

Aaron and His Sons

“Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. ... He shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.”
—Exodus 4:14,16

AARON WAS THE BROTHER

of Moses. He was appointed by God to be a mouthpiece for Moses, as stated in our opening text. Because of this, his services and experiences for the most part parallel those of the great lawgiver, Moses. With the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, Israel's priesthood was instituted, and Aaron was appointed the first high priest, with his four sons serving as under priests.

Aaron was dependent upon his brother and received his authority from him. When Moses went up into Mount Sinai to receive the Law, Aaron was left on his own below, and displayed his weakness by yielding to the demands of the people to make the golden calf and worship it. He repented of this sin, and Moses gained forgiveness for him.—Exod. 32:21-24; Deut. 9:20

It was immediately following the making and worshiping of the golden calf that “Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD’S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.” (Exod. 32:26) Aaron was of the tribe of Levi, and later this entire tribe was substituted for the firstborn of all the families of Israel, to be the religious servants of the people.—Num. 3:41,45

The Aaronic family of the Levites was chosen as the one from which the priests of Israel would be taken, by succession from father to son, Aaron being the first high priest. God’s authorization for Moses’ appointment of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood is recorded in Exodus 28:1, which reads: “Take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.”

Aaron’s standing as high priest in Israel pointed forward to the position occupied by Jesus. Paul wrote that Jesus did not exalt himself to this high office, saying, “No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.” (Heb. 5:4,5) In God’s arrangement with Israel the principal work of a priest was to offer sacrifice and, upon the basis of his sacrificial service, to extend blessings to the people. Thus, Aaron’s position was emblematic of the manner in which, through Christ, the blessings which God promised through the “seed” of Abraham

will be extended to “all the families of the earth.”—Gen. 12:3; 22:18

The priests of Israel offered animals in sacrifice, but Jesus offered himself. With Aaron, both he and his sons served as priests. Similarly, both Jesus and his faithful followers lay down their lives in sacrifice—Jesus dying as the Redeemer of the world, and the church being “planted together in the likeness of his death,” their sacrifice being made acceptable through his. (Rom. 6:5) Peter wrote that the church is being built as a “spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up ... sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 2:5

AARON’S CONSECRATION

Not only were Aaron and his sons appointed by God to be Israel’s first high priest and under priests, but a rather elaborate service was prescribed for initiating them into office. This service is outlined in the 8th chapter of Leviticus and was repeated each time a new high priest was installed into office. On this occasion, Aaron was clothed in his garments of “glory and beauty,” while his sons were clothed in white linen robes, with bonnets on their heads, to indicate that they were not the “head” of the priesthood, but rather members of “his body.” (Exod. 28:1-43; Eph. 1:22,23) Aaron’s garments included a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, an embroidered coat, a headpiece called a mitre, and a girdle or waistband.—Exod. 28:4

In the service of consecration three animals were offered in sacrifice—a bullock for a sin offering, a ram for a burnt offering, and the ram of consecration. The bullock for the sin offering was offered first. (Lev. 8:14-17) Aaron and his sons laid their

hands on its head, indicating that it represented them collectively, as a sacrificing priesthood. This pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus and his body members, the church, prefiguring their experiences during the present Gospel Age.

This bullock was delivered up to Moses, who represented Israel's Law arrangement. To meet the demands of the Law the bullock had to be slain, "and he [Moses] slew it." Its blood was applied to the horns of the altar. Horns are often used in Scripture to represent power. Having the blood of the bullock applied to the horns of the altar points out that the power of Christ's sacrifice is represented in the blood, and that the church's sacrifice is acceptable to God only upon the basis of Jesus' shed blood. (I Pet. 1:1,2,18,19; I John 1:7) Moses also poured blood at the base of the altar, suggesting that through the power of the blood of Jesus, even the curse which is upon the earth because of sin will be removed as a result of his sacrificial offering.

Moses took the hide and flesh of the bullock and burnt them with fire outside the camp of Israel. This suggests that through the sacrificial work of Christ and his church, the world of mankind will ultimately be delivered, the value of this sacrifice being, of course, that of the perfect man, Christ Jesus. At the present time, however, this sacrifice is a vile thing in the eyes of the unbelieving world, but God accepts it and is pleased with the heart devotion which prompts it.

The ram for the burnt offering indicates the manner in which God accepts the sacrifices of Christ and his "body" members, the church. The ram was cut into pieces and laid on the altar—first the head, followed by the other body parts, and the fat. Thus

Jesus, the “Head” of the church, was first sacrificed, and throughout the Gospel Age the remaining members of the Christ class are being offered. (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18) God’s acceptance is shown by the fire which consumed the entire offering.—Lev. 8:18-21

The ram of consecration points forward to the effect of the spirit of consecration as manifested in Christ and the church. After slaying this ram, Moses took of the blood and put it upon Aaron and his sons separately, thus showing that our consecration and dedication to God are individual matters and place upon us a daily, personal responsibility.—vss. 22-29

Moses put the blood upon the tip of the right ear, upon the thumb of the right hand, and the great toe of the right foot. Thus, through our consecration we are given the hearing of faith and are enabled thereby to appreciate God’s promises as no others can. Our hands, too, are consecrated so that we do with our might what our hands find to do. Our feet are also consecrated so that we “walk in newness of life.”—Rom. 10:17; Eccles. 9:10; Rom. 6:4

The choice portions of the ram, its “inwards” and “fat,” represent our heart sentiments, zeal, and best efforts. These were taken in the hands of the priests and “waved”—passed to and fro before the Lord—representing the fact that our consecrated life is not given to the Lord merely for a moment, or a day, or a year. Rather, we are to keep our affections and efforts continually uplifted, never ceasing until our sacrifice is fully consumed and accepted by him.

Being installed in office, Aaron and his sons were then prepared to conduct the various religious services which God had outlined to Moses while on Mount Sinai. Just as their consecration pointed

forward to the dedication of the greater priesthood and the effect it would have upon the lives of Jesus and his followers, so the sacrificial services which they subsequently conducted were typical of the “better sacrifices” of this Gospel Age. (Heb. 9:23) This is particularly true of the services outlined in the 9th and 16th chapters of Leviticus.

Significant in connection with the service outlined in Leviticus 9:1-24 is the fact that after the work of sacrifice was over, Aaron, clothed in his garments of glory, came out and, along with Moses, blessed the people. Thus is shown that after the better sacrifices of this present Gospel Age have been completed, the glorified Christ, Head and body, will extend to all mankind those blessings of health and life which God promised would reach the people through the seed of Abraham.—Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:7,8

In the 16th chapter of Leviticus is recorded God’s instructions concerning Israel’s annual Day of Atonement, which was observed each year on the tenth day of the seventh month. On that day, two animals were sacrificed—a bullock and a goat—and each one was treated in the same way. We believe that in this picture the bullock represented Jesus, and the goat his body members, the church. The bullock was slain first. Aaron took burning coals from the brazen altar in the Court of the Tabernacle and put them on the golden altar in the Holy compartment of the Tabernacle. He then sprinkled the incense on the hot coals. The sweet perfume of this burning incense penetrated into the Most Holy of the Tabernacle, where the blood of the bullock was then sprinkled by Aaron upon and in front of the mercy seat. The fat of the bullock was burned on

the brazen altar, and its skin and flesh were taken and burned outside the camp of Israel.

The goat was sacrificed in the same way as the bullock. Paul identifies the followers of Jesus with this picture, when he writes, "Let us go forth unto him [Jesus] without the camp, bearing his reproach." Here the apostle shows the significance of the burning of the carcasses of the animals, as well as revealing that the church shares these sacrificial experiences with Jesus.—Heb. 13:11-13

The fact that the followers of Christ are shown to be fellow-sacrificers with him explains one of the critical aspects of the Christian life—that it is not merely a matter of accepting Christ and living righteously, but, as Paul explains, it is also "given in the behalf of Christ ... to suffer for his sake," as well as to "suffer with him." (Phil. 1:29; Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11,12) It also reveals one of the principal reasons that the blessings of life promised to come through the Messiah have not yet been offered to the world. This is because the foretold and prefigured work of sacrifice by Christ's body members is not yet finished.

THE REBELLION OF KORAH

In the 16th chapter of Numbers there is an account of a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, led by Korah. Korah challenged the right of Moses and Aaron to have full charge of the religious affairs of the nation. Moses properly left the matter in the hands of the Lord to decide. His decision was against Korah and his sympathizers, and an earthquake opened the ground under them, and they went down and were destroyed.—vss. 30-33

This, however, did not entirely put down the rebellion. The next day “the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD.” (vs. 41) The Lord then sent a plague upon the Israelites, and before it was stopped “fourteen thousand and seven hundred” of the people died. (vs. 49) The plague was halted when Aaron, obeying the instructions of Moses, ran among the people with a censer in which was fire and incense.

After this, Moses gave instructions that the heads of all the twelve tribes of the Israelites bring their rods, which denoted authority, to the Tabernacle. Aaron’s rod, for the tribe of Levi, was included. These rods were laid up in the tabernacle for a day, with the understanding that whichever rod budded would signify that the tribe for which this rod stood would be God’s choice for conducting the religious services devolving upon the priesthood.—Num. 17:1-7

The result was convincing. “It came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.” (vs. 8) This served to convince the Israelites that only the household of Aaron, assisted by the Levites, were to serve in the religious affairs of the nation.

While the tribe of Levi had previously been substituted for the firstborn of all Israel and the Aaronic family appointed for the priesthood, apparently the Israelites had not had this sufficiently impressed upon them. The rebellion of Korah, and the subsequent uprising of the people in sympathy with him, served a needed lesson. Now the Israelites

outside of the tribe of Levi who had not been obeying the Lord's instructions in connection with coming near to the Tabernacle were fearful lest they be punished by death, but they were spared.

The Lord said to Aaron, "Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood." (Num. 18:1) Apparently God was willing to forget the past, but he made it clear that from this time forward the priestly family was made wholly responsible for the proper carrying out of the Tabernacle services.—vss. 2-8

The Lord was very strict with everything pertaining to the Tabernacle and its services because it was designed as a pattern of better things to come. Concerning the Aaronic priesthood, Paul wrote, "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount."—Heb. 8:5

Two members of the priestly family of Aaron, his sons Nadab and Abihu, were slain when they offered "strange fire" before the Lord, after having been fully instructed in all the Tabernacle services. (Lev. 10:1,2; Num. 3:4; 26:61) The "strange fire" was kindled by themselves for use in their censers, instead of being taken from that which burned perpetually on the brazen altar. (Lev. 6:13) When these two sons of Aaron were slain, the remaining sons were forbidden to mourn, emphasizing that the Lord's decisions are always just and right.—Lev. 10:6

THE DEATH OF AARON

While Aaron was a faithful coworker with his brother, Moses, serving as his mouthpiece and later as high priest, he was not always of a strong character. As previously noted, he readily yielded to the clamor of the people in connection with the erection and worship of the golden calf. In another instance, when Moses lost his patience and failed to give glory to God for bringing water out of the rock, Aaron participated in the wrong with him.

This was at Kadesh, in the desert of Zin. The people were without water for themselves and for their animals, and, as was often their reaction, they complained to Moses. Then “Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the Tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.”—Num. 20:6-8

These instructions were clearly stated, and were applied to Aaron as well as to Moses, but they were not properly carried out. With the people gathered before the rock, Moses did not speak to the rock as instructed, but to the people. He said, “Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?” Then he smote the rock twice.—vss. 10,11

The words, “must we” fetch you water, indicates that Aaron was sympathetic to Moses’ viewpoint, and they both failed to give glory to the Lord. As a

result, God not only decreed that because of this Moses could not enter the land of Canaan, but extended the same punishment to Aaron. (Num. 20:12) Later, as the Israelites journeyed from Kadesh, in the desert of Zin, they “came unto Mount Hor. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah.” (vss. 22-24) Meribah means “strife,” and is a fitting name given by the Lord to the water that came out of the rock at Kadesh.

God then instructed Moses to take Aaron and his son Eleazar up into Mount Hor and place Aaron’s priestly garments upon Eleazar. This was done, and Aaron died in the mount, being, as the account says, “gathered unto his people.” (vss. 26-28) The trio went up into the mountain in the sight of all the people, and after Aaron’s death, only Moses and Eleazar returned, so it was at once evident that Aaron had died in the mountain.

“And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.” (vs. 29) Aaron’s death was a great loss to the Israelites, for he had served them from the time he and Moses first appeared before Pharaoh to demand their release from Egyptian bondage. He had shared with Moses the Israelites’ many accusations of evil intent in bringing them out of Egypt. The people evidently now realized that only by the mercy and power of God manifested through these two faithful servants were they kept

alive in the wilderness. It is no wonder that they mourned when he died. No doubt Moses shared in this mourning, for he had been more closely associated with his brother than any of the others. Aaron was by his side as a “mouth,” or spokesman, and was faithful in his service as high priest.

Now Aaron had been gathered to his fathers, and Moses knew that he also would soon die. The Lord had given him Aaron as a mouthpiece because he insisted that he was a man slow of speech. However, now that Aaron was no more with him, we find Moses in the last days of his life presenting to the children of Israel one of the most beautiful orations recorded in the Bible. It is recorded in the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy, of which we quote the first four verses: “Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

The Lord has limitless ways of giving his people the assistance they need. Aaron had been provided to make up for Moses’ slowness of speech, and without doubt he very capably filled the need. Now that he was gone, God gave eloquent utterance to Moses’ own tongue. Thus we see fulfilled in Aaron, in Moses, and in the daily experiences of our own lives as we endeavor to serve the Lord, the fact that he helps his people in all their needs and sustains them with his “abundant grace.”—II Cor. 4:15 ■