

THE USE OF THE HEBREW WORD SAMAK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ORDINATION OF JOSHUA

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1. Introduction

FROM the very beginning of the church in the Old Testament (OT), there has been an *ordo*, or structure, based on a succession of leaderships. In Num 27:18-23, provision is made for a successor in the government: (1) By the prayer of Moses (v. 15-17). (2) By the appointment of God (v. 18, etc.). Moses seems to be the first person in the Scripture to appoint a successor, after he prays for a successor.

God, in answer to his prayer, appoints him a successor, even Joshua, who had long since signaled himself by his courage in fighting Amalek, his humility in ministering to Moses, and his faith and sincerity in witnessing against the report of the evil spies. This is the man whom God picks to succeed Moses: A man in whom is the Spirit, the Spirit of grace (he is a good man, fearing God and hating covetousness, and acting from principle), the spirit of government (he is fit to do the work and discharge the trusts of his place), a spirit of conduct and courage; and he had also the spirit of prophecy, for the Lord often spoke unto him, Jos 4:1; 6:2; 7:10.

Elisha was the successor of Elijah. From 1Kgs 19:19, Elijah makes his will, and leaves Elisha his heir, now anointing him to be prophet in his room, more than when he cast his mantle upon him. After the earthly ministry of Jesus, most of the original twelve disciples became the first generation of leaders in the church. They, along with Paul, were itinerant evangelists who selected others to be local pastors under their authority (see 1Cor 4:17, 1Thess 3:2). This selection process not only allowed for the succession of the next generation of church leaders, but it also served to legitimize the authority of the new leaders in the eyes of the Christian population. Thus it is the beginning of the rite of ordination.

With this background it is the goal of this paper to examine the use of the Hebrew word *samak* used in Num 27:23, which is translated to lean, lay, rest, support, put, and uphold.¹ Then, it will consider its use in light of the laying on of hands in the rite of ordination, which combines the three aspects, including: (a) blessing, (b) succession to office, and (c) authority to teach. As a general overview, this paper seeks to give the reader a bird's eye view of ordination for the purpose of generating discussion and guiding principles applicable to the issue of ordination.

"18 So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; 19 and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation; and commission him in their sight. 20 "And you shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey *him*. 21 "Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, *both* he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation." 22 And Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation. 23 Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses" (Numbers 27:18-23).

2. The General Use of the Hebrew Word *Samak*

The root in the other Semitic languages with meaning similar to that of the Biblical Hebrew. The Akkadian *samauku*, "to cover up,"² with the related forms *samku*, "cover up," *simku*, and *saumuktu* meaning "covering"³ exist.

The Hebrew word *samak* occurs 84 times in OT, 41 times of those in the *Qal*, which includes the active and the passive participles,

¹D. D. Wead, "ordination," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-1988), 2:611-612.

²F. Stolz, "סָמַךְ," *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1997), 2: 804-5.

³*Ibid*

6 in the *Niphal*, and 1 in the *Piel* forms. In each case the verbal elements means "to help, support," and either singular masculine, or in masculine plural. The meaning of the verb varies between "lean on" and "support." Furthermore, *samak* exhibits semantic variations extending from physical supporting or leaning to the abstract notion of helping and sustaining. The concrete meaning of *samak* includes:

- (i) supporting someone who falls (Ps 145:14);
- (ii) holding someone by the hand and to prevent a fall (Ps 37:24);
- (iii) Leaning against or on something; such as, pillars (Jug 16:29);
- (iv) relying on something (2Kgs 10:21; Isa 36:6).
- (v) laying of the hand on something (Lev 1:4).

The relationship between God and a person can be used with *samak* in various aspects:

- (i) God supports those who are falling, and raises up those are bowed down (Ps 145:14). The falling person does not perish, because YHWH steadies his hand (Ps 37:24).
- (ii) a more abstract sense of "helping" is meant when God helps (*'azar*) and supports the oppressed petitioners (Ps 54:6). The wicked will perish according to the Psalmist (Ps 37:10, 15, 17, 20) because YHWH upholds the righteous (Ps 37:17). *samak* with direct object can be expanded by a second object, with one object referring to the person who is supported, and the other substantively qualifying the manner of such support.
- (iii) *samak* can be used with God as the subject, *samak*, also refer to the deliverance that comes when a person's life is threatened by death. The Psalmist says if I sleep YHWH sustains me (Ps 3:6).

3. The Use of *Samak* With the Laying on of Hands

The Hebrew word which connotes rabbinic ordination is *samak*, which has to do with the laying on of hands. Interestingly, the same word root is used in connotation with laying hands upon an animal,

which is being brought for sacrifice. In the case of the sacrifice, a solemn and essential part of the ritual was the placing of the hand of the offerer upon the head of the animal.

The word *samak*, "put," means "to lean" with one's weight, an act by which the penitent sinner represented his utter dependence upon the substitute. As to the meaning of this, commentators, ancient and modern, understand that it signifies a symbolic transfer of his sins from the offerer to the victim, or the substitution of the victim to die in the sinner's place. "The laying of hands upon the victim's head is an ordinary rite by which the substitution and the transfer of sins are effected." "In every sacrifice there is the idea of substitution; the victim takes the place of the human sinner."¹

The first account of *samak* in the Bible is found in Num 27:18-23 where Moses appoints Joshua as his successor by laying hands upon him. Joshua, in turn, appointed his successor in this fashion and leaders of the people were so denoted for hundreds of years. It is interesting to realize that the word *samak* whenever it is used, is either used in the *Qal* perfect masculine, or in the *Niphal* perfect singular plural, or in the *Piel* imperfect masculine plural. Thus, "ordination should only fall upon men because of the masculinity use of the word [*samak*]"²

After the fall of the second temple in 70 CE, however, the emphasis of the role of the rabbi shifted from the sacrificial to the institutional, with various academies gaining reputations for the scholarship of those who taught and studied there. Although *samak* was officially prohibited in 135 CE, the tradition continued until 425 when it fell into disuse. After that, the term *samak* was still used but the laying on of hands as a sign of ordination was not performed.³

The gesture of laying on of hands accompanies various interpretations in OT. According to J. Licht and R. Rendtorff they may be classified as:

- (i) "*Transference of* Hypotheses: by means of this gesture, Moses transfers his authority to his successor, the priest transfers sins to the scapegoat, and the offerers transfer

¹The Jewish Encyclopedia, ed. Isidore Singer (1903), s.v. "Atonement, Day of" (p. 286).

²53, 2000 دللاد روصنه ا موعامتجلا او مينا سلا ائو حبللا و تاسار دلا ن ريع خامس تملگ م ادختس

³Bradshaw, Paul F., *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2010), 22.

thus to the sacrificed lamb.¹ According to B. Janowski and Rendtorff this hypotheses can be accepted only in cases such as scapegoat, but not in connection with sacrifice.

(ii) *"Identification of" Hypotheses*: during hand leaning a transference of the offerer's own person to the animal takes place.²

(iii) *"Modification of Representational" Hypotheses*: B. Janowski asserts "the essential element in cultic representation is not transference" but rather the representational aspects.

4. Ordination as a Blessing

The first Scriptural record of the imposition of hands can be found in Gen 48:14, which is a symbol of blessing. "Though not essential to the transmission of blessing, the act is not without an appropriate fitness as being a symbol of the invisible fact. Accordingly, it became the recognized mode of conveying spiritual powers, or gifts. This procedure was employed in the OT period for the dedication of Joshua (Num 27:18, 23; Deut 34:9), as in the time of the NT church for the ordination of officers (Acts 6:6; 8:17; 1Tim 4:14; 2Tim 1:6), and in the performance of many miracles (Mark 6:5; 8:23, 25; Acts 9:17; 19:6; 28:8)."³

Jacob, after kissing and embracing the two sons of Joseph: Manasseh and Ephraim. He [Jacob] asked Joseph to have the two sons "placed near his knees, which is a symbolic act of legitimatizing their status as sons; cf. 30:3; 50:23."⁴ Consequently, Joseph places Manasseh on the right and Ephraim on the left sides of Jacob assuming that Manasseh, the oldest son will be the recipient of the blessing of Jacob's right hand. However, Jacob crosses his hands so that his right hand rests on Ephraim (v. 14; cf. Num 27:18, 23). When

¹K. Elliger, *Leviticus*, Handbuch zum Alten Testament 4 (1966), 153.

²M. Noth, *Leviticus*, Old Testament Library, Eng. Trans. (1965), 22.

³"He Blessed Joseph" (Gen 48:16), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald), 1:477.

⁴Terence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Genesis to Leviticus* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 1994), 1:659.

Joseph sees this (v. 17), he interrupts the ritual, thinking that Jacob's failing sight did not distinguish between the older, the younger and attempted to switch his father's hands. But Jacob calmly insists that he is fully aware of his actions; further, he explains that both sons will become a great nation, however, Ephraim shall be greater, the father of a multitude of nations.

The story of Jacob placing his hands upon the two sons of Joseph sets the stage of the blessing the individual receives during the rite of laying on of hands. There are two blessings, which accompany the laying on of hands in this rite. These are:

- (i) Jacob blesses Joseph (v. 20), although it seems that only Manasseh and Ephraim are blessed. Nevertheless, from vv. 21-22 we learn that the reference to the father includes the sons (Deut 33:13-17; cf. Gen 49:22-26). Here, the old Patriarch, Jacob begins a threefold invocation, in liturgical language, with a structure similar to the Aaronic benediction in Num 6:24-26. The specific content of the blessing (v. 16) consists of:
 - a. Their families' being included with the ongoing traditions that include the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and
 - b. Their considerable growth as families, blessed by God with the power of life.
- (ii) The second blessing is found in v. 20, it seems complicated however, by the use of the singular "you." The first instance probably refers to the sons individually (cf. the use of plural and singular in Num 6:23-26), the second to the one being blessed. The sons' names can be invoked when Israel (the people, cf. 47:27) pronounces blessing on others: God bless you as he has blessed Ephraim and Manasseh with all, that is in terms of life, fertility, and well-being (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). What God has done to them will be an exemplary instance of divine blessing.

The blessings one received during the laying on of hands is compared to the priestly blessings found in Num 6:23-26. The Hebrew inscription: "the Lord bless you and keep you and be with you" was found on a jar at *Kuntillet 'Ajrud* in the upper Sinai, dating from the 8th cent. BCE. This inscription indicates the use of a blessing very similar to that of Num 5:24-26. The blessing is written on two silver amulets (an object believed to give magical powers

of protection against evil to the one who wears it) dating from the 7th cent. B.C. Such discoveries of amulets raise further questions of whether the priestly blessings was meant to function in association with the dead. Baruch Levine suggests that "the priestly blessing may have protected the dead on their way to Sheol"¹

The laying on of hands as a blessing has a threefold blessing: (a) the first emphasizes concrete gifts-blessing and security (guarding). (b) the second stresses the hope that God will be well pleased with the person, and (c) the third asserts that God will pay attention and thus provides fullness of life. Therefore, the threefold blessing provides a safeguard against defilement by the presence of divine power in the life of the recipient. It also concludes with a description of the ideal that God pays particular attention to persons, where blessing and security drive out the power of death, and where the achievement of wholeness and peace is possible (see Num. 5-6).

5. Ordination as a Succession to Office

5.1. Old Testament

In the 1st cent. CE, the apostles chose their co-workers and successors and consecrated them for service, based on OT precedents such as Joshua (Num 27:15-23) and David (1Sam 16:11-13). For instance, in the case of Joshua, Ellen G. White says: "Through the laying on of hands by Moses, accompanied by a most impressive charge, Joshua was solemnly set apart as the leader of Israel. He was also admitted to a present share in the government. The words of the Lord concerning Joshua came through Moses to the congregation, "He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him, after the judgment of Urim before the Lord. At his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation."²

The succession procedure included the laying on of hands, a visual representation of the transfer of power while Moses was still alive. "This action was to forestall any doubts as the legitimacy of the transfer of power among the people. This investiture of power

¹Baruch Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, AB 4A (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 236-244, esp.242-243.

²E.G.White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Pacific Press, 2002), 463.

was done under the most solemn and public of circumstances."¹ It was done before Eleazar and the whole congregation (v. 19). Moreover, the transfer was to be put into operation on a gradual but immediate basis. Some of Moses' authority was to be given to Joshua that the people might begin to obey him (see v. 20). The transition from the leadership of Moses to any successor would be difficult. Thus, the change would be made smoother by a gradual shift of power while Moses was still alive.

Therefore, Joshua was to stand before Eleazar the priest while Moses was still alive, that there would be no priestly objections either. Furthermore, Joshua was to go before the priest for consultation and to receive a divine oracle by the sacred lot, the Urim (Exod 28:30) before the Lord (v. 20). The Urim and the Thummim were apparently stones that the priest kept and used to determine a divine decision, a "yes" or "no." Joshua was to begin leading the movement of the congregation as well. The word *samak* "ordain" used suggests that Joshua as a leader would continue to provide guidance for Israel. Furthermore, "Joshua as a leader suggests continuity with the past and planning for the future. He has experience and is prepared to lead the people into the new land."²

5.1. New Testament

The selection of deacons (Acts 6:3-6), commissioning of missionaries such as Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2-3), and appointing of house church pastors (Acts 14:23), were all practical responses to the situations at hand, while at the same time were understood and recognized as God's choices, which was brought to light by the discernment of spiritual gifts. The prayer and the laying on of hands (2Tim 1:6, cf. Numb 8:10), the succeeding affirmed what God had already done, and even when there was an election (Acts 1:21-26), it was only meant to give God an opportunity to show which person was the divinely chosen one.³

¹Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1990), 2:946.

²W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *Leviticus-Numbers*, New International Biblical Commentary: Old Testament Series 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 285.

³Bradshaw, Paul F., *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo, 1990), 22.

Throughout the apostolic age the church's leadership structure only acknowledged a distinction between those who knew Jesus and those who did not (Acts 1:21-22). In a practical sense, the New Testament knows no technical distinction between the terms *presbyteros* (priest/elder) and *episcopos* (bishop/overseer). Even in the *Didache*, the terms appear to be interchangeable.¹

The apostles were invested with the authority of prophets, but because they were itinerant missionaries, they appointed resident pastors (variously called *prebyteroi* and *episcopoi*) to be the teachers and presiders in the local house churches. In many cases, the house church pastors were probably also the hosts and/or owners of the homes in which the assembly met. The deacons assisted these resident pastors in the liturgy of the Eucharist, including taking the Eucharistic elements to those who could not be present at the church meeting.²

While it could be argued that there has been a rite of ordination since the apostles laid hands on the newly chosen deacons in the book of Acts, ordination didn't become a true ritual until after Constantine legalized Christianity. Before the 4th cent. CE, only the *Apostolic Tradition* mentions an ordination ritual, and the sections in question are likely a later addition to the text.³

Constantine gave clergy certain secular rights and privileges, and especially in the case of bishops who were invested with the authority of civil magistrates, ordination began to take on some of the pomp and drama of certain Roman ceremonies, including royal coronation. Vesting became part of the ritual in some places, as clergy began to further distinguish themselves from laity by continuing to dress in older formal (secular) dress, which ultimately took on a sacred meaning analogous to the priestly dress of ancient Judaism.⁴

¹Didache 15. The date of the *Didache* is a matter of debate, but it is probably more or less contemporary with the gospel of Matthew

²Justin Martyr, *I Apology* 67.

³Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo, 1990), 3.

⁴Bradshaw, *Ordination*, 18. Cf. Exodus 28, 39.

7. Ordination as Authority to Teach

The Jewish education was religious education. There was no recognized office of teacher with a definite title. For the Jews, the real center of education was the home, and the responsibility of educating the child was laid on the parents (see Deut 4:9, 10; 6:7; 20-25:11:19; 32:46). Philo calls the synagogues during the time of the Exile "houses of instruction."¹ The prophets were recognized to be divinely inspired teachers, and by the spoken and written word they taught the Israelites God's will for them. Boys and only boys received a public education, and started school between the ages of 5 and 7. The school was usually attached to the synagogue, and was called "the House of the Book."² The teacher was highly esteemed in the Jewish society, because teachers were considered ordained of God; further, teaching was entirely oral and education was to every large extent memorization.

In the NT context, the word *didaskalos* is used in a general sense to refer to any teacher. The word is associated with men who have received especial charisma from the Holy Spirit to instruct the community in Christian truth (see. I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).

Also, from 1Tim 3:2, we discover that the gift of teaching was exclusively for the men in the church. The use of the Greek word for bishop is called *episkopos*, which served "more as a sort of chairman, or first among equals, he gradually assumed more and more authority over those associated with him in the administration of the affairs of the local church. The term *episkopos* thus came to designate a "bishop" as the presiding elder, and eventually, in the 2nd and 3rd cent. CE, as a sort of overlord in the church. Such an officer of the church in the early centuries is now commonly known as a monarchical bishop."³

In Acts 13:1, 2 it is revealed that the early leadership of the Antiochene church was furnished by men of the spiritual gifts, the *pneumatikoi*. It may have been that vigorous men, coming to leadership there later, hastened the decline of the power of the men of the gifts, who as a class fell under suspicion. If this kind of

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Day of Christ* (1876), 45.

² William Barclay, *Train Up a Child: Educational Ideas in the Ancient World* (London : [s.n.], 1959), 44.

³ "The Men of the Gifts" (Acts) *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Review and Herald, 1980), 6:26.

leadership developed, the episcopate might well have crystallized into a commanding ecclesiastical order by Ignatius' time.

For instance, a document produced sometime in the 2nd century, called Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Didache), affirms that the role of a bishop or an elder is given to men and not to women, the Didache says of the episcopate only: "Appoint for yourselves therefore bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not lovers of money, and true and approved; for unto you they also perform the service of the prophets and teachers Therefore despise them not; for they are your honourable men along with the prophets and teachers."¹

8. Conclusion

The Hebrew word *samak* is used in both feminine and masculine senses especially during animal sacrifices. However, whenever the word *samak* is used in connection with ordination, it is used in a masculine sense. This seems to suggest that ordination can be only and exclusively for malefactors, in other words, it excludes female factors.

We definitely need the role of women in the church in different capacities; such as, the Women's Ministry, at the Leadership role like that of Deborah, Ministers in their homes, personal evangelism, and even in public ministry. Concerning the ministry of the mothers at homes, Ellen G. White reminds the reader that "there is no greater ministry for the mother than to be a teacher at home. Molding her children's character is considered to be the highest level of evangelism."²

However, the leadership and authority is by virtue vested upon the man. From the use of the Hebrew word *samak*, it seems to suggest that this order cannot be changed. If *ordo*, or structure of

¹Lightfoot, J. B. and Harmer, J. R., *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan, 1891), 234.

²Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980). 233. Moreover, the same author admonishes mothers by calling their attention that this work of teaching their children at home is "dealing with developing minds and character, working not only for time but for eternity." Furthermore, if the mother stays at home to take care of her children, Ellen G. White says that the mother is "a home missionary.... her work is solemn and important one...the recording angel writes her name as one of the greatest missionaries in the world." (Ibid., 235).

leaderships changes, it would as Uriah Smith aptly states that such is "the usurping of authority over the man..."¹

As indicated above, whenever the word *samak* is used for ordination, it is used in masculine singular/plural and can be attributed exclusively for men. As also noted by the early Seventh-day Adventists pioneers that the issue of authority or rulership; such as, rulership over the husband in the family circle, not to be an elder, nor a pastor of a church. Thus, elders, church leaders, and pastors of the church are to be men.

¹Uriah Smith, "Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches," *Review and Herald* (June 26, 1866): 28. Ellet John Waggoner, was so specific about the leadership and authority of the man, says: "man is entitled to certain privileges which are not given to women; and he is subjected to some duties and burdens from which the woman is exempt. A woman may pray prophecy, exhort, and comfort the church, but she cannot occupy the position of a pastor or a ruling elder." See Ellet John Waggoner, *Woman Ministry* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1899), 38.