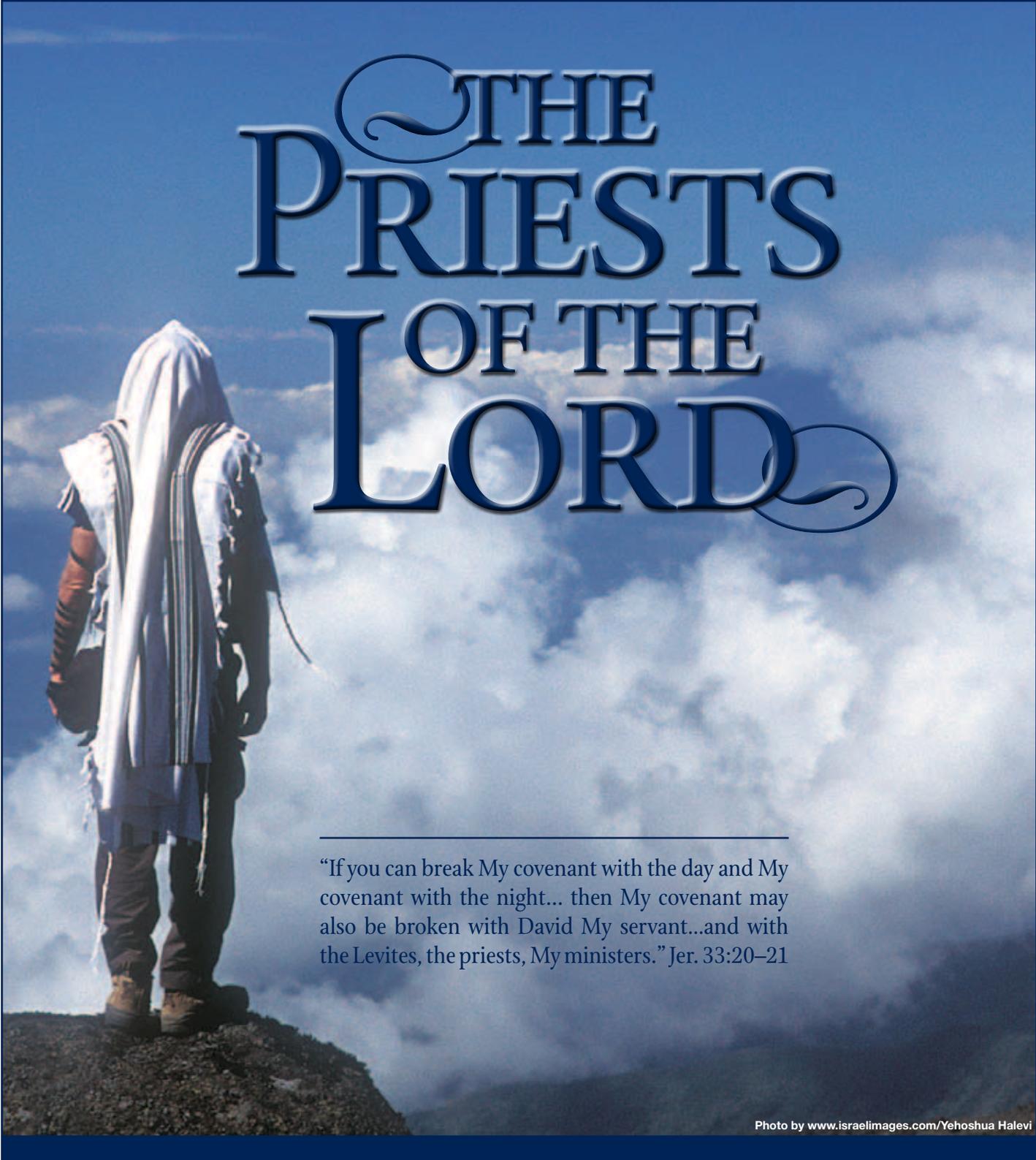


# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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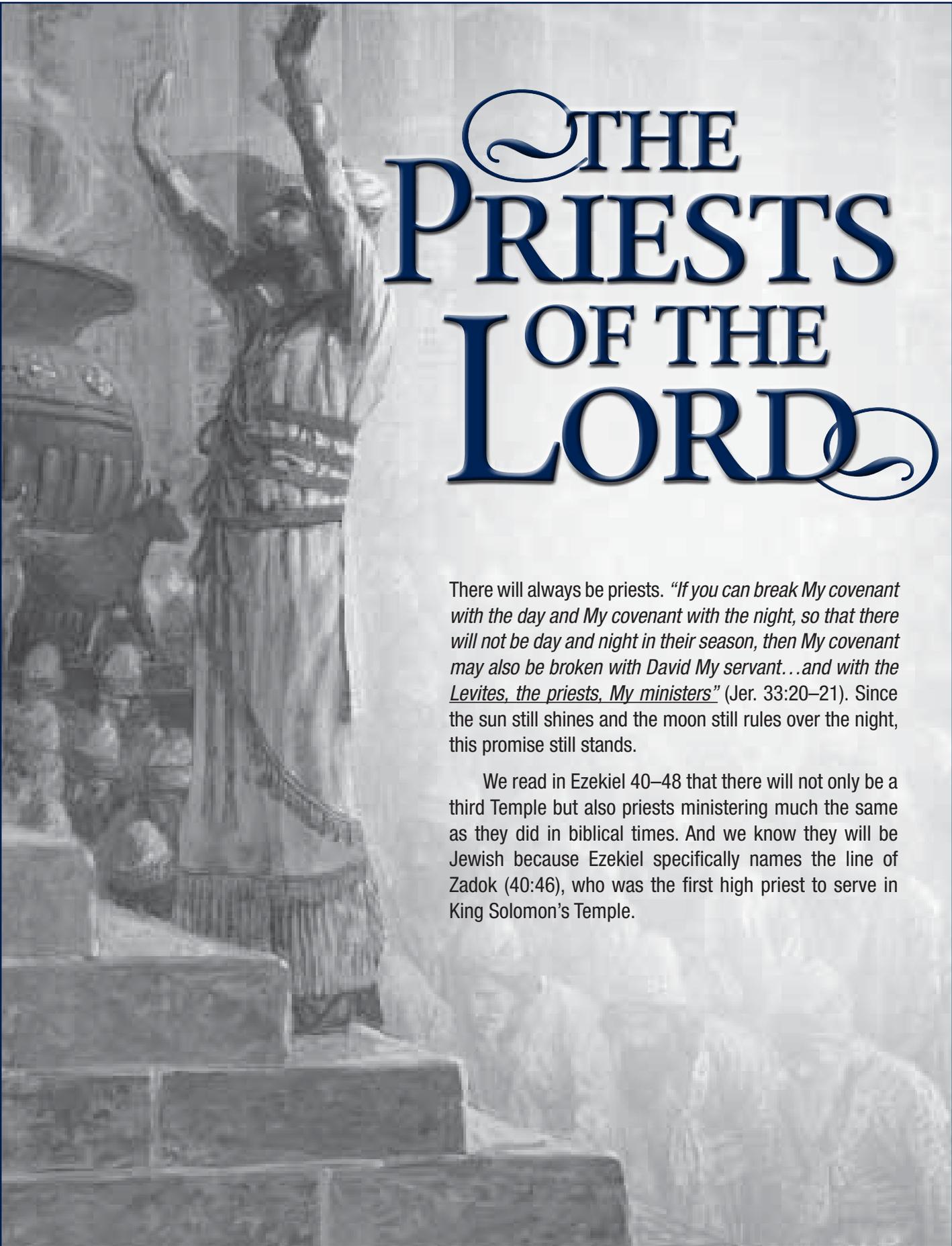


## THE PRIESTS OF THE LORD

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“If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night... then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant...and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers.” Jer. 33:20–21

Photo by [www.israelimages.com/](http://www.israelimages.com/)Yehoshua Halevi



# THE PRIESTS OF THE LORD

There will always be priests. *“If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant. . .and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers”* (Jer. 33:20–21). Since the sun still shines and the moon still rules over the night, this promise still stands.

We read in Ezekiel 40–48 that there will not only be a third Temple but also priests ministering much the same as they did in biblical times. And we know they will be Jewish because Ezekiel specifically names the line of Zadok (40:46), who was the first high priest to serve in King Solomon’s Temple.



## TODAY'S JEWISH PRIESTHOOD

Many of the religious among the Jewish people, especially in Israel, are quite serious about preparing the priesthood for the Third Temple. Anyone who has read the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) knows there's a lot of detail to learn for someone leading Temple worship, so the process has begun to both identify the priests and prepare them. In fact, in Israel, both priests and Levites are taking classes about the laws of Temple service, including animal sacrifices.

Since its founding in 1987, the Temple Institute in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City has been preparing Temple vessels as well as the priests' clothing according to Exodus 29. In 2006, they finished the High Priest's blue robe using dye from the Murex snail; the crown, ephod, and breastplate have also been completed.

In 2007, the priestly tribe of Levi had their first "family reunion" in 2,000 years in Jerusalem at the first international Cohen–Levi conference. The *kohanim* (priests) are the descendants of Aaron, who was of the tribe of Levi; the Levites were "given" to Aaron to assist him and his sons (Num. 18:6) but are sometimes referred to as priests as well. Originally, God intended to use the firstborn of each Israelite family as the nation's worship leaders, but because the tribe of Levi were the only ones who rallied on God's side after the golden calf incident, they were honored instead.

"About.com" reported that in 1997, Dr. Karl Skorecki found a particular genetic marker which can identify the *kohanim* through a blood test: "The chances of these

findings happening at random is greater than one in 10,000. Thus, recent scientific research has proven a clear genetic relationship among Kohanim and their direct lineage from a common ancestor."

Christians also have priests. While there are priests who serve in some Christian denominations, most evangelical denominations who do not have priests (but rather elders or pastors) subscribe to a doctrine called the "priesthood of the believer," based on 1 Peter 2:9: "*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...*" John says that Yeshua (Jesus) "*has made us kings and priests to His God and Father*" (Rev. 1:6). Instead of a special group serving as priests, *all* believers are seen as serving the Lord in a priestly role. This teaching letter is based on this view.

Christians, however, cannot possibly understand the full significance of their priestly role without first understanding the Jewish priesthood because it was this priesthood that Peter referenced. Peter's readers, who were living during the time of the Second Temple, didn't need an explanation of what it meant to be a priest. If we truly are priests, we should be just as diligent to understand our role as Jewish people are.

## THE PRIESTLY ROLE

We often think that the only thing the biblical priests did was to offer sacrifices, but when you read passages that detail their tasks, you will find that the job description included much more. A look at these tasks will give us clues to what God has asked of us.

In Israel, *kohanim* are taking classes about the laws of Temple service (left).

The golden menorah is one of the temple vessels prepared by the Temple Institute (right).





Photo by [www.israelimages.com/](http://www.israelimages.com/) Richard Nowitz

Thousands gather at the Western Wall during the feast days for the priestly blessing.

## Worship Leaders:

Priests were taught how to offer up the various sacrificial offerings. They knew all the “rules” of worship and made sure they were carefully followed, inspecting the animals for blemishes and determining what was acceptable and what was not. The Levites were musicians and singers. In today’s Christian terminology, we would call them worship leaders.

Though the people bought and brought their own sacrifices and even laid their hands on them, signifying that the animal was their substitute, the offerings were slain and placed on the altar by the priests. Since the destruction of the Temple, prayers have been substituted for sacrifices, based on Hosea 14:2: *“Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.’”*

Thus, today’s *kohanim* have a special place of honor in synagogue prayer services when they recite the Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24–26). They also do this at the Western Wall during the feast days where thousands gather to be blessed. They are the first to be called up to read the *Torah* and receive the “redemption of the firstborn” based on instructions in Numbers 3.

Priests are worshippers and those who bless. Yeshua said, *“...worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him”* (John 4:23). Paul instructs us how to do this: *“...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the*

*Lord”* (Col. 3:16). Following Jewish tradition, Christians often recite the Priestly Blessing when praying for friends, but the New Testament Scriptures tell us to also bless those who curse us (Matt. 5:44), persecute us (Rom. 12:14), or revile us (1 Cor. 4:12).

## Mediators:

After God judged Korah and 250 others for questioning Moses and Aaron’s leadership, the people blamed the two for killing the malcontents. God then sent a plague, but Aaron took a censer and *“stood between the dead and the living, so the plague was stopped”* (Num. 16:48). When an Israelite man defiantly took a Midianite woman after God had Moses hang other sexual offenders, Phinehas, Aaron’s grandson, boldly killed the couple with a javelin. Though 24,000 died in a plague, it was stopped by Phinehas’s action (Num. 25).

To mediate is “to occupy a middle position,” according to *Webster’s Dictionary*. This is the work of an intercessor who prays for the sake of another, but intercession can also be an act that holds back the wrath of God. James 5:19–20 instructs, *“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”* Galatians 6:1 says the same: *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness...”* It’s the work of a priest.

## Judges:

Priests were decision-makers and made judgments on all kinds of issues. They declared if a leper was clean or not, set the value of gifts given to the Lord (Lev. 27), and determined if an accusation against an adulteress was true or false (Num. 5). God said, "...by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled" (Deut. 21:5).

Some Christians believe we are not to make judgments based on Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that you be not judged." However, Yeshua is saying that we should not judge others hypocritically for things we ourselves are guilty of. He is not saying we should not make any judgments, but rather "judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Paul berates the church of Corinth because they were taking disagreements to a court of law instead of judging situations themselves (1 Cor. 6). New Testament priests of the Lord are to judge differently—with love, mercy, sincerity, compassion, and without partiality.

## Teachers:

The priests were carriers of the Word; only they could carry the Ark of the Covenant, in which the *Torah* was kept. Moses instructed the priests to read the *Torah* publicly every seven years on the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 31:9–11). When he blessed the tribes before his death, his words to Levi were, "They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel Your law" (Deut. 33:10).

After the Israelites returned to Israel from the Babylonian captivity, Ezra, the priest—along with other Levites—did this: "So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8). Malachi confirmed this: "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (2:7).

Paul told Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Timothy was one of Paul's disciples. Every disciple can and should be tutored to know how to "rightly divide" the Word.

Yet, many polls indicate that an alarming percentage of Christians don't even read the Bible regularly, much less know how to study it. With all the study tools we have, both online and in books (commen-

taries, atlases, dictionaries, etc.), too many in the Church remain ill equipped. Though we are not all called to be teachers, we are all called to go and make disciples, and part of that is teaching (Matt. 28:19–20). We should know the Word well enough to know when someone (even a teacher or preacher) is off course (see 2 Tim. 4:3–4) because those who aren't grounded in the truth can be easily deceived and even drawn into cultic groups.

## Healers:

Priests did not give out remedies for maladies or heal in some supernatural way, but when someone was diseased, they inspected the body and determined its severity, what kind of seclusion or separation was necessary for how long, and when they were well and considered clean. They "facilitated" the healing the Lord did.

Today, the medical profession admits that up to 80% of all disease is not caused by some physical malfunction but by a person's emotional or mental state. Deuteronomy 28 seems to concur, as the passage on curses includes a list of sicknesses that come from consequence of disobedience. The *Chumash* (English-Hebrew Jewish translation of Gen.–Deut.) states that leprosy was the result of the sin of slander (Miriam, Moses's sister, being an example, Num. 12). Many maladies, say today's medical experts, can be traced to stress, fear, and anxiety alone. Yet, the first place most of us go to for help is the doctor's office instead of the pastor's.



"So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading."

*Nehemiah 8:8*



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Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

*James 5:16*

James tells us where we're supposed to go: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up" (5:14–15a). Note that though the Church prays, it is still the Lord who heals.

Why is prayer the solution? Because often the cause of our sickness is spiritual (buried guilt, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, etc.). This does not mean there's not a place for doctors or medicine, but often if we deal with the inside cause first, the outside symptoms vanish. "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 1:2). When John prayed this prayer, he was linking the body and soul (the seat of our emotions) together because what affects the soul, affects the body.

Why don't we seek out an elder or a priest first? Maybe because the church we've turned to is powerless; we've been prayed for but not healed. Many churches don't believe in supernatural healing. Maybe we shy away from inner healing because it requires confession: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). We fear transparency and don't want to look at our wounded places within.

No matter our reasons, God has equipped the Church with gifts of healing, discernment, and prayer, so we need to be priests who can facilitate healing and lead others to the Lord who heals.

## Servants:

An article on [www.cohen-lev.org](http://www.cohen-lev.org) notes that the verb form for *cohen* (priest) is *lechahan*, (לכהן) which means "to serve." It is found in Exodus 28:1: "Now take Aaron your brother and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister [*lechahano*] (לכהנו) to Me as priest..." Many translations use the word "serve" instead of "minister." A further definition in the Hebrew can mean "one who undertakes any one's cause."

Priests undertake God's cause. That covers a lot of territory, and a lot of it is hands-on ministry. If done with God's love (*agape*), it is serving to the point of laying down one's life for another. Though He is the King of Kings, Yeshua came to serve not rule. When His disciples were arguing over who was the greatest of them, He said, "... he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves?...Yet I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:26–27).

Serving includes taking care of the sick (even cleaning up vomit), feeding (...and washing dishes!) and clothing the poor (especially widows and orphans), and visiting the imprisoned (Matt. 25:35–45). Lest we think this role too menial and somehow demeaning, we need to remember that the first "servants" the Church chose to "serve tables" and take care of the widows were men (not women) "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" and wisdom (Acts 6:2–6)—highly esteemed for their spiritual maturity.

## CONSECRATED FOR SERVICE

Notes from the *Chumash* explain that the Hebrew word for "consecration" (or inauguration) literally means to fill one's hands; otherwise, one is empty-handed. So what are a person's hands filled with? In the Jewish commentary on Leviticus, *Vayikra*, it is said the priests' hands were filled with holiness, so they were fit to handle holy things in a holy place. Several Scriptures suggest more.

Just before his death, Moses inaugurated Joshua: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him...And you shall give some of

*your authority to him...*" (Num. 27: 18, 20). In Deuteronomy 34:9, says Joshua was "full of the *spirit of wisdom*, for Moses had laid his hands on him..." The same idea of transference is seen when Elijah's mantle was passed down to Elisha: "Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of *your spirit* be upon me'" (2 Kings 2:9b). Elisha's ministry did indeed double, both in the number of years and the number of miracles.

God said to Moses, "And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests..." (Exod. 29:1). Another word for "hallow" is "sanctify." Jewish people in religious circles use the word often, but Christians don't. A word used more often in Christian circles would be "to dedicate." It means to be set apart for holy use.

We think of Church leaders being set apart because we ordain them and invest them with the authority of the Church, but non-clergy members have also been given authority. Yeshua gave all His followers authority over *all* the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19), including demons and the ability to cure diseases (Luke 9:1)! We just have to learn how to use it. There are many references in the New Testament that say we are sanctified (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:11). We are sanctified by the truth (John 17:19), by faith in Yeshua (Acts 26:18), and by His sacrifice for us (Heb. 10:10).

When we look at how Aaron and his sons were consecrated, we will see similarities in how God consecrates us for service today. It's described in Exodus 28–29 and Leviticus 8.

## Washed:

"Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water" (Lev. 8:6). According to *Vayikra*, this means they were totally immersed symbolizing "the idea that one should 'submerge' himself in God's holiness, to the exclusion of extraneous and contradictory influences." For the Christian, this is baptism, the beginning of the Christian testimony of a life changed by God. Every day the priests had to wash their hands and feet before entering the Holy Place, which reminded them that they had to be pure and holy in order to serve God. Christians are sanctified and cleansed "with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:16).

## Clothed:

Next, Moses dressed them. Exodus 28:2 says their garments were made "for glory and for beauty." (I wrote a teaching letter entitled "The Clothing of the Righteous," posted now on our Web site, which would be worth reviewing for more detail on the significance of our spiritual clothing.) The glory and beauty of the New Testament believer's clothing includes tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, and love (Col. 3:12–14) as well as a suit of armor (Eph. 6:13–17).

Around the High Priest's turban was tied a gold plate (crown) engraved with "Holiness to the Lord" (Exod. 28:36). I've thought if we had to place that on our head every day, we would probably behave very differently. However, Paul tells us that we are to present our bodies as holy to the Lord every day (Rom. 12:1).

## Anointed:

First they were anointed with oil, later with blood, and then a mixture of oil and blood. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* notes that the oil was "poured" only on Aaron's head, whereas it was only sprinkled on the others. The blood was applied to the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot. God wants to

"And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests..."

*Exodus 29:1*



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endow His servants' hearing, service, and walk (behavior) with His power.

One can be called into a role of ministry but not be anointed. It is possible for a servant of God to do all he does in the strength of his own flesh and not be led or empowered by the Holy Spirit. When we let the Holy Spirit direct all we do, we walk in His anointing. God gave the ancient priests very detailed instructions as to how Temple service was to be done; if they did it any other way, it could mean death. We have to minister God's way, or there is no anointing.

Christian pastor and author E. M. Bounds (1835–1913) wrote, "Without it, no true spiritual eternal results are accomplished" (see 1 Cor. 3:9–15). While anointing is part of the believing priest's heritage (1 John 2:27), we have to continually lay our flesh aside (because natural talent and charisma can produce much), understand that "our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5), and ask the Lord to empower/anoint all we do and say.

According to the difficulty of the assignment we've been given, receiving anointing for it may mean separating ourselves from all else for a season to seek the Lord. Aaron and his sons were told to stay within the Tabernacle compound for seven days before their inauguration was complete. There were also sacrifices offered: a sin offering acknowledged their need for forgiveness; the burnt offering was a picture of dedicating themselves totally to the Lord; and the peace offering was eaten in intimate fellowship with God. We still need to appropriate all three offerings spiritually on a daily basis.

During those seven days, they must have felt the heavy weight of the responsibility given them. That responsibility is no less today for us. Unfortunately, we tend to think these priestly duties are only for the clergy. No, my friend, just as the whole nation of Israel has been called to be a holy nation, all the members of the Church are also called to be a holy people. As people of the Book and of the one true God, we are called to be God's priests to a world without the Book.

By Charleeda Sprinkle, Assistant Editor

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