

THE PRIESTLY COVENANT – Session Five



Leader's Opening Remarks

Our covenant journey has taken us to Eden, where a broken promise activates the genesis of *redemption*. Next, we went by boat with Noah, where God re-created the world as the stage upon which the story of God's grace and redemption would play out. Then despite Abraham and Sarah's shortcomings, God used them to secure the innumerable seed of blessing that God had in store for the world. Last week, we made a turn as we Laws, or standards that God would set to define how one should live in relationship with God and with others.

Today, we will look again at Moses and this time, also his brother, Aaron, his nephew, Eleazar, and Eleazar's son, Phinehas. This journey will reveal the importance of succession. The priestly covenant is a covenant of peace. But it starts out as anything but peaceful...



Remember Moses' reluctance to do what God had for him? He stuttered, and insisted that he wasn't capable of doing all that God was calling him to do. So, God relented and gave Moses his brother, Aaron as an assurance that Moses had all that was needed to help free the Israelites from Pharaoh. A series of plagues and the death of Pharaoh's son later, and Moses, Aaron, and all of the Israelites, crossed the Red Sea, and the enemy was defeated! But it still was not peaceful!

The Israelites received the law, but the idolatry of Israel angered God and God denied the Israelites the peace that God had for them.

Instead, the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. It was every bit as harsh as it sounds. Not only did the Israelites contend with the grind of the reality of the wilderness wandering as a consequence for their idolatry, they did it in an environment of extremely Scarce Resources!

Quick Question

Have you ever had a time in your life where your resources were scarce? How did that effect your relationship with God? Others?

Toward the end of their 40 year wandering, once again God's peace for Isreal is side-stepped when the Israelites, Moses, and Aaron are involved in an incident at Meribah, the Hebrew word for "testing." The place bears that name after the event that took place there.

Remember the wilderness was a place of scarce resources! Even to this day, the region's main issue is the supply of water. It was the same back then – and the Israelites were grumbling! God asked Moses and Aaron to take the now-infamous staff of Moses and speak to a rock and told him that God would cause water to come from it to provide a life-giving drink for the grumbling Israelites.

Instead, Moses and Aaron spoke to the grumbling Israelites and struck the rock - not once, but twice, with the staff. That is not what God instructed them to do, but regardless of why they did it, which is a matter of much scholarly debate, God would ultimately judge that because of Moses' and Aaron's disobedience in leading the Israelites as God instructed, they would both pass, in death, before Israel reached and inherited the Land the God had promised them.

And while that is a sad for Moses and his brother, Aaron, we can trust, just as we've seen in each of the covenants, and in each of the stories we've looked at, that God is extending God's grace.

The pattern of God's promises CONTINUE...in a SUCCESSION...

Exodus 20:22-29, MSG

22 The People of Israel, the entire company, set out from Kadesh and traveled to Mount Hor.

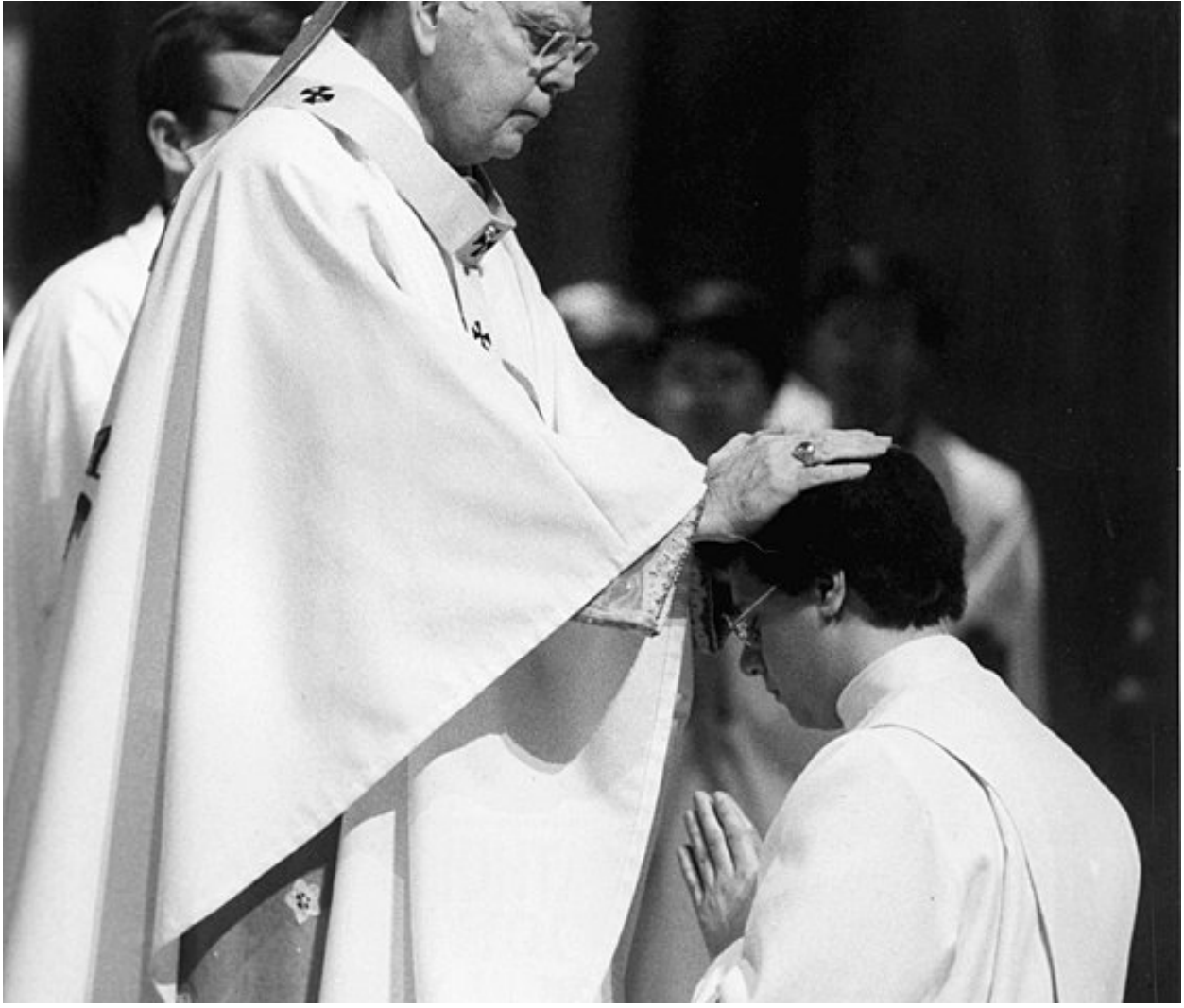
23-26 God said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor at the border of Edom, "It's time for Aaron to be gathered into the company of his ancestors. He will not enter the land I am giving to the People of Israel because you both rebelled against my orders at the Waters of Meribah. So take Aaron and his son Eleazar and lead them up Mount Hor. Remove Aaron's clothes from him and put them on his son Eleazar. Aaron will be gathered there; Aaron will die."

27-29 Moses obeyed God's command. They climbed Mount Hor as the whole congregation watched. Moses took off Aaron's clothes and put them on his son Eleazar. Aaron died on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. The whole

congregation, getting the news that Aaron had died, went into thirty days of mourning for him.

Israel was told by the king of Edom you may not go through our land, you must go around. They were still there at the edge of Edom, below the dead sea (the western border of Moab)... this is the place where God chose for Aaron's life to end. In the desert, far to the south. Aaron was 123 years old. Moses lived a little longer and died at 120 years old. These two men's lives were extended beyond the norm. The reason is found in God's care for Israel.

There was the office of priests, high priests – This is the office Aaron held. It is the office that God used to display God's care over the children of Israel. In this account, God continued the office so that Israel would remember that this office helped give them an awareness of the forgiveness of their sins, an ongoing grace that God was offering them. There it is!!! The GRACE!!!



Aaron's priesthood ended, but the priestly office continued... in a succession. God spoke to Moses and Aaron and told them the time had come to gather Aaron to his descendants (the great cloud of witnesses) and gave them instructions on passing down of the garments – this was a **HUGE** event in the life of the Children of Israel.

God did not just come to Moses and say to tell Aaron this and that; rather, God told Moses and Aaron. This is one of the ways that God showed Moses some mercy and grace. Moses and Aaron took Eleazar into their confidence. Eleazar was Aaron's son, who had been by his side for much of his long life. Eleazar was one the people God called to be responsible for the OT Tabernacle, the centralized, mobile place of worship.

Eleazar carried the oil for the lampstand, the sweet incense for the altar, the daily grain offering and the anointing oil, and also oversaw the carriage of the Ark of the Covenant, the table of showbread, the brazen altar and other tabernacle fittings which were transported by the Levites.

Here, the Israelites see something unprecedented happen - something so completely unusual! Aaron walked out of the Tabernacle, in his priestly garments, garments that largely would have been reserved for the inside of the tabernacle, and Aaron walked away from the

Tabernacle with Moses, his brother, by his side, and his son, Eleazar on his other side, and they go up the hill from the foot of the mountain, the robes of the high priest are leaving the Israelites, and they disappear! This is really unusual...

This performance of God's instructions was gloomy... Eleazar had a frightening assignment: with great sorrow in his heart for his father (who was very old), who he has worked with for many years... and who was always with him... Eleazar staring into the eyes of Moses, who was equally concerned and heartbroken. The two having always been together... through all the suffering, the plagues, the Pharoah, the Sea, 40 years in the wilderness with the belly-aching Israelites...

Eleazar would have looked into the eyes of Aaron, who saw the end... the of his days... of his limitations... facing the consequences of his disobedience by not going into Canaan. He died just outside of the promised land. Scripture stops right there... There are no details about his actual death...

That Aaron died on Mt Hor in the wilderness was significant. Aaron and Moses had momentarily lost sight of the children of Israel and looked upon the grumbling heathens and believed, for a brief moment, that God would not give them water. They didn't see them as God saw them. Therefore, neither was allowed to enter in the land of promise. Aaron didn't even see the land. (Moses did, at Mount Nebo) But Aaron's death was a reprimand that God placed on them. The sin that they committed at Mirabum was the cause. Moses and Aaron saw the chosen people of God, who being imperfect, committed sins, all of them. But only seeing them in their sin and not seeing them as justified by God was a problem. This happens nowadays, too.

Quick Question:

Have you ever been so preoccupied by the sins of others that you forgot that ALL people are God's people?

This story challenges us to see others as God sees them, with the eyes of Christ, who takes on the sins of all, before, during, and after, as a mind-boggling extension of God's grace and continuing care.

WE and THE ISRAELITES learn from this text about the seriousness of sin through this incident. Aaron was the high priest – whose office was about the promise of peace and care for God's people; Eleazar became the high priest – a continuum of the promised grace and care of God.

But, they are human; weak; to DUST returning (remember Ash Wednesday?) How much value do their bodies have? How much value do ours have?

God graciously extended Aaron's life for the sake of Israel. God continued the office of the high priest to display God's care over the children of Israel. God continued the office of the high priest so that Israel would remember their need for forgiveness of their sins. And, it didn't stop with Eleazar, either. Eleazar would have a son, Phinehas.

Ultimately, the pattern of sin didn't stop with Israel. It hasn't stopped with us, either. But that has not stopped God from providing grace and care for God's family.

The sinners keep on sinning. It gets even worse! But, God continued to call imperfect human priests in their midst to continue to perform the functions of the priestly office... To give the people a sense of the office of High priest... Eleazar's would be the High Priest for 20 years, then his son Phinehas took over...

Numbers 25: 10-13, MSG

¹⁰⁻¹³ God spoke to Moses: "Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has stopped my anger against the People of Israel. Because he was as zealous for my honor as I myself am, I didn't kill all the People of Israel in my zeal. So tell him that I am making a Covenant-of-Peace with him. He and his descendants are joined in a covenant of eternal

**priesthood, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement
for the People of Israel.”**

And all of this would lead to their recognition of the Messiah, THE HIGH
PRIEST, JESUS CHRIST. But Jesus would be different from the others:

He would carry on God’s perfect and sufficient grace and continuing
care for God’s family!!

Now, that continuation very much involves us, Christ’s raised body, His
Church, the one that He loved and formed. We are very much alive and
busy in building the Kingdom of God and co-laboring to transform the
world!