

# Foundations Course

## 9. THE LAYING ON OF HANDS A tool for ministry, blessing and inheritance

### Introduction

Throughout the scriptures the hand is significant. In the Old Testament it is seen as that part of the body which carries out a person's will. In the New Testament there are over forty references to touching with the hands.

God's 'hands' denote:

- power *Exodus 15:6*
- judgement *Exodus 9:3; Deuteronomy 2:15*
- provision *Psalms 145:16*
- deliverance *Exodus 13:3*
- security *John 10:28-29*

Hands denote a man's ability to work, fight enemies, bring gifts, forge friendship, bless, give, bring sacrifices to God.

Hands are lifted up in taking an oath, forging a covenant, praise, prayer, worship.

The laying on of hands was practised in both the Old and New Testament times. In both eras it was a spiritual transaction, used to impart blessing, inheritance, spiritual gifts, and set apart for ruling and ministry.

### Old Testament

The laying on of hands was an important precept in the Old Testament and was used in several ways:

1. Offering and identification

A person presenting a peace (or fellowship) offering, or a sin offering was to lay their hands upon the animal so that they identified themselves (or their family) with the animal being offered. *Leviticus 3:2; 1:4*

The unblemished animal paid the penalty (or atoned for) the sin of the person.  
(As Jesus did for us, once for all.)

Once a year the priest placed his hands on the scapegoat, who was to carry the burden of sin for all the people. *Leviticus 16:21*

2. Imparting authority and commissioning for leadership  
Moses commissioned Joshua and gave him authority to lead the nation of Israel.  
*Numbers 27:18-23*
3. Passing judgement  
Witnesses at the trial of a blasphemer placed their hands on the accused to confirm acceptance of the verdict. *Leviticus 24:13*  
God's judgement of Egypt is likened to his laying his hands upon them. *Exodus 7:4*
4. Imparting blessing  
Jacob laid his hands on his grandsons to impart a blessing and confirm their inheritance.  
*Genesis 48*

## New Testament

In the New Testament the sacrificial use of the laying on of hands ceases because of Jesus. We are told that Jesus died once, for all and that we have been made holy through his sacrifice. We do not need priests as intermediaries. Jesus is our High Priest. *Hebrews 9:26b; 10:10b.*

*"...but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."  
Hebrew 7:24,25*

In the New Testament the laying on of hands is used to:

1. Minister healing
  - Jesus *Luke 4:40*
  - the apostles *Acts 28:8*
  - all believers *Mark 16:18*
  - elders *James 5:13*
2. Minister baptism in the Holy Spirit
  - to the Samaritans *Acts 8:17-19*
  - to believers at Ephesus *Acts 19:6*
  - to Paul *Acts 9:17*
3. Impart blessing
  - Jesus blessed the children *Mark 10:16*
4. Impart spiritual gifts
  - by elders *1 Timothy 4:14*
  - by apostles *2 Timothy 1:6; Romans 1:11*
5. Set apart and send out ministries
  - appointing deacons *Acts 6:6*
  - sending out missionaries *Acts 13:3*

The laying on of hands does not make the ministry happen, but confirms the ministry to the body of the church and to the minister himself/herself. It is God's seal of approval and authority to minister in a particular area, the elders (presbytery) being guided by the Holy Spirit. God imparts the authority – not man.

*“...the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’.”*

*Acts 13:2*

Paul, writing to Timothy (*1 Timothy 5:22*) warns him not to lay hands hastily on anyone. This probably refers to the appointment of elders and the commissioning of ministries, including apostles. There are strict requirements regarding the character and behaviour of people who hold the office of an elder. There were people promoting false doctrine in the church at Ephesus. Care needed to be taken that none of them were given recognition in the church by the laying on of hands.

#### NOTES:

In the New Testament we find overseers gathering into groups for the purpose of laying on hands and prophesying to establish people in their ministry. No single pastor or elder took this upon himself without others to assist. This was for two reasons:

- all prophecy must be judged
- the group ensured a complete prophetic ministry.

A group of elders from either a local congregation or from the wider church, is called a presbytery. The Bible does not give licence to individual believers to prophesy and set aside another for ministry. This is reserved for a group of experienced and proven elders.

Believers should be wary about allowing someone unknown to them or their oversight to lay hands upon them. Not all spiritual impartation comes from God. As with all the good things of God, Satan counterfeits. The ‘transference’ of spiritual powers through ‘laying on of hands’ is a common occult practise. For example, psychic people or mediums will testify that people close to them transferred their ‘gifts’ to them.