

6.

MESSAGE 3

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PEOPLE CONCERNING OFFENSE-OFFERINGS FOR OFFENSES AGAINST JEHOVAH

Leviticus 5:14-19

Introduction

The third message given to Moses from The Tabernacle contained instructions concerning still another type of fire-offering. It is not stated that the message was for the people, but it so obviously builds on the previous messages, which were for the people, that it is clear that this message also was so intended. Comments on Leviticus 5:6 in MESSAGE 2 discussed and rejected the suggestion that instructions for this type of offering began in Leviticus 5:1. Regardless of whether the discussion begins in Leviticus 5:1 or Leviticus 5:14, this type of offering is introduced in Leviticus for the first time. Like the sin-offering, it was not known before Sinai. Its name is best translated “offense-offering” (see comments below on Lev. 5:15 under the heading for an offense-offering).

This fifth type of fire-offering was similar in many respects to the sin-offering, and yet it was quite distinct. The major distinction is that an offense-offering was offered for sins that caused harm that could be corrected. When a person committed such an offense, he was required to correct the damage he had caused or to make restitution for the harm he had done before he presented his offense-offering. An offense that required restitution could be committed against Jehovah or against another person. Offense-offerings for offenses committed against Jehovah are discussed in this MESSAGE 3. Offense-offerings for offenses committed against other people are discussed in MESSAGE 4.

The first type of sin for which an offense-offering was to be offered was for offenses against holy objects that belonged to God. Then in the same message Jehovah gave instructions for an offense-offering that was to be offered for offenses committed directly against Himself. Offerings for both of these purposes teach that sins against God are especially serious. Their confession and forgiveness requires special attention. The idea that some have that treating our fellowmen well is all God expects of us is a serious error. Actually, God expects us to be properly related to Him first, and then He helps us build the proper relationships with other people. So the instructions God gave in this third MESSAGE have a deep significance.

This message can be outlined as follows:

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Interpretation

CHAPTER 5

Introductory note (5:14)

Verse 14. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

These words are a shortened form of Leviticus 1:1. They introduce a third MESSAGE that Jehovah spoke to Moses by an audible voice from The Tabernacle. It is not accurate to reduce these words to “And Jehovah said to Moses,” as many translations do. The words were written by Moses to show that this MESSAGE was actually spoken to Him by an audible voice. Shortening the words to obscure the method by which God spoke takes the edge off of the wonder of these revelations. As Moses stood before The Tabernacle to hear God’s words, it is logical to believe that he was equipped with writing materials and that he recorded the words just as they were spoken to Him.

- (a) Offered for an offense by mistake against objects that were holy to Jehovah (5:15-16)

Verse 15. **If a person betrays [with] a betrayal and sins by mistake against holy items belonging to Jehovah, then he shall bring his offense to Jehovah, [with] a pristine ram from the flock, [worth] by your estimation [at least three] shekels of silver in the shekel of The Holy [Place] for an offense-offering.**

If a person betrays [with] a betrayal. An additional word for “sin” occurs here for the first time in Leviticus. It occurs both in noun and verb forms. The root means “to act unfaithfully” or “to act treacherously.” It is used in Numbers 5:12, 27 to refer to a woman’s unfaithfulness to her husband. In this verse, it refers to unfaithfulness toward God. Thus, the word describes a sin of disloyalty, in which the sinner fails in an obligation he owes to God. The nearest English rendering of the whole phrase is “betrays [with] a betrayal” or “is unfaithful [with] an unfaithfulness.”

and sins by mistake. These words are the same words used in Leviticus 4:2 (see comments on Lev. 4:2 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading by mistake). The expression refers to a sin committed not out of rebellion but out of weakness. The verb translated “sins” is the most common Hebrew word for sin and means “to miss the mark” (see comments on Lev. 4:1 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading When someone sins). It is used here in the perfect state, which describes completed actions shows that the unfaithful act was not a set habit but a one time failure. It describes an act of unfaithfulness that was serious but that did not indicate a desire to reject Jehovah or His laws.

against holy items belonging to Jehovah. This phrase is literally “against holinesses of Jehovah.” The noun “a holiness” was used to refer to items that Jehovah had set aside to belong to Him and assigned to the priests and Levites for their support (see comments on Leviticus. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading It is a holiness of holinesses, where those items are listed). Up to this point, Jehovah had not given a complete listing of these holy items, but He had named some of them in connection with describing fire-offerings. They included portions of homage-offerings (see comments on Lev. 2:3,10,12 in MESSAGE 1) and portions of sin-offerings (see comments on Lev. 5:13 in MESSAGE 2) (refer also to comments on Lev. 3:1 in MESSAGE 1). As Jehovah continued His revelations to Moses, He described other holy items one by one. In Leviticus 22:10-16 He identified who could and who could not eat of those holy items (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 27). Finally, in Leviticus 23:8-32, He listed and summarized all of them (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 31). Even before Jehovah identified what all of those holy items were, He told the Israelites through instructions about the offense-offering that it was a serious sin to abuse those holy items. Therefore, the Israelites should have been ready to take the instructions seriously when Jehovah revealed what those holy items were.

then he shall bring his offense to Jehovah. The word translated “offense” is the word is discussed in comments on Leviticus 5:6 (see comments on Lev. 5:6 in MESSAGE 2 under the

heading “And he shall bring his offense to Jehovah”. The word can mean either “offense” or “offense-offering.”¹ The grammatical construction is identical here to that found in Leviticus 5:6, 7. Comments on those verses argue that in those verses the word refers to the offense rather than to the offering. It would seem from the similarity of the construction that the same is true in this verse. Also, making the word refer to the offering in this expression makes for redundancy in the sentence, since the sentence ends with “for an offense-offering.”

Bringing his offense “to Jehovah” showed that the only one who could forgive offenses was Jehovah Himself. The offender was to recognize that fact by taking his offense-offering to The Tabernacle, as he was to do with the other offerings (see Lev. 1:2,3,5,11,14; 2:1,8,11,14; 3:1,7,12; 4:3,4,6,7,15,17,18,24; 5:7).

[with] a pristine ram from the flock. The word translated “ram” seems to mean an adult male sheep (Num. 28:20-21,28-29; 29:3-4,9-10,14-15,18,21,24,27,30,33,37). A male sheep was not used for a sin-offering (compare Lev. 4:3,14,23,28,32), so that animal was reserved for use in the offense-offering. There was no provision for varying the animal in the offense-offering, as was allowed in the sin-offering. The fact that the animal was to be male and also adult shows that the animal was selected because of its value or costliness. Unlike other offerings, the value of the animal was important in the offense-offering, because the offense was one that caused a loss that needed to be compensated. An inexpensive offering would not have been expressive of the worshiper’s regret for causing harm or for taking for himself objects that belonged to others.

[worth] by your evaluation [at least three] silver shekels, in the shekel of The Holy [Place]. In choosing the ram to bring for this offering, the worshiper was to evaluate the animal in the silver shekels used in The Holy [Place]. This action

¹ KJV, DRV translate it as a reference to the offense. ASV, RSV, SGV, NEB, NASB, JB, AB, and HCSB translate it as a reference to the offering. NIV makes it a reference to the offering and distorts the spirit of the offering by calling it a “penalty.” LB omits the phrase from its translation

strengthens the conclusion that this offering emphasized the value of the animal. The words “[at least three] silver shekels” seem to have been an idiomatic expression indicating that the ram had to be worth more than two shekels. The Hebrew language has singular, dual, and plural forms for nouns. “Shekels” in this verse is plural in form. The “shekel of the sanctuary” seems to have been an accurate weight kept in The Holy [Place], to set the standard for any weight measurement that needed to be checked. Such a standard was needed at The Holy [Place] so it would be readily available. 2 Samuel 14:26 refers to a civil weight standard in the time of David and Absalom. We do not know if Israel’s elders had any such standard in the wilderness; but even when Israel’s government did have such standards, they would not have been accessible easily at The Holy [Place]. Later in the history of Israel, a shekel was a coin. At the time of the Exodus, the Israelites had no coins, and a shekel was a weight measurement. The weight traditionally assigned to a shekel by the Israelites was different from that used by other peoples of the time, just as the volume of an American gallon is different than the volume of an English gallon today. Among the Israelites, a shekel weighed 224½ grains or nearly one-half ounce. The monetary value of a shekel depended on the kind of material weighed. A silver shekel naturally was not worth as much as a gold shekel. The standard used at the sanctuary to measure weight was the silver shekel. It is difficult to know what value should be placed on a silver shekel when compared with modern American money. The value of silver on today’s market changes day by day, and conditions for its mining and distribution are so improved today that today’s value would be far removed from what it was in the time of Moses. At least, it is clear from this verse that a ram for an offense-offering had to have at least a certain market value, in order to express the meaning of the offering. Since the word “shekels” in plural, the ram had to have the value of at least three shekels.

The word translated “The Holy [Place]” in this verse is the same word used in Leviticus 4:6 (see comments on Lev. 4:6 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading of the Holy [Place]). The word literally means “the holiness.” Here it obviously referred to the entire Tabernacle complex.

for an offense-offering. If the interpretations given in comments on Leviticus 5:5,6,7 and in the Critical Note at the end of MESSAGE 2 are correct, the name of the fifth type of offering occurs here for the first time.. It is best rendered “offense-offering” (see comments on Leviticus 5:6 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading “And he shall bring his offense to Jehovah and the Critical Note at the end of MESSAGE 2). This offering is not mentioned in the Scripture prior to Sinai, and it was not mentioned in previous instructions given to Moses at Sinai. Apparently the offense-offering was revealed for the first time in this MESSAGE.²

Verse 16. **And whatever [amount] he sinned against the holy objects, he shall pay, and he shall add a fifth of it to it, and he shall give it to the priest. Then the priest shall cover over him with the ram of the offense-offering, and it shall be forgiven him.**

And whatever [amount] he sinned against the holy objects, he shall pay. Before offering his offense-offering, the worshiper was to give at The Tabernacle the value of whatever He had damaged

² KJV always translates the name of this offering as “trespass offering,” except in Is. 53:10, where it uses simply “offering.” ASV follows the same practice, except that it adds a hyphen in the name. NASB, NWV, and NIV always use “guilt offering.” LB usually follows the same practice, but uses more variant translations. SGV and NEB add the hyphen and translate it as “guilt-offering,” SGV is consistent in its translations, but NEB varies its usual translation with a number of other translations in some verses. AB generally uses “guilt [or] trespass offering” but sometimes reverses the order of these words and sometimes shortens the rendering to one or the other. JB usually uses “sacrifice of reparation” but also uses a variety of other translations. DRV usually interprets the word to refer to the offense rather than to the offering. Where it does interpret the word to refer to the offering, it uses no consistent translation. NAB and MV often interpret the term to apply to the offense rather than to the offering in places where most translators see it as applying to the offering. In each case in which they do interpret it as referring to the offering, they render it as “guilt-offering.” However, NAB often omits the hyphen. HCSB uses “restitution offerings,” except in 1 Samuel 6, where it uses “guilt offering” four times. A great need exists for more consistent translations for the name for this offering than has been achieved by the existing English translations.

or had failed to give for the support of the priests and the Levites.

and he shall add a fifth of it to it. Then he was to add one-fifth more to compensate for the harm he had done. This additional payment showed his desire to compensate for the damage he had done or for the pain and anguish he had caused by failing to bring his items for the support of the priests on time. Other examples of adding one-fifth more as interest for failure to fulfill one’s obligation are: keeping vows, Lev. 27:2-25; giving firstlings, Lev. 27:26-27; and paying tithes, Lev. 27:31).

and give it to the priest. The holy items were items set aside for the support of the priest, so payment was to be made to the priest who officiated at the offense-offering.

and the priest shall cover over him with the ram of the offense-offering, and it shall be forgiven him. Restitution was made to the priests, but the sin was against Jehovah whom the priests served. Covering and forgiveness from Jehovah came from repentance symbolized by the offering, not from the payment. The offering represented repentance. God honored that repentance with forgiveness. The restitution was an expression of the worshiper’s genuine sorrow over the harm he had done and his desire to correct it. The sinner did not buy forgiveness from God by making restitution. God gave him forgiveness as a gift in response to his repentance and restitution (See comments on Lev. 1:4 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading to cover over him).

- (a) Offered for an offense by mistake directly against Jehovah (5:17-19)

Verse 17. ¶ **And if a person sins [by] doing anything against any commandment of Jehovah that should not be done, even [if] he did not know, still he shall have offended, and he shall bear his iniquity.**

And if a person sins, [by] doing anything against any commandment of Jehovah that should not be done. This section adds additional offenses for which an offense-offering was to be offered. It

specifies any action “against any commandment of Jehovah.” At first reading, this statement seems to refer to any act that was contrary to any commandment God gave; however, at little thought indicates that something more specific must have been in mind. The offenses mentioned in Leviticus 5:14-16 were against Jehovah’s commandments. In the next MESSAGE, Jehovah added a list of offenses against other people for which an offense-offering was to be offered, and in each case restitution was to be given (see comments on Lev. 6:2-3 in MESSAGE 4). Those instructions would have been unnecessary if this verse included every offense of every kind against every commandment. Likely, therefore, the statement “against any commandment of Jehovah” means any commandment directly related to Jehovah. Verses 14-16 specified an offense-offering for an offense against objects belonging to Jehovah. This verse seems to specify an offense-offering for any other offense that was committed directly against Jehovah Himself.

This section of instructions concerning offense-offerings does not mention restitution. Since every other section of the instructions dealing with offense-offerings mentions restitution, very likely it is implied here. We should conclude that, when an Israelite sinned directly against Jehovah, he was to do what he could to make up for his action in any way he could. Then he was to express his regret by offering an offense-offering.

Jehovah did not give specific examples of offenses committed directly against Jehovah for which an offense-offering should be offered, as He did of sins for which a sin-offering was to be offered (see comments on Lev. 5:1-6 in MESSAGE 2) or as He did for offenses against other people for which an offense-offering was to be offered (see comments on Lev. 6:1-3 in MESSAGE 4). However, two later events are helpful in knowing what Israelites understood those offenses to be.

The first event is recorded in 1 Chronicles 21:1-22:1, which tells of David’s taking a census of the Israelites, evidently to prepare for a military subscription. Since by the time that David ordered the census, he had already defeated all of his enemies, his major motive must have been pride.

Joab objected to taking the census, and called it “bringing an offense onto Israel.” David insisted, and the census was taken. Jehovah then sent The Angel of Jehovah to bring plagues on Israel. When The Angel neared Jerusalem at the threshing floor of Ornan, David repented and begged for mercy. He did not offer an offense-offering, because The Tabernacle was far away in Gibeon, but Jehovah told The Angel to stop the plague because David had repented. Then The Angel of Jehovah told the prophet Gad what David should do, and Gad ordered David to make restitution for his offense by purchasing the threshing floor of Ornan and building an altar there. David did so on the spot, and The Angel put up his sword. Then David began gathering materials for the Temple that later was built by his son Solomon on the ground where Ornan’s threshing floor had stood. The event reveals that trusting in military might and pride in one’s self for protection instead of Jehovah is an example of an offense directly against Jehovah. It also reveals that restitution is required for such an offense.

The second passage is found in Ezra 9:1-10:44, which tells how, some years after the Israelites returned from Babylonian exile, they began to adopt the abominable religious practices of the nations around them and to marry women of those nations. Ezra was greatly distressed and called the people to repent. They did repent and showed it by offering an offense-offering and making restitution. Ezra 10:19 says, “They offered a ram of the flock for their offense-offering.” Though the last phrase might be translated “for their offense,” the use of a ram for the offering shows conclusively that that the offering presented was an offense-offering. Then they made restitution by putting away their foreign wives. This event shows that adopting the practices of other gods and marrying wives who worshiped other gods was an offense against Jehovah directly. An Israelites who repented of such an offense, was to demonstrate his repentance by offering an offense-offering and by making restitution.

Both of these events confirm the conclusion that the offenses referred to in these verses in Leviticus were offenses that broke commandments

that were directly related to responsibilities to Jehovah Himself.

Even [if] he did not know, still he shall have offended. The sense of this clause is not that a person offended only *when* he did not know any better. Rather it is that he had offended *even if* he did not know any better. He should have known better, and God held him accountable for not knowing.

and he shall bear his iniquity. In either case, the weight of his sin would bear down on the worshiper. The heaviness of it would prompt him to repent and to offer an offense-offering to symbolize his repentance (see comments on Lev. 5:1 in MESSAGE 2 under the headings then he shall bear and his iniquity).

Verse 18. **And he shall bring a pristine ram from the flock, [worth enough] by your estimation for an offense-offering, to the priest, and the priest shall cover over him from his mistake in which he made the mistake, even [if] he did not know, and it shall be forgiven him.**

And he shall bring a pristine ram from the flock, [worth enough] by your estimation for an offense offering, to the priest: The procedure and significance were the same for an offense by mistake committed directly against Jehovah as they were for offenses committed by mistake against “the holy objects of Jehovah” (see comments on Lev. 5:14-16).

This verse does not refer to silver shekels, but it does use the words “by your estimation” that are found in verse 15. This verse expresses the same idea as verse 15 in fewer words in this verse to save unnecessary repetition. The ram was to be worth at least three shekels.

and the priest shall cover over him. The emphasis of this expression is not that the sin was covered but that the sinner was covered to protect him from his sins (see comments on Leviticus 1:14 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading to cover over him). God does not hide sins. He requires that they be openly confessed, and then he gives forgiveness that protects the sinner from his sins.

from the mistake in which he made the mistake, even [if] he did not know. If the word translated “mistake” is taken to mean “ignorance,” then the literal translation of this verse is, “from the ignorance in which he was ignorant that he did not know [about]. That translation produces unnecessary repetition in a writing that is remarkable for its economy in the use of words. The full expression is much easier to explain when the sin referred to is understood to mean a sin of weakness because in that case the words “he did not know” add an additional idea (see comments on Lev. 4:2 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading by mistake and on Lev. 4:13-14 under the heading sins by mistake).. This view enables us to understand that an offense-offering was not to be offered for deliberate rebellion against Jehovah. It was available when a person committed an offense out of weakness when faced with temptation. No offering was available for sins of deliberate and persistent rebellion. The penalty for that sin was death, which was the penalty Israel received when they refused to enter the land at God’s command, just as it is the penalty for anyone who persists in resisting God today (see Introduction to MESSAGE 24, Lev. 20).

One might wonder how a person could disobey a known commandment of Jehovah and still not intend to rebel against Him. The two examples above can help us find the answer to that question. When David determined to take a census for unnecessary military purposes and selfish pride, he warned not to do it by Joab, who was a most unlikely person to give him such a warning. Still David persisted. However, when God plagued the Israelites, David repented in agony and tears. When he repented, he showed he did not offend out of hardened rebellion but out of human weakness. He knew better and sinned anyway, but his intention was not to defy God. He showed that he did not intend to rebel by offering an offense-offering.

When the people of Israel in Ezra’s day adopted the abominations of the nations around them and married foreign wives, they knew God had commanded them to have only one God, but they were influenced by all those around them who worshiped other gods. When Ezra scolded them,

they responded and joined him in sorrowing over their offenses. They offered an offense-offering with a sincere heart and showed it by putting away their foreign wives. As serious as those sins were, they were not committed out of an intent to reject Jehovah altogether. They were weak before temptation, but they did not want to reject Jehovah as their God. They showed it when they repented, offered an offense-offering, and made restitution by putting away their foreign wives.

Today we still offend God by such actions as failing to keep the Lord's Day holy, even when we know better. We show we commit that offense out of weakness and not out of rebellion when we repent and begin to obey Him about the Lord's Day.

and it shall be forgiven him. When the priests offered the blood and the fat of the ram of the offense-offering on the altar, the sinner's sins were forgiven. In actuality, his forgiveness came from his repentance and from his trust in the promised Son to come and pay the price for his sins. The offering was simply a symbol of his repentance

and of his forgiveness. (see comments on Lev. 4:20b in MESSAGE 2.

Verse 19. **It is an offense-offering. Offending he shall have offended against Jehovah.**

It is an offense-offering: These words mean that the instructions given in this MESSAGE define the procedure and the meaning of an offense-offering for an offense committed directly against Jehovah.

Offending, he shall have offended against Jehovah. The point of this statement is that, when a person committed an offense directly against Jehovah, the correct offering for him to offer was an offense-offering. This interpretation is supported by the fact that none of the offenses mentioned in Leviticus 5:1-4, for which sin-offerings were to be offered, were offenses committed directly against Jehovah.

Application

Some offenses are distinct enough that they need special attention. Among them are offenses that offend God directly. Sins that harm other people are sins against God, because God created all people and loves all people. When we offend anyone, we hurt God and sin against Him. However, when actions are committed that offend God directly, they are especially serious. Being callous, indifferent, or even hostile toward God undermines everything else that is good in our lives. Such offenses deserve our special attention and concern.

One way to sin against God directly is to show disrespect for objects that belong to Him. Some examples of such offenses may be: damaging God's house, defaming God's church, falsely criticizing God's minister, embezzling God's funds, and stealing God's tithe. When we commit such an offense, we should not just repent. We should also compensate the church we damaged or correct the harm we did to God's people or God's man. When we correct our offense, we should add to what was originally expected of us, to show that as far as possible we want to make up for the damage we have caused. One offense we should correct is paying our tithes. We should consider unpaid tithes to be a debt that we owe. We should be serious about paying our tithes, even if we pay them late. And when we pay back tithes, we should pay interest on them, just as we would pay extra interest on a past due loan. If we use the offense-offering as an example, we should add one-fifth more when we pay our past-due tithes.

On the other hand, some offenses can be not just against what belongs to God but to God personally. Some examples are: worshiping false gods, neglecting to pray, failing to attend worship, worshiping Him insincerely, blaspheming His name, failing to praise His name, and desecrating the Lord's Day. These sins may affect other people, but they primarily relate to our responsibilities to God. They offend God directly. When we become aware that we have offended God directly, we should recognize that what we have done is especially sinful, and we should feel a special sense of sorrow and regret. We should seek forgiveness with a

special urgency, and we should make every effort to see that we do not repeat the offense. We also should seek earnestly for a way to correct the damage we have done. Many sins against God directly cannot be corrected with money. What we can do is publicly repent, so people whom we may have influenced wrongly will know we are sorry. Another way to correct damage is to apologize to the people we influenced to do or think wrongly. Most of all, we can make a new start and faithfully fulfill our responsibilities in the future. The offense-offering should inspire us to take our obligations to God seriously and to fulfill them faithfully. Failing to do so is a serious offense that we should correct in every way possible.