

Numbers 8:5-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-8/numbers-85-7/>

In verses 5 – 22, the LORD described how Moses was to conduct the consecration (ordination) of the Levites into their service to the priests. It included inward and outward cleansing and a ceremony of commitment. Verses 5 – 8 describe outward cleansing. Verses 9 – 11 deal with inward cleansing. Verses 12 – 19 are concerned with the ceremony of commitment. Lastly, verses 20 – 22 speak of the obedience of the Israelites to the LORD’s instructions.

Before the Levites could assume their role as assisting the priests in the worship of the LORD, they needed to be cleansed. So, *the Lord spoke to Moses* (v. 5), telling him to *take the Levites from among the sons of Israel and cleanse them* (v. 6). The Hebrew word for *cleanse* (“tahir”) is used almost exclusively for ritual and moral purity. The idea here was that in order to serve the LORD, one had to be cleansed from all impurity, both external and internal.

There are other applications of consecration described in Scripture. At Mount Sinai, God prepared the people to be in His presence and hear from Him on the Mountain. He told Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments” (Exodus 19:10). Here in Numbers 8, the priests are being set aside to minister in the presence God, and also need to be cleansed.

Verse 7 lists what Moses needed *to do to them for their cleansing* (v. 7). First, he was instructed to *sprinkle purifying water on them*. The phrase “purifying water” is literally “water of sin” in the Hebrew text, and it referred to the purification from sin. Jewish tradition holds that this is the same water as the “water of purification” in Numbers 19:9. This water was mixed with the ashes of the red heifer sacrifice. The red heifer sacrifice was required to be done “outside the camp” (Numbers 19:3). The New Testament tells us that Jesus suffered “outside the gate” that He might “sanctify the people” (Hebrews 13:12). Thus the *purifying water* foreshadows Jesus.

Next, the Levites were to *use a razor over their whole body*. There is disagreement as to whether this meant that the Levites were to shave their whole bodies or simply trim their hair. It seems best to see this as shaving their bodies. To remove all hair was a symbol of a return to childlike innocence. Add to this the tendency of Semitic men to have beards and other body hair. So, to remove all bodily hair would be an act of extreme devotion to serving the LORD. Plus, hair tended to get dirty and needed to be washed often. To participate in this ceremonial removal of the hair would be to symbolically remove that which would attract physical impurity.

Finally, they were to *wash their clothes*. These were the priestly garments given to them in Leviticus 8:13, and being in the wilderness, they would have accumulated dust and dirt. Thus, their *clothes* needed to be cleansed as well.

Once these actions were taken, the Levites would *be clean* outwardly.

Biblical Text

⁵ Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ⁶ “Take the Levites from among the sons of Israel and cleanse them. ⁷ Thus you shall do to them, for their cleansing: *sprinkle* purifying water on them, and let them use a razor over their whole body and wash their clothes, and they will be clean.