

Exod 05-02-20a

This is the 20th of February, 2005, Sunday morning. We continue our study in the Book of Exodus. We are looking at the closing chapters of that book.

We've seen the design and construction of the tabernacle, the appurtenances, furniture, design, materials. We are currently looking at the priesthood. We've looked at the vestures of the high priest, and we're going to be examining a little bit of the function of the priesthood this morning.

Let's take a moment as we approach the study of the Word of God to clear our minds, prepare our hearts, focus our attention, recognize the appropriate level of respect that should be accorded to God and His Word in a time such as this. Father, we are grateful for your many blessings, the ways that you provide for us, protect us, preserve us, meet our needs, bless us, grant to us a glimpse of coming glory through your Word, through the ministry of your Holy Spirit. We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ, who has made a way for us through the veil, has bridged the great gap that separated us in our sinfulness and our helplessness and hopelessness, and has made it possible for our lives to not only have meaning and purpose on this earth, but also in the ages to come.

We thank you for the country in which we live, for our leadership. We pray that you will continue to bless and to have your guiding hand upon our president and upon his staff and his advisors, those who honor you and recognize the necessity for honoring you as they fulfill their governmental functions. We thank you for those who serve in the military, who are in harm's way, who are in support roles, all those who guard our freedom and our way of life through their faithfulness in preserving for us the principles of divine establishment.

We thank you for those who are assembled here and all of those who study with us your Word. We pray that you will bless us. May God the Holy Spirit lead us into all truth and find our hearts teachable and receptive to the promises and principles and doctrines that we encounter as we study your Word this morning.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. First Scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Matthew chapter 23.

Matthew chapter 23. I don't know if it's because we are approaching the woe songs in Ezekiel that I find myself motivated to look at the New Testament woe songs here, but primarily there is a section in what Jesus says in Matthew 23 that pertains to our study of the Levitical priesthood. As usual, there is a convergence in our study in Ezekiel, our study in Hebrews, and our study in Exodus.

In Hebrews we are looking at priesthood from the standpoint of Melchizedek and the Lord Jesus as the high priest in that order. We find ourselves in Ezekiel looking at the failure of priesthood, looking at the consequences of apathy and indifference toward worship of God and

toward responsibility to fulfill His call. Here in our study of Exodus we are looking at the beginnings of Levitical priesthood and function and the symbolism that God built into that particular worship system.

Matthew chapter 23. Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples saying... Before I even begin, let me just point out that as we have noted previously in some of our gospel studies, it is always important to look at the audience. Scripture tells us who Jesus is talking to when He speaks His words.

When you encounter red letters in your red letter edition, look and see to whom is Jesus speaking. It will tell you when that information is pertinent and important. Sometimes it says Jesus took His disciples aside and said.

Or Jesus spoke to the multitudes and said. Or answering the scribes or Pharisees or rulers of the Jews or whatever. It will say who Jesus is talking to when He says what He says.

And it is important because if I am a captain in the Marine Corps, the things I say to my troops may differ from the things I say to my superiors which are going to differ from the things I say to my family when I come home. And if you do not distinguish the audience to whom remarks are addressed, you are going to make interpretive errors. Who is the addressed audience here? The multitudes and the disciples.

That is important because we know that Jesus is speaking in the age of Israel. He is in the age of the Old Testament. The law is still in effect.

It has not been superseded. It has not been set aside. It has not yet been fulfilled.

He is talking to a Jewish audience. He is not talking to Gentiles. He is not talking to the world at large.

He is not talking to Christians per se. He is talking to the people of Israel in the Old Testament age of Israel in Matthew chapter 23 which is our scripture reading. Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples.

Both the present audience and the future leaders and teachers of the New Testament church. They are both being addressed here. Saying, the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do. Kind of a startling statement for the Lord Jesus to make, isn't it? Knowing what we know about the scribes and the Pharisees. Teaching his doctrines, the traditions of men and so on.

Yet Jesus says, they sit in Moses' seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do. But do not do according to their works.

For they say and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on men's shoulders. But they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues.

Greetings in the marketplace. And to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi. Or in Hebrew, Ravi, Ravi.

Or Rav. Even today if you read priestly chatter and commentary and so on. Websites, I was looking at some Jewish websites earlier this week.

And you can click and get real audio. By the way, it's fascinating. If you want to hear the beauty of the Hebrew language.

I'm sure it's evolved and probably doesn't sound completely like Moses and David and Isaiah. And the early parties that spoke it as their native tongue. But you can go to Judaism 101 or another one of these websites.

And you'll find rabbis reading and speaking Jewish prayers and scriptures in real audio. And you can play it and just listen to the sound of that language. It's some of the most beautiful.

People say, oh, French sounds so great. French, well, don't even get me started on French. But Hebrew is a beautiful, beautiful language.

And as the cantors or as those who read and even sing the Hebrew language pronounce those syllables. There are two different pronunciation systems, by the way. There's Sephardic and there's Ashkenazi.

There's two different ways of speaking. It's kind of like sybilis versus shibilis. There are three or four different sounds in Hebrew that they treat differently.

Hard T versus an S and so on. But find one of those and just listen to it. You can read along the English translation as they speak.

Or even an English transliteration of the Hebrew. It's a beautiful, beautiful language. But you'll see that these are done and they'll say, well, this is Rav so-and-so.

Well, Rav is just the modern equivalent of Rabbi. And so they say, well, I'm Rabbi, you know, Joseph Ben Sternem or whoever he is. Well, what does Jesus say here? They love to be called by men Rabbi, Rabbi.

This is a title of respect and elevation. People used to call Jesus this when he was walking around. He said, they love this.

You, verse 8, do not be called Rabbi. For one, capital O, is your teacher, the Christ. And you are all brethren.

Do not call anyone on earth your father. How do the Catholics get past this verse? I have no

idea. You know, Father Pagliati or whoever he is down there.

Father MacDougall, Father this, Father that. Everybody's a father who's a priest in a Catholic church, right? Jesus specifically says, do not call anyone on earth your father. Now, obviously, your human father, I think, goes without saying.

You can't say, well, sorry, Dad can't call you father. What's he talking about here? Do not adopt a subservient, son-like attitude towards somebody who claims their position based on religion. Who claims their position based on some sort of spiritual superiority.

Paul himself is going to write to a church and say, you have many teachers, but you do not have many fathers in Christ. He's implying, I begot you in the Lord. Well, that is true, and it's a true illustration.

But they didn't say, oh, look, here comes Father Paul, did they? Because Jesus specifically prohibits it. How can you have a church that for 1,800 years flies in the face of a direct, simple, straightforward statement of the Lord? Well, there you go. Do not call anyone on earth your father, for one is your father, he who is in heaven.

And do not be called teachers. For one is your teacher, capital O, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant, and whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

I don't let anybody call me Pastor Sam. I don't let anybody call me Reverend Hull, based on this passage. I have no special status because my particular assignment in the body of Christ is to study and teach.

Do you go to the mess decks and address the lance corporal behind the stainless steel grill who's slinging the hash and dumping the mashed potatoes in your plate and say, oh, honorable mess man, oh, revered hash slinger. I mean, why would you do that? He has no standing. He's slinging hash.

He's just doing his job. And he gets no special title or special treatment for that. Well, it's a dangerous thing to set up a hierarchy.

It is a dangerous thing to elevate a person and say, you're my right pastor. You're my be-all and end-all. You're my spiritual source.

What you say goes. I listen to what you say with an uncritical ear because you're my father. You're my rabbi.

You're my go-to guy for things spiritual. Nonsense. Do not abdicate your responsibility to think for yourself.

Your teacher, just like my teacher, is Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus has given us the spirit to lead us into all truth. You have no need that any man teach you, John says.

You've got the spirit. I can put stuff on the tray, but it's up to you to look at it, to analyze it, to decide if it is nutritious for you. You do your own digestion.

You do your own feeding. The guy doesn't come out from behind the mess line there and come over to the table and start spoon-feeding the troops, does he? Oh, here, Sergeant Smith. Let me just spoon these spuds into your mouth here and make sure you eat them all and these canned peas that have been on the ship for like a month and some days open and unrefrigerated.

Let me just give you this stuff. We feed ourselves, don't we, all of us. God has facilitated so that you don't have to spend the time that I spend digging around, analyzing and cross-checking and finding references and so on.

I can bring things together and submit them for your, like Rod Serling, submitted for your approval. You look at it. You decide if it makes sense or not.

I am not always right. I am not always comprehensive. I miss something.

That's what I love about our breaks and our after-class discussions because all of you know I miss things that you think of that God brings to your mind. God completes the lessons that are insufficient and incomplete that I bring because they're going to be meaningful for you. The Word of God is living and powerful, and it pierces your soul and spirit perhaps in a slightly different way than it pierces mine.

It divides asunder and lays open thoughts and intents in your heart that may be different than mine. That's the power of the Word. It's not the power of Sam or the power of any other pastor or teacher that you want to name.

So Jesus says, don't miss the point here. Don't focus on the messenger instead of the message. Do not call anyone on earth your father, for one is your father, he who is in heaven.

What's the connection to our study in Exodus? What's going to be the natural instinct as soon as a priesthood is established? Oh, closer to God, allowed to walk within the holy precincts, wearing the special garments. He's got the in. And you start making an issue out of the priest or being a priest.

You look in the history of Israel and it's not long after the priesthood is established before people want in. Who says you can be the only priest? Why would that even be a motivation? Why would Nadab and Abihu? Why would Korah, Dathan and Abiram rebel and try to intrude themselves into the priesthood? They see it as a big advantage. They see it as up on a pedestal.

You're on a pedestal. I want to be up there. I'm going to knock you off and stand there myself.

And it's completely irrelevant. It's a wrong view to even think that. Do not be called teachers, for one is your teacher, the Christ.

He who is greatest among you shall be your servant. It ought to be viewed as a service, not as

an elevated, lofty sort of a calling. But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.

You neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. You not only refuse to walk through the gate, but you deflect anybody else that's trying to walk through the gate. Not only will you not walk the narrow road through the straight gate that leads to life, but you make sure that you are an impediment to anyone else who is trying to do that.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. What does it mean to devour widows' houses? Well, look at your average TV ministry. All you little widows, take a part of your social security check and send it to me.

Sow your seed into the kingdom. The windows of heaven are going to open. You're a partner.

If I hear the word partner one more time on Christian television, I'm going to throw a boot through the thing. You're a partner. A partner in what? A partner in crime, maybe.

You devour widows' houses. There are going to be many, many people in all different levels and strata of modern Christianity who are going to be held to account by God at the judgment for devouring widows' houses, taking people's money under false pretenses, pressuring people to give, misusing and twisting the scriptures, promising blessings that they have no authorization to promise, acting as though giving to them is giving to God. What hubris! Oh, you give to me, you've given it to God.

What are you saying about yourself? Oh yeah, me and God, we're like this. You give to me, it's just like giving to Him. Well, woe to you, Jesus says.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Do I need to point to modern Christianity in this regard? Travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and once he is won, you pervert him and prevent him from ever entering the kingdom, ever understanding what the plan of God is all about. It's just spiritual amway.

We live to reproduce. It's a pyramid scheme. I'm going to live off your efforts.

I'm going to be your mentor. You're going to go out, I'm going to push you and make you go knock on doors and evangelize. The whole point of being a Christian is lost in this.

Woe to you, blind guides who say, whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it. Splitting theological hairs, deciding whether or not someone is saved based on their perseverance, trying to decide whether or not atonement is limited or unlimited, straining at gnats and swallowing camels. Fools and blind, Jesus says.

Which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is obliged to perform his oath. Fools and blind, Jesus says. I wish all of us knew Greek well enough to hear the scathing indictment, the way this comes across, probably in the original Aramaic that Jesus spoke this in.

It's like saying, well, I can't even tell you what it's really like saying in English, but it's like you blithering idiots. It's got about that level of scorn in it. You blithering idiots.

You blithering nonsense spewers is a rough equivalent. Which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.

And he who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits on it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithe of mint and anise and come and have neglected the weightier matters of the law. This is the contents of the spice cabinet.

One-tenth of everything goes to God or 20% or 30%. So I've gone in and I'm dividing out my cinnamon and dividing out my bay leaves. I'm so scrupulous and so meticulous to keep the very microscopic letter of the law.

But you have left out, neglected the weightier matters, justice and mercy and faith. This is the standard by which we ought to be measured. You try applying to a Bible college or a seminary and fill out the application papers.

And when they want to find out whether or not you have any kind of spiritual life, you know the questions they're going to ask you? When's the last time you led someone to the Lord? What ministries have you been involved in recently? Where do you volunteer your time? You can't measure justice and mercy and faith. And to think that you can get some estimate of those by looking simply at when's the last time you gave somebody the gospel? Have you done street evangelism? Have you been on a mission trip? Are you related to or do you know any missionaries or any pastors? What is your connection to visible ministry? It's a crock. These you ought to have done without leaving the others undone.

And he says, fine, if you want to be scrupulous about keeping God's law, great. Knock yourself out. But it's meaningless unless it is grounded in respect and desire in the areas of justice and mercy and faith.

Blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. Of course, that's a pretty knee-slappingly funny comparison, isn't it? You can see a guy with a little cup of water, he's got a little dipper, and he sees a gnat straying around in there, and he's trying to get it out. Because honestly, there was a section of the traditional, the oral law, that said a gnat was an unclean animal, and if you drank water that contained a gnat, you were ceremonially unclean, you were ritually defiled.

If you were really doing the law right, you had to go through the whole thing to be purified if you swallowed a gnat. He says, you're straining at that gnat to be sure you're not defiled, and you're swallowing a camel. Well, a camel is one of the biggest unclean animals in the whole economy of ancient Israel.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. What's extortion? Is extortion something you do to yourself? It's something you do to other people, isn't it? I will stick my nose in your business. I believe I'm going to mentor you.

I'm going to disciple you. I'm going to witness to you. I'm going to drag you, kicking and screaming, not only into the kingdom of God, but into my church, into my spiritual life.

I'm going to ask you penetrating questions about your thought life, and hold you accountable, because accountability is the key. Does Jesus say anything in this sermon about accountability to men? He talks about justice and mercy and faith. Who can judge the level of justice and mercy in your soul? Who can analyze and sift out the faith that you exercise in your thought life day by day by day? Our accountability is to God, who will judge the secrets of men in the day that Christ is revealed, according to my gospel, Paul says, in the day when God will judge the secrets of men.

God judges. God looks at the thoughts and intents of the heart. Blind Pharisee, full of extortion and self-indulgence.

How many of us take our Christianity, looking around at our worldwide Christian brotherhood, how many of us are really using it as a means of self-indulgence? Well, this is my ticket to social life. This is my absolution. I feel guilty.

I can go sit in a building full of stained glass windows and come out feeling better. I can listen to choir music and I'm better. I've got a good place for my kids to go hang around with other kids.

I've got parents who also want their kids to hang around with kids. Somehow the kids in the church are better than the kids out in the world. It's self-indulgence, isn't it? I have a goal and I'm going to get my goal accomplished.

Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish that the outside of them may be clean also. Jesus said, you're silly to worry about washing up before you eat. Remember when the Pharisees said, Oh, your disciples are harvesting the grain and eating it with unwashed hands.

And Jesus said, Do you not know that it isn't what you take in that defiles you? It's what proceeds out of the heart. Well, how do you cleanse the heart? Mankind has found no way. You can't use therapy.

You can't use chemicals. You can't use support groups. You can't use psychology.

You can't use philosophy. Man has never found a way to cleanse the inside of the cup. There's only one way to get that done and that's to let God do it.

By the washing of water and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. David prays in Psalm 51, Create in me, O God, a new heart.

Renew a right spirit within me. That's the work of God. So when Jesus says, First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

What's he saying? You need to go to God and stop being self-indulgent. Stop operating in the realm of extortion. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.

You are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead bones and all uncleanness. Well, this doesn't really need explanation, does it? The outside of the coffin looks great, just don't open it. Even so, you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

These men who tithe their spice cabinet are called lawless by Jesus. Why? Because they have neglected the weightier matters of the law, the most important things, justice, mercy, and faith. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous and say, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

Therefore, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your father's guilt. And, of course, that's exactly what they're going to do.

They're going to murder not only the prophets, they're going to murder the Son of God Himself. Serpents, boo the vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her, how often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. This is the whole key, isn't it? Are we willing or not? It takes humility.

It takes controlling our strength and our hubris and our pride. It takes an acknowledgment that there is something greater and more important than ourselves. We have to get out of self-indulgence.

We have to get out of sharpshooting everybody around us and recognize that we need God's deliverance. We need God's cleansing. We need God's grace.

If we are not willing, we can never be gathered under those wings. We've memorized verses in Psalm 91, 1-4, about being under the protection of the Almighty, dwelling in His shadow, being sheltered under His wings. If we can't see that, if we can't do that, see, your house is left to you desolate.

For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Well, it's a powerful reminder, isn't it, that even as you look at God's provision, whether it is the priesthood or pastors and teachers, whether it is the logistical grace that comes to us so that we have finances, so that we have food, clothing, and shelter, whatever it may be, we have to remember the source and we have to honor the source, not the intermediate means. Well, back to Exodus.

In chapter 28, we've been looking at the priesthood, the initial commissioning, the dress for the high priest, and after talking about the ephod and the breastplate, which we looked at last time, he says in verse 31, you shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. There shall be an opening for his head in the middle of it, woven binding all around its opening like the opening of a coat of mail so that it does not tear. Upon its hem you make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet all around its hem, and bells of gold between them all around.

A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate upon the hem of the robe all around. It shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out that he may not die. I mentioned last time that these pomegranates I think are sort of serving the function of a striker or a clapper against the bells, but you'll notice it says that they, the pomegranates, should be blue, purple, and scarlet.

Well, if they were gold pomegranates, they couldn't very well be blue, purple, and scarlet, could they? The blue, purple, and scarlet material is always the linen or the thread of decoration, isn't it? So, if these are more or less pomegranate-shaped yarn decorations that are interspersed between the bells, they could possibly have little weights inside so that they are little muted clappers. This is not going to be a harsh sound made by these bells, is it? If it was gold next to gold, then these little bells would not make a very good sound. By the way, have you ever seen a gold bell? You know why they don't make bells out of gold, solid gold? They don't ring.

You make a bell out of gold, it won't ring. The metal is too dense, too soft, and you can't get a sound out of a gold bell. So, these are an alloy of gold because it says they're going to make a sound.

It's not going to go thunk, thunk. It's going to make this gentle, euphonious noise as the high priest moves. He's going to be accompanied by this musical, muted sound.

I think these pomegranates have got little weights inside. I think that they're like little pouches that gently knock against these bells and just make this musical sound as the priest moves. It's not a clanging or a jangling noise.

These gold bells, the more gold there is in them, the less harsh and ringing that noise is going to be. It's just going to be a gentle, musical note that is emitted by each one of these. It shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, that he may not die.

There is a gentle and musical announcement of the approach of the high priest so that God doesn't strike him dead. You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, holiness to the Lord. We're going to see something about that signet a little bit later in our study this morning.

You shall put on it a blue cord that it may be on the turban. It should be on the front of the turban. It should be on Aaron's forehead that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things with the children of Israel, hallowed in all their holy gifts.

Skillfully weave the tunic, make tunics for the sons, and that description pretty well completes the chapter. But we're going to look a little bit at the Levitical priesthood as it is outlined here and in Numbers and Leviticus. This, of course, is not the origination of the idea of priesthood.

There's been priesthood for a long time. It goes back into the days of the patriarchs. We know that Job offered sacrifices.

Job 1.5. This is well before the time of Moses wandering the wilderness. Job 1.5. When the days of feasting had run their course, Job would send and sanctify his children. He would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all.

For Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus Job did regularly. This is a priestly function, offering sacrifice on behalf of someone else.

First thing Noah did after he got out of the ark. What did he do? Genesis 8.20. Noah built an altar to the Lord, took every clean animal of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. That's why he took more than two clean animals.

Because it would have been kind of pointless to get them through the flood for 14 months and bring them out and sacrifice them and not have any more clean animals. So the two by two was the unclean animals, right? Then there were more of the clean. Abraham traveled through Canaan.

Every place he went he built an altar. Genesis 12.7 and 8. The Lord appeared to Abram and said to your descendants, I will give this land. So there Abram built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.

He moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. Same thing in Genesis 13.18 and 22.9 and more times when you see Abram building altars.

Isaac and Jacob did the same thing. Genesis 26.25. Isaac built an altar and called on the name of the Lord, pitched his tent there and Isaac's servants dug a well. Genesis 33.20 you have Jacob erecting an altar and calling it El Elohe Yisrael.

So why does the priesthood change when we get here to Leviticus? Initially it was not going to be an exclusive priesthood. What's the first mention of this that we see? You go back to Exodus chapter 19. The time around the giving of the Ten Commandments.

What does God say? Exodus 19.4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you, nation of Israel, will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you, nation of Israel, shall be a special treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine. You shall be to me, Exodus 19.6, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

These are the words which you shall speak, God says to Moses, to the children of Israel. You shall be a kingdom of priests. The original deal was everybody is a priest.

So what happened? Well, before Moses can even get back down the mountain, you have the golden calf. And because of that, they lose that opportunity. By the way, you can see them actually functioning in this universal priesthood in Exodus 24.4-5. When they approach Sinai, Moses wrote all the words of the Lord.

He rose early in the morning. He built an altar at the foot of the mountain. Twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Then he sent young men of the children of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. Now this is Exodus 24. We don't have Aaron and his sons operating in the priesthood yet, do we? These young men.

Moses just details some young men. He says, go offer sacrifices. You are a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

Knock yourselves out. Israel was to be a kingdom of priests. So God gave them this opportunity.

But, of course, they were supposed to. It was contingent. It was conditioned on what God said in 19.5. If you will indeed obey my voice, if you will indeed keep my covenant, you are a special treasure.

You are a kingdom of priests. You are a holy nation. Well, that didn't last a week, did it? Or it didn't last three months.

Therefore, it became necessary for God to institute a priesthood from among the people. A

smaller fraction serves as priests. Not even an entire tribe.

Within the tribe of Levi, it's restricted to the clan of Amram. And within the clan of Amram, it's restricted to the family of Aaron. And within the family of Aaron, it's going to be restricted ultimately to two of his four sons.

Pretty exclusive. Pretty small proportion. It would be interesting to go look up these census numbers and calculate the percentage in the nation of Israel at the time that that early census was taken that was actually priests compared to the totality of the nation.

Very small fraction. So, God says, take from among the children of Israel, this is Exodus 28, that he may minister to me as priest Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. That's 28-1 that we're just looking at.

So, you have the tribe of Levi functioning as priests and then a subset within that. Turn with me, just before we go to our break, to Numbers chapter 3. If you've got a piece of paper or something, you may want to keep it in Numbers because we're going to be looking at this in our second session. Numbers chapter 3, verse 5. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Bring the tribe of Levi near and present them before Aaron the priest that they may serve him.

And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting to do the work of the tabernacle. Also, they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting and to the needs of the children of Israel to do the work of the tabernacle. You shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons.

They are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel. So, you shall appoint Aaron and his sons and they shall attend to their priesthood. But the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.

Aaron and his sons are the priests. The rest of the Levites are their servants. And anybody else who tries to intrude himself into this is going to die.

That's what God says. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, verse 11 and 12, Now behold, I myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. This is the official, explicit, superseding of the family priesthood which devolved upon the firstborn in each generation by the Levitical priesthood.

Therefore, the Levites shall be mine, God says, because all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be mine.

I am the Lord. Remember how the Levites were a ransom? And when they ran out of Levites and still had more firstborn, they had to pay money? Because the Levites stand in for and take the place of the firstborn in Israel. And then from among the Levites, only Aaron and his sons will actually perform the priesthood.

Very exclusive, very limited amount. How many people in Israel are God's people? How many people in Israel represent the saved? Those who have been delivered from bondage, delivered from slavery in Egypt? Well, it's the whole crowd. But how many have the privilege of approaching God? Initially they all had it.

How did they lose that privilege? Disobedience. We have all been given... Go over and read Peter. We as believers... He quotes this very passage.

You are a nation of priests. You are a kingdom of priests in a holy nation. Peter applies that to the church.

Can we lose that opportunity the same way Israel did? We certainly can. How do we do it? What do we have for a scripture reading this morning? Woe to you if you observe the letter and miss the Spirit. If you are self-indulgent and not seeking to fulfill the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Well, we have much more to say about the priesthood. We'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll resume our look at the Levitical priesthood centered around Exodus 28.