

## 4. Laying on of hands

The 'laying on of hands' is mentioned as one of the foundational or basic doctrines of the church in Hebrews 6:2, but it can also be found in the Old Testament.

### Old Testament

#### Blessing and Authority

The laying on of hands is a symbolic act that sets individuals apart and signifies the imparting of spiritual blessings, authority, and power. In the Old Testament a blessing was often conferred in this way. For example, Isaac blessed his son Jacob by the laying on of hands, and Jacob passed on blessings from God by laying his hands on Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:13-20).

Genesis 27:27-29 NLT *So Jacob went over and kissed him. And when Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he was finally convinced, and he blessed his son. He said, "Ah! The smell of my son is like the smell of the outdoors, which the Lord has blessed! "From the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth, may God always give you abundant harvests of grain and bountiful new wine. May many nations become your servants, and may they bow down to you. May you be the master over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. All who curse you will be cursed, and all who bless you will be blessed."*

Genesis 48:14 *But Jacob crossed his arms as he reached out to lay his hands on the boys' heads. He put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, though he was the younger boy, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, though he was the firstborn.*

The laying on of hands was accompanied by a Prayer of Blessing. This Blessing was stolen from Esau by Jacob. yet when the truth was found out, it could not be reversed. The Blessing had been pronounced. Be careful before you give your blessings. The Jews still lay hands on their children and pray a blessing over them – this is a good practice and should be done by Christian fathers, or in their absence, by their mothers, as well.

Moses ordained Joshua through *semikha* - i.e. by the laying on of hands.

Numbers 27:15-23 NLT *"O Lord, you are the God who gives breath to all creatures. Please appoint a new man as leader for the community. Give them someone who will guide them wherever they go and will lead them into battle, so the community of the Lord will not be like sheep without a shepherd." The Lord replied, "Take Joshua son of Nun, who has the Spirit in him, and lay your hands on him. Present him to Eleazar the priest before the whole community, and publicly commission him to lead the people. Transfer some of your authority to him so the whole community of Israel will obey him. When direction from the Lord is needed, Joshua will stand before Eleazar the priest, who will use the Urim - one of the sacred lots cast before the Lord - to determine his will. This is how Joshua and the rest of the community of Israel will determine everything they should do." So, Moses did as the Lord commanded. He presented Joshua to Eleazar the priest and the whole community. Moses laid his hands on him and commissioned him to lead the people, just as the Lord had commanded through Moses.*

The Bible adds that Joshua was thereby "filled with the spirit of wisdom". Moses also ordained the 70 elders (Numbers 11:16-25). The elders later ordained their successors in this way. Their successors in turn ordained others.

Deuteronomy 34:9 NLT *Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.*

#### For the Transferring of Sin

Aaron and the high priests' who succeeded him, symbolically transferred the sins of the Children of Israel to a sacrificial goat by the laying on of hands. This does not apply today as Jesus paid the penalty for our sins once for all.

## **Burnt Offerings**

Leviticus 1:4 NLT *Lay your hand on the animal's head, and the Lord will accept its death in your place to purify you, making you right with him.*

## **Peace Offering**

Leviticus 3:1-2 NLT *"If you present an animal from the herd as a peace offering to the Lord, it may be a male or a female, but it must have no defects. Lay your hand on the animal's head, and slaughter it at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Then Aaron's sons, the priests, will splatter its blood against all sides of the altar.*

## **Sin Offerings**

Leviticus 4:14-15 NLT *When they become aware of their sin, the people must bring a young bull as an offering for their sin and present it before the Tabernacle. The elders of the community must then lay their hands on the bull's head and slaughter it before the Lord.*

## **Punishment for Blasphemy**

Leviticus 24:14 NLT *Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and tell all those who heard the curse to lay their hands on his head. Then let the entire community stone him to death.*

## **Atonement** (The act of making amends for sin)

Leviticus 16:21 NLT *He will lay both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people's sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specially chosen for the task will drive the goat into the wilderness.*

## **Cleansing of the Levites** (See Number 8:5-22)

Numbers 8:10-12 NLT *When you present the Levites before the Lord, the people of Israel must lay their hands on them. Raising his hands, Aaron must then present the Levites to the Lord as a special offering from the people of Israel, thus dedicating them to the Lord's service. "Next the Levites will lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls. Present one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the Lord, to purify the Levites and make them right with the Lord.*

## **New Testament**

### **To impart a spiritual blessing**

Mark 10:16 NLT *Then He (Jesus) took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them. (See also Matthew 19:15).*

### **For the Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

When we pray for someone to be baptized in the Holy Spirit we often lay hands on them.

Acts 8:17 NLT *Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

Acts 9:17 *So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*

Here are two instances to consider: in one case the believers received the gift of speaking in tongues when the apostle laid hands on them, and in the other case the Holy Spirit came on them without the laying on of hands, but simply through the apostle's preaching.

Acts 19:4-6 NLT *Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus." As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied.*

Acts 10:44-46 NLT *Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message. The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of*

*the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too. For they heard them speaking in other tongues and praising God.*

### **For Healing**

Jesus healed people in many different ways including by laying His hands on them.

*Luke 4:40 As the sun went down that evening, people throughout the village brought sick family members to Jesus. No matter what their diseases were, the touch of his hand healed everyone.*

The bible says that we will lay hands on the sick and they will recover. The verse below does not say only when the anointed man of God or the Pastor prays. It says when those that believe. So any believer is able to lay hands on the sick and they will recover.

*Mark 16:17-18 NLT and these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name, they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.*

*Acts 28:8 NLT it happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed and putting his hands on him healed him.*

Jesus certainly laid His hands on many of those He healed; however, He also healed without laying His hands on people. In fact, there were times when He was nowhere in the vicinity of those He healed. Matthew 8:8 describes Jesus healing the servant of the centurion without going near the centurion's house.

*Matthew 8:8 NLT But the officer said, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed.*

### **Anointing for Ministry**

We lay hands on others to impart the anointing so that they can operate in ministry.

*1 Timothy 4:14 NLT Do not neglect the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you.*

### **Ordination (Official appointment).**

Another purpose for the laying on of hands is that of ordination. Generally, at ordination services, hands are laid on those being ordained by the apostles or elders. An example is found in Acts 6. Here seven men became deacons when the apostles prayed and 'laid hands on them'.

However we are cautioned about being in too much of a hurry to officially recognise and appoint leaders, by the public act of laying hands on them.

*Acts 6:6 NLT These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.*

*1 Timothy 5:22 NLT Never be in a hurry about appointing a church leader. Do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.*

The instruction here is not so much in cautioning the physical action of laying on of hands but to urge care in bestowing the responsibility of spiritual leadership (however it is done). Leaders are not to be ordained 'in a hurry' or without due consideration. This is supported by the instructions on the appointment of deacons, who must apparently (from the repetition of 'in the same way') face the same tests as elders before their appointment.

*1 Timothy 3:10 NLT Before they are appointed as deacons, let them be closely examined. If they pass the test, then let them serve as deacons.*

### **Commissioned for service or an assignment**

*Acts 13:2-3 NLT One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them." So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way.*

So, the laying on of hands to impart an anointing and the ordination of office is a biblical instruction and should be part of the ceremony. We are all cautioned not to appoint anyone without first praying and fasting, and only once the people chosen have proved themselves worthy.

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