron and his sons. It involved the sacrifice of a young bull and 2 rams without blemish. This was accompanied with a grain offering. They were to dress in their garments, use anointing oil on their heads. And then offer the sacrifices. Aaron and his sons were to put their hands on the head of the bull (vs. 10) and kill it at the door of the tabernacle. Some of its blood was to be put on the horns of the altar. Fat from various parts was then burned on the altar and other parts (as a sin offering) was burned outside the camp. Then they

killed a ram and sprinkled its blood and then burn it on the altar. Some of its blood was then put on their right ear, on their right thumb and big toe. Some of the blood was then “sprinkled” on their garments. VERY specific details were given for this offering. The consecration process was to take 7 days. They also sanctified the altar for 7 days. Leviticus 8 records the sanctification ceremony following the instructions of Exodus 29. Leviticus 9 records the beginning of their priestly service.

II. The Sacrifices

- a. Sacrifices have always been an important part of worship to God. The first recorded act of worship was a sacrifice (Genesis 4:1-5ff). While we are not told the details, we KNOW that God gave instructions as to what He expected. He accepted Abel’s sacrifice (Heb. 11:4 tells us he offered it by faith), and rejected Cain’s. During the patriarchal age, we see sacrifices. Abraham faithfully sacrificed to God and “called on the name of the LORD” (Genesis 12:8). We also find sacrifices associated with covenants between God and man and burnt offerings (Genesis 22:13). BUT we are not given specific details about these sacrifices. However, under the LOM that changed.
- b. An important aspect of Israel’s religious life was sacrifices. Numbers 28 records the various times they were to offer sacrifices. They were offered regularly, twice daily (28:3-8), weekly - Sabbath (28:9-10), monthly (28:11-15), during various feasts (28:16-29:40), annually (29:7-11) and as needed for various situations, including forgiveness.
- c. Under the LOM, the priests offered the sacrifices (under the patriarchal system it was usually the patriarch). There were different instructions depending on who the various sacrifices were for. One worthy of note. If a sacrifice was for a group – the priest would kill the animal. If it was for an individual, he would put his hand on the animal and kill it and THEN the priest would offer it. Also, it was to be of HIS stock. This is significant when we think about sin offerings. The one GUILTY had to make the sacrifice.
- d. Leviticus 1-7 records 5 different types of sacrifices they were to offer. Each sacrifice was for a different purpose and involved different types of animals depending on the circumstance. We will not take the time to describe each sacrifice here, but I will mention the 5 different sacrifices and what they were about.
 - i. **The burnt offering** (Lev. 1, 6:8-13) – It was the most thorough and most ancient. It was a voluntary (freewill) offering. Other than the skin, the entire animal was burned up and its ashes taken out in the morning. This was the basic sacrifice to God. Its purpose was to declare total dedication to God.
 - ii. **The grain offering** (Lev. 2, 6:14-23) – was an offering of flour and unleavened cakes mixed with oil. It was the only bloodless offering, but it typically accompanied other offerings. A portion was burned with other offerings and the rest given to the priest to eat. NOTE: Numbers 15 notes that these offerings were accompanied with a drink (wine) offering as well.
 - iii. **The peace offering** (Lev. 3, 7:11-21). This offering was intended to declare that all was well between God and the one offering the gift. It was a thanksgiving offering, sometimes called a “fellowship offering”. It’s name is derived from the Hebrew word for “peace” (a derivative of Shalom). The animal could be a bull, cow, sheep or goat.
 - iv. **The sin offering** (Lev. 4, 6:24-30). Obviously, this is the offering to be made if one sins. OF note is that it is for the one who sins “unintentionally”. The offering depended upon whom the guilt applied to – a priest, the whole congregation, a ruler or an individual. The

greater the party, the greater the sacrifice. It was an act of faith that God would forgive them. For the congregation or the priest – a bull was required. For a leader it was a young bull. For the common person – a female goat or lamb. The “party” or its representative was required to lay their hands on the animal and kill it (accepting their “guilt”). NOTE: This was not intended for INTENTIONAL sin. If you study the LOM, there is NO sacrifice for intentional sins. That does not mean God would not forgive such, but it is a serious thing to think about – requiring total FAITH in Him as they repented.

- v. **The trespass offering** (Lev. 5:1- 6:7, 7:1-10). This is a special guilt offering. 3 examples are given in the text – 1) a person hears something he should say and doesn’t say it (e.g., letting the guilty “get away” with something); 2) He touches an unclean thing, or 3) he swears and doesn’t keep his promise. This sacrifice requires confession, restitution and an offering. This is about making right a wrong.
- vi. **Further instructions are given** for each type of offering involving the responsibility of the priests in the offerings (6:8-7:21).
- vii. **One final observation** - they are also commanded to not eat blood or fat (Lev. 7:22-27).
- viii. There are other instructions given about sacrifices but in these we can see their significance to the children of Israel.

III. Applications for today

- a. NOTE: The term “priest” is never used in the NT of a minister in the church. We need to be careful to use Bible names – e.g., Matthew 23:6-11. We need to ensure that our language is CLEAR! “Pastor” for the preacher, the “clergy/laity” system that is NOT found in the NT, “reverend” as a title, etc.
- b. We are the priesthood of God and all individually priests – 1 Peter 2:5, 9, Revelation 1:6, 5:10, etc.
 - i. We approach God directly – Romans 5:2, Ephesians 2:18
 - ii. We offer spiritual sacrifices – Philippians 4:18, etc.
 - iii. We proclaim His marvelous light – 1 Peter 2:9, 12
 - iv. We worship God -
- c. We offer sacrifices to God – Romans 12:1-2 – our bodies are a living sacrifice; Hebrews 13:15-16
- d. Jesus is our High Priest – Hebrews 4:14-16. Much of the rest of Hebrews develops how He is our High Priest.
- e. Even in this we need to honor God’s pattern wherever He has established such. Recall how everything Israel did was to be “according to the pattern” (Exodus 25:9, 40). Colossians 3:17 calls for us to “do all in the name of the Lord.”

The priesthood and sacrifices had clear meaning. We have hope because of the ultimate sacrifice of our Lord Jesus for us. As a part of His “priesthood”, what are you willing to offer to Him? Think about it!