**The Aaronic Priesthood**

**By James M. Ates**

The next significant priesthood in the Bible is found in Exodus. First, God brings the descendants of Israel (Jacob) out of Egypt through the Red Sea on dry ground, baptizing them in the sea and in the cloud. Then God leads them to Sinai, the mountain of God, where He made known unto them his will. Notice Exodus 19:3-6 "And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, thus shalt thou say unto the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle's wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests,

and an holy nation..."

Here we see how God called unto himself the whole nation to do two things:

1. Obey my voice indeed.

2. Keep my covenant.

Then you shall be:

1. A peculiar treasure.

2. A kingdom of priests

3. A holy nation.

We know that the nation of Israel did not do as God commanded but were constantly backsliding and going after idolatry etc. Therefore, God in his sovereignty and grace chose the family of Aaron to be priests unto him over the nation of Israel. We marvel at the sovereign acts of God in choosing Aaron — for we know that Aaron was not only involved in the sin of golden calf worship, but that he himself fashioned it right at the foot of Mt. Sinai. (Exodus

32:3-4)

God chose Aaron to be the high priest, and his sons as priests. Therefore it is called the Aaronic priesthood. Hebrews 5:4 tells us that Aaron was called of God. We also notice the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16, and Moses' response in verse 5. "And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the Lord will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him."

Notice the "Lord will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him; even him whom he hath chosen". The rod of Aaron was laid before the Lord with all the rods of the princes of Israel in Numbers 17:8. Aaron's rod "budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds." Hence, Aaron was affirmed the chosen high priest unto God over the nation of Israel. Everything we find in or relating to Aaron, as with all the tabernacle furniture, and sacrifices, is a type and shadow of Jesus Christ. For the purpose of our subject at hand, we will focus on Aaron alone as high priest.

First, let us briefly examine the garments to be worn by Aaron. The garments are described in Exodus 28. These holy garments are for "glory and for beauty." The parts of the garments we notice first are the linen breeches, coat and belt, and mitre (bonnet). They were all made of fine twined linen. These white garments represented purity and righteousness.

The next article of clothing, Aaron's robe, is described in the following quotes: "The robe worn by the priest was a long garment called `The robe of the ephod' because the ephod was worn over it...The garment was seamless and was woven entirely of blue thread."

"Around the neck of this garment was a linen corslet [similar to a coat of mail] which

made it impossible to rend, for the rending of it was forbidden. Lev 10:6" "The hem of the

robe was adorned with seventy-two golden bells and seventy-two pomegranates woven of blue, purple, and scarlet material."

"The blue, purple, and the scarlet which are blended in this fruit upon breaking prophesied of the bruising, the crushing of Christ. Also, in the pomegranate there is a multitude of seeds which signifies fruitfulness. The bell, which was of gold, had a tongue in it. This tells of testimony (tongue); Divine testimony (gold)."

"The ephod which was worn over the robe "was a short, close fitting coat worn around the body under the arms and having straps over the shoulders to keep it in place. The ephod ended at the waist in an artistically woven band or girdle. To indicate the intimate connection between the high priest and the sanctuary, the ephod was made of the same material as the curtain and the veil of the tabernacle. In addition, gold threads were woven into the material as a symbol of the royalty of God and of the high priest's position as the spiritual head of the community."

Two onyx stones with six tribes engraved in each served as buttons for the shoulder straps to hold the ephod on. The front of the breastplate was adorned with twelve various stones, each engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Judah. This breastplate was fastened to the ephod and held secure. This represents the priest bearing the burden of the people on his heart. "The high priest was supposed to intercede constantly for his people.

"The breastplate was called the 'breastplate of judgment' because it contained the Urim and the Thummim, by means of which the high priest was to seek the judgment of God on questions affecting the welfare of the nation."

There was a plate of pure gold "two fingers in depth and extended across the forehead of the high priest. The inscription, HOLY TO THE LORD, not only proclaimed the spiritual ideal of which the sanctuary was a concrete emblem; it also marked the dedication of the high priest to the service of God, and crystallized the aim and purpose of his service. He was to remember always that he was holy to the Lord and that he bore the iniquity of the people of Israel."

After the priest was clothed in his garments of glory and beauty he had to be consecrated for service.

Exodus 29 gives instructions for the consecration for service. They were to bring a bullock and two rams — unleavened bread, and cakes unleavened tempered with oil, and wafers unleavened anointed with oil. Then Aaron was washed at the door of the tabernacle. "Now they are to be baptized for the consecration. The baptism was performed in the court of the sanctuary, and the priest's entire body had to be immersed in water." After the garments were put upon Aaron, he was anointed. "The oil had to cover the priest from the top of his head to the bottom of his toes —but because the garments were anointed and miraculously protected by the Holy Spirit, they never got stained. The anointing oil made the garments holy; and unless the high priest had on the anointed garment, he himself was not under the anointing of the Holy Spirit." The bullock was brought before the tent of meeting and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bullock. "By laying their hands upon the bullock, the priest signified that their own sin, transgression, and iniquity were passing to the bullock which was the sin offering." After the sin offering (bullock) was finished the first ram was brought and offered as a burnt offering. Sin is dealt with and the priest is now in communion with God. Now the second ram is brought, Exodus 29:19 "And you shall take the other ram; and Aaron and his sons shall lay

their hands upon the head of the ram.”

"This is the consecration sacrifice, and everything that preceded it has been preparing the priest for this rite of induction. They've been cleansed of their sins; they're in close communion with God. Now they will be inducted into his service."

The blood of this ram was to be put on the right ear, right thumb and great toe of the right foot. Then the blood was sprinkled on the altar and round about it. (Exodus 29:20)

Since we are focusing on Aaron the high priest; notice that the oil of anointing was applied to him before the blood was applied. On the other hand (his sons) had the blood applied before they were anointed. With these sacrifices completed Israel had a high priest to mediate for them, and one to offer gifts and sacrifices. The high priest could now enter into the holy place and approach the golden altar of incense. He could intercede in the Holiest of Holies on the Day of Atonement, with incense and blood to atone for the nation.

We will turn our attention now to the work and ministry of the high priest. Of the many duties and services performed, officiating on the Day of Atonement was of the greatest significance. For the purpose of this writing we will condense the activities of this day to the briefest and simplest form possible. The Day of Atonement had on an average day (not a Sabbath) some fifteen sacrifices to be offered. The high priest officiated alone on this day, especially in the Holy place and the Holiest of Holies.

This day started with the morning burnt offering and ended with the evening burnt offering. Between these two burnt offerings were all the activities and offerings concerning the Day of Atonement. The high priest put off his garments of "glory and beauty" and was clothed only in white linen. There is a common misconception which is important to correct here. Some do not understand that the high priest is ministering in white linen garments. He does not enter into the most holy place in his garments of "glory and beauty". It is quiet — there are no bells ringing for they are not on the garments he is wearing.

During this time he could not touch or be touched by flesh. This linen represented purity, holiness or righteousness. After his first trip with incense and the blood of the bullock into the Holiest of Holies, he then returned with the blood of the goat to atone for the house of God and for the people. Notice, in the days of the tabernacle in the wilderness, when the priest entered the Holiest of Holies, there was the Ark of the Covenant with the mercy seat and the cheribums coming up out of it on either end, covering the ark. Between "...the cheribums was the visible presence of Jehovah in the cloud of the Shekinah." 31 In Herod's temple there was neither the Shekinah nor even the ark with its covering of mercy seat and cheribums. In this temple the high priest burned incense and sprinkled blood on and before a large stone called the foundation stone (the stone upon which the ark had

rested).

After leaving the most holy place for the last time on this day, the high priest (still wearing

the linen garments) came back out and laid his hands on the scape goat. He confessed the sins

of the people thereon and sent it away. The high priest now enters the holy place, removes the white linen garment and leaves them there—never to be worn again. He is then clothed in his holy garments of "glory and beauty". The bells begin ringing and the people know their priest is alive and ministering for them as he offers the burnt offering at the end of the day. This has been a brief summary but it is sufficient enough for our purposes.

The Aaronic priesthood and ceremonial law were good, given and ordained of God. It was the will and purpose of God for its time. This law was imparted in order to hold sin at bay. It was there to cover sin, and roll it ahead year by year; a shadow of something better to come.

Although the Aaronic priesthood stood and mediated for some fifteen or sixteen hundred years, this priesthood was over the nation of Israel, and was a shadow of forgiveness, justification, and right standing with God. It could never accomplish this, only point towards it. The Aaronic priesthood and ceremonial laws were never intended to be permanent. The continual repeating of the sacrifices and the replacing of high priest by reason of death all spoke of an incomplete and non-permanent system. The Aaronic priesthood was to be passed by genealogy down to the descendants of Aaron. But it had become polluted by the time of John the Baptist and Christ, and it remained so even to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Alfred Edersheim said "The first procurator whom Tiberius appointed over Judaea, changed the occupancy of the high priesthood four times, till he found in Caiaphas a sufficiently submissive instrument of Roman tyranny..."

"Such, then, was the political condition of the land, when John appeared to preach the near advent of a kingdom with which Israel associated all that was happy and glorious, even beyond the dreams of the religious enthusiast. And equally loud was the call for help in reference to those who held chief spiritual rule over the people. St. Luke significantly joins together, as the highest religious authority in the land, the names of Annas and Caiaphas. The former had been appointed by Quirinius. After holding the Pontificate for nine years, he was deposed, and succeeded by others, of whom the fourth was his son in law Caiaphas."

We now see that in the days of Christ, the men filling the office of the high priest office were not qualified. I believe there are a number of things mentioned above which are significant, and we will consider them as we begin to observe the next priesthood mentioned in the Scripture.

The above article, “The Aaronic Priesthood,” is the second chapter from the book, We Have a Great High Priest by James M. Ates.

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