

## Exodus 29:1-46

### Introduction

This morning, we come to Exodus chapter twenty-nine – a chapter whose significance and importance is likely more easily missed than any other chapter in Exodus.

We've seen the Tabernacle with its rooms, and courtyard, and furniture all carefully described. And in connection with all this, we've learned the concept of sacred, or holy, space." There's the "Most Holy Place" (literally, the "holy of holies") containing the Ark of the Covenant, there's the "Holy Place" containing the table, the lampstand, and the altar of incense, and then there's the tabernacle as a whole (including the outer court), which is also called the "holy place" ("sanctuary").

When we think of holiness, we often think of moral purity and righteousness. We might say that a devout person who faithfully seeks the Lord and obeys His commandments is a holy person. That's true as far as it goes, but it's still missing the bigger picture. It's not really what holiness **IS**. How can a **place** be holy? How can there be holy **things**? To answer that question, we have to think about God's holiness.

God's holiness is His "**otherness**." God is other than, and separate from, and apart from everything outside of Himself. God is the infinite, self-sufficient Creator, while all else besides Him is finite, dependent creation. *This* is what the Bible means by God's holiness.

- Psalm 111:9 — He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. **Holy and awesome is his name!**
- Isaiah 57:15 — Thus says the One who is **high and lifted up**, who **inhabits eternity**, whose **name is Holy**: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Now, God was holy *before* there was anything else for Him to be distinct from, or other than, or separate from. So God's holiness isn't just who He is in comparison with us. In the end, God's holiness is simply His **greatness**. In the end, God's holiness is the sum total of all the perfections of His being – of who He is. And, so, we can say that God's *glory* is "simply" the radiance and the splendor of His holiness.

Now, if this is what God's holiness is, then how can we say that a place is holy? A place is holy in so far as it's set apart only to **God's** use or service – to the use and service of the God who **IS holy**. When we think like this, we can also see how special *times* can be holy.

- Exodus 31:14–15 — You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death... the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD.

The seventh day was holy in so far as it was set apart from all secular and common use or pursuits and set apart *to* only **God's** use and service – the God who **IS holy**. If there are holy places, and holy times, there can also be holy people.

- Isaiah 13:3 — I myself have commanded my consecrated [holy] ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones.

How can the pagan Persians be described as “holy”? Well, the God who is holy has set the Persians apart for His own special use – to accomplish *His* sovereign purpose; therefore, they have become, in a certain sense, “holy.”

- Jeremiah 1:5 — Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you [I made you holy]; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

Jeremiah was holy even from before his birth because he was set apart before his birth to the use and service of the God who **IS holy** – the God who is in every way “other than,” “apart from,” and “above and beyond” in all of His infinite perfections and glory.

Are we *beginning* to get the picture? There is only *one* who *is* holy because there's only one who is the Creator. Everything else can only be holiness by **association**. So think about this: Any *place* becomes holy automatically, by the simple fact of **God's** presence there.

- Exodus 3:5 (cf. Josh. 5:15) Then [the Lord] said [to Moses], “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

The ground has become holy because it's in the immediate vicinity of the God who is holy. It's the ground on which the holy God is standing in the midst of the burning bush.

- Joshua 5:15 — The commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.”
- 2 Peter 1:18 — We ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

The mountain becomes the *holy* mountain as soon as it becomes the place where the radiance and glory of God's holiness is revealed.

Now, it's one thing for a *place* to become holy automatically because of its connection with the presence of God; it's quite another thing for a *person* to become holy automatically because he has in some way come into contact with the holiness of God. If I set foot inside the Holy Place, or touch any of the most holy pieces of furniture, then I also become holy – and this is not at all a good thing. Once I've become holy through contact with holy things or holy places, I can't just go back to “common,” everyday life. That's out of the question. And yet neither can I continue on living in the presence of the God who is other than, and apart from, and above and beyond me – especially in His *moral* perfections, as opposed to my moral imperfection. So, if I can no longer simply go back to the secular and the common, and yet neither can I simply continue on in the presence of God, then what does my “holiness”—what does my consecration—mean? It's

obvious, isn't it? It means that my life is forfeit. I must die. This helps us to understand a passage like this one in Ezekiel:

- Ezekiel 44:19 (cf. 46:20) — When [the priests] go out into the outer court to the people, they shall put off the garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers. And they shall put on other garments, **lest they transmit holiness to the people** with their garments.

Any holiness “contagiously” transferred by **contact**—is, by default, **deadly**. Now the point, here, isn't the magical properties of “holy” objects. The point, here, isn't magic at all. The point, here, is God's loving purpose to teach His people the lesson of **HIS** holiness for *their* welfare and good. After all, it's only as they truly come to understand **HIS** holiness that they can truly come to understand their own calling:

- Exodus 19:5–6 — If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

If Israel will obey God's voice and keep His covenant, then they will be a nation set apart from the surrounding nations – a nation set apart in every way to the use and service of the God who **IS holy**, and who is to dwell in their midst.

It sounds good, doesn't it? But how is it really, practically, possible? This holiness of the people can only be holiness by association. This holiness of the people *has* to be all tied up with their **fellowship** with God at His tent – with the people's **worship** of God at His “sanctuary” – His “holy **place**.” And yet, to automatically become holy by contagious contact with other holy places and things is always, by default, deadly. How, then, can the people ever truly be God's holy people? How can any people ever be set apart to the exclusive use and service of the holy God?

The answer to this all-important question is all tied up with the priesthood. The priests embody and represent the people; and so it's **in and through** the priests, and *their* service in God's holy place, among God's holy things, that **all** the people become **holy** – set apart to the exclusive use and service of the God who **IS holy**.

But you see the obvious problem, don't you? All we've done is move things back one step. Now we have to ask: What about the priests? Won't the contagion of God's holiness be just as dangerous for them as for anyone else? How is it possible that *any* people could *ever* be called the **holy** people of the **holy** God? It's in Exodus 29 that God provides the solution to this all-consuming question. It's in Exodus 29 that God answers the question: What makes a priest a priest?

**I. Exodus 29:1a** — Now this is what you shall do to [Aaron and his sons] to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests.

The Hebrew word for the *noun* “holy,” or “holiness,” is “*qodes*.” The Hebrew word for “holy,” as an *adjective*, is “*qados*.” The Hebrew word for the *verb* “consecrate,” or “make holy,” is “*qadas*.” We’ll find this verb, “*qadas*” (make holy) no less than ten times in this chapter, the first of which is right here in verse one. We could translate like this: “Now this is what you shall do to Aaron and his sons **to make them holy**, that they may serve me as priests.”

Aaron and his sons, representing the people, are to become holy not first of all by contagious contact with holy places and holy things (that would be deadly). Instead, they are to become holy ***through a very purposeful and careful process of being made holy*** – of being **consecrated** (*qadas*) to the exclusive use and service of the **holy God**, in His **holy dwelling**, among His **holy things**. *That’s* what this chapter is all about. If we never understand all the details of this chapter, it’s enough for us to understand **why** what’s happening here is all of the utmost, absolute importance.

**II. Exodus 29:1b–3** — Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil. You shall make them of fine wheat flour. You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams.

Already, there’s a gravity and seriousness to this occasion. The instructions are explicit, even down to bringing the bread, and cakes, and wafers in a basket.

But in the midst of the formality, we have to assume a deep, deep joy here, as well. After all, the purpose of all these things is in some way to **consecrate** Aaron and his sons, that they might serve as priests of the **holy God** – so that in and through their service in God’s **holy tent**, the whole people of Israel might also be **holy**, set apart to **God’s** exclusive **use** and **service**.

**III. Exodus 29:4** — You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water.

This washing of Aaron and his sons isn’t the same as just anyone else taking a bath. Notice *where* they are to be washed: just outside the entrance to God’s house. In other words: They are to be washed *in* God’s presence, but not yet so *near* to His presence that they become holy by contagious contact. This ceremonial washing in God’s presence is an outward picture of their being consecrated—of their being made holy—so they can serve as priests in God’s holy presence. After the washing comes clothing:

**IV. Exodus 29:5–6, 8-9a** — Then you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban... Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them.

This clothing of Aaron and his sons is certainly not the same as just anyone else getting dressed. Once again, look where they’re being clothed! – At the entrance of God’s tent. They’re being clothed *in* God’s presence, but not yet so *near* to His presence that they become holy by

contagious contact. And, of course, these aren't your ordinary, everyday clothes, as we've seen over the last several weeks. When the High Priest's clothes were introduced in chapter twenty-eight, this is what read:

- Exodus 28:3 (cf. 28:41) — You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him [**to make him holy; qadas**] for my priesthood.

This ceremonial "clothing" in ceremonial clothes is another outward picture of Aaron and his sons being made holy—so they can serve as priests in God's holy place, among God's holy things, in God's holy presence.

After the washing and clothing comes the anointing:

**V. Exodus 29:7** — You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him.

So far, the *sons* of Aaron have also been washed and clothed. But when it comes to the anointing, this is only for Aaron, the High Priest. We can see in chapter thirty that even the anointing oil has its own special story.

- Exodus 30:22–33 (cf. 40:9-15) — The LORD said to Moses, "You shall make... a **sacred [qodes]** anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a **holy [qodes]** anointing oil. With it... you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and **consecrate [qadas]** them, that they may serve me as priests. And you shall say to the people of Israel, 'This shall be my **holy [qodes]** anointing oil throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on the body of an ordinary person, and you shall make no other like it in composition. It is **holy [qodes]**, and it shall be **holy [qodes]** to you.'"

This anointing with holy oil is *another* outward picture of Aaron being made holy—so he can serve as High Priest in God's **holy place**, among God's **holy things**, in God's **holy presence**.

We see the solemn weight and gravity of this anointing, but the psalmist also celebrates the beauty, and the power, and the joy of this anointing in Psalm 133:

- Psalm 133:1–3 — Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

The Psalmist is rejoicing in the wonder and beauty of Aaron's anointing. Why? Because the anointing of the High Priest is the key to his *own* status as a holy member of a holy people, set apart to the exclusive use and service of the God who **IS holy**.

And so after the washing, and the clothing, and the anointing, we come to the triumphant pronouncement at the end of verse nine:

**VI. Exodus 29:9b** — And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

Oh, how solemn and how joyful these words must be! And yet the consecration of Aaron and his sons is still not complete. What about the bull, and the two rams, and the bread, and the cakes and wafers? So now we read in verses 10-14:

**VII. Exodus 29:10–14** — Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. Then you shall kill the bull before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall take part of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar. And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar. But the flesh of the bull and its skin and its dung you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.

The purpose of this sin offering is the same as that of any other, and yet its significance, here, on this occasion, is not the same as at any other time. Before Aaron and his sons can be fully consecrated to the priesthood, any sinful defilement attaching to them must be atoned for and forgiven. This is what's pictured by their laying their hands on the head of the bull. *In the same way*, before Aaron and his sons can be fully consecrated to the priesthood, any pollution of the holy altar by their defilement must also be remedied and cleansed. That's the reason for taking part of the blood of the bull and putting it on the horns of the altar. (cf. Lev. 8:15)

So now that atonement has been made both for Aaron and his sons and for the altar, we're ready for the next step. After the sin offering comes the burnt offering.

**VIII. Exodus 29:15–18** — Then you shall take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, and you shall kill the ram and shall take its blood and throw it against the sides of the altar. Then you shall cut the ram into pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head, and burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD.

The purpose of this burnt offering is the same as that of any other, and yet its significance, here, on this occasion, is once again *not* the same as at any other time. As the whole ram is burned up on the altar, we see the smoke rises as a pleasing aroma to the Lord – a symbol of the offering up of Aaron and his sons to the service of God, and of God's willingness to receive their service. Only now, after the sin offering and after the burnt offering, are we ready for the offering that's completely unique and special to this occasion.

**IX. Exodus 29:19–21a** — You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar. Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons' garments with him.

Only one other time is the blood of the sacrifice ever said to be applied to the person who offers it, and that's when a leper comes to the priest for his cleansing. (cf. Lev. 14:14) So also, here, the blood of the ram of ordination is applied to the right ear, the right thumb, and the right big toe, symbolizing the cleansing and the purifying of the **whole** person. And then, some of this blood is even taken from the altar where it was sprinkled, mixed with the holy anointing oil, and then sprinkled on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons' garments with him. And what is the **purpose** of all this ceremony? It's **THIS**:

**X. Exodus 29:21b** — He and his garments shall be made holy [*qadas*],\* and his sons and his sons' garments with him.

Are you seeing God's **solution** to our problem? Aaron and his sons are not to become holy automatically by contagious contact with holy places and holy things – else they would die. Instead, they are to be *made* holy through this special ceremony of *consecration* so that they might serve in God's holy place, among God's holy things, in the presence of the God who **IS holy**.

We go on to read in verses 22-28:

**XI. Exodus 29:22–28** — You shall also take the fat from the ram and the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh (**for it is a ram of ordination**), and one loaf of bread and one cake of bread made with oil, and one wafer out of the basket of unleavened bread **that is before the LORD**. You shall put all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and wave them for a wave offering before the LORD. Then you shall take them from their hands and burn them on the altar on top of the burnt offering, as a **pleasing aroma before the LORD**. It is a food offering to the LORD. You shall take the breast of **the ram of Aaron's ordination** and wave it for a wave offering before the LORD, and it shall be your portion. And you shall **consecrate** [*qadas*] the breast of the wave offering that is waved and the thigh of the priests' portion that is contributed from the ram of ordination, from what was Aaron's and his sons'. It shall be for Aaron and his sons as a perpetual due from the people of Israel, for it is a contribution. It shall be a contribution from the people of Israel from their peace offerings, their contribution to the LORD.

In the midst of even more solemn ritual and ceremony, one part might especially jump out. The breast and the right thigh of all the people's peace offerings, after being symbolically waved before the Lord and offered up **to Him as His food**, is then to be set aside for **the priests as their food!** – For the priests **to eat!** Here is the **miracle** of consecration – of the *making holy* of Aaron and his sons. The food of Yahweh's holy offerings is now consecrated (*qadas*) and set apart **as the food** of Yahweh's holy priests.

Maybe now, we will have learned how to read to the end of the chapter with a true sense of awe:

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\* Cf. HCSB (“become”)

**XII. Exodus 29:29–46**— The **holy [qodes]** garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them. The son who succeeds him as priest, who comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the **Holy Place [qodes]**, shall wear them seven days.

You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh in a **holy place [qodes]**. And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket in the entrance of the tent of meeting. They shall eat those things with which atonement was made at their ordination and **consecration [qadas]**, but an outsider shall not eat of them, because they are **holy [qodes]**. And if any of the flesh for the ordination or of the bread remain until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is **holy [qodes]**.

Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Through seven days shall you ordain them, and every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement. Also you shall purify the altar, when you make atonement for it, and shall anoint it to **consecrate it [qadas]**. Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and **consecrate it [qadas]**, and the altar shall be **most holy [qodes qodes]**. Whatever touches the altar shall **become holy [qadas]**.

Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. And with the first lamb a tenth measure of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. There I will meet with **the people of Israel**, and it **shall be sanctified [qadas]** by my glory [by the splendor of my holiness]. **I will consecrate [qadas]** the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons **I will consecrate [qadas]** to serve me as priests. I will dwell among **the people of Israel** and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.

So the chapter ends almost exactly as it began. Only, at the end, we see clearly that the consecration of Aaron and his sons to serve as priests of the holy God is all for the sake of the whole people of Israel – that they, too, might be **holy**, set apart exclusively for the use and service of the God who *alone IS holy*.

### **Conclusion**

Qados... qodes... qadas. To be **holy**. The question I've been asking myself this week is this: Have I ever really understood the *miracle*, the joy, the privilege, and the responsibility of being **holy**?

The only kind of holiness you and I can ever have is holiness by association. But we know the problem. To become holy simply through contagious contact with the holy God can only, logically, require that we, who are sinners, should be put to death.

In the end, when the priesthood of Aaron and his sons had served its purpose and prepared the way, God **consecrated** His own Son and sent Him into the world to be our High Priest (cf. John 10:36; Heb. 5:5-6, 9-10; 7:20-21, 28). God did this so that in Him, *we* might become a holy priesthood – so that in Him, *we* might be set apart exclusively to **serve**, and to **minister**, and to **worship** always before Him – always in His holy presence. (cf. Rom. 12:1-2) The reformers called this wonderful miracle of God’s grace, the “**priesthood of all believers**.” It was *as our* great high priest that Jesus prayed:

➤ John 17:19 — For their sake I consecrate *myself*, that *they also may be consecrated* in truth.

And so Peter can write:

➤ 1 Peter 2:4–5 (cf. 2:9) — As you come to [Jesus], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, **to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

Paul writes “to those sanctified [made holy] in Christ Jesus, called to be saints [holy ones].” (1 Cor. 1:2)

We are holy — Why? Because we have been **consecrated** – set apart to the exclusive use and service of the God who **IS holy**.

➤ Hebrews 10:10 — By [God’s] will we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And so it’s this awesome miracle and privilege that prepares us to tremble and rejoice at these words:

➤ 2 Timothy 2:20–22 — Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

Prayer – Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated

“[Now] **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**” – Revelation 1:5–6