

8.

MESSAGE 5 INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PRIESTS CONCERNING THE CONTINUAL OFFERINGS

Leviticus 6:8-18

Introduction

This passage is numbered Leviticus 6:1-11 in the Hebrew text. It is the first of three living special instructions to the priests concerning the fire-offerings. They contain information that guided the priests in their responsibilities in the offering rituals, in contrast to what an offerer was to do when he brought an offering to the altar. This first of the three messages deals with continual offerings, which were regular offerings offered each evening and morning by the priests in behalf of the whole nation. They were not brought by some specific worshiper but were presented by the priests in behalf of all the people. The people needed to know about these offerings and understand their significance, but their observance was the specific responsibility of the priests.

This MESSAGE can be outlined as follows:

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Interpretation

Chapter 6

Introductory note (6:8)

Verse 8. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying:**

This verse contains the familiar introduction of a new MESSAGE to Moses from The Tabernacle.

- (1) Continual rededication-offerings (6:9-13)

Verse 9. **Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This in the law of the rededication-offering. It, the rededication-offering, [shall be] on the roastings on the altar all the night until the morning. And the fire of the altar must be kept burning in it.**

Command Aaron and his sons saying. Moses was commanded to communicate the instructions of this MESSAGE to Aaron and his sons, who were the first priests (Ex. 28:1). The word “command” is more forceful than the word “speak” used previously (Lev. 1:2; 4:2). It was apparently used only for variety, since the next MESSAGE for the priests (Lev. 6:25) reverts to the word “speak.” The MESSAGE was given to Moses for both Aaron and his sons, since both the high priest and the ordinary priests were involved in carrying out these commands.

This is the law of the rededication-offering. The word translated “law” was a more general word than “commandment.” Its root means “teaching” or “instruction.” The word was used to refer to the whole body of instructions given to the Israelites concerning their worship, and it was also used to refer to the whole of the Five Books of Moses. Here it means that Jehovah was giving to the priests official instructions concerning how they were to conduct the portions of the fire-offerings that were performed away from the altar. In this verse, it

refers particularly to instructions concerning the rededication-offering.

It, the rededication-offering, [shall be] on the roastings on the altar all night unto the morning. This statement refers to the “continual rededication-offering,” which already had been commanded in Exodus 29:38-43. A rededication-offering was to be offered each evening and each morning in behalf of the whole nation, indicating the need for the Israelites as a whole to constantly renew their commitment to Jehovah and also indicating Jehovah’s readiness to constantly receive the commitment of Israel. One experience of dedication to Jehovah was not enough. It needed to be renewed each evening and morning because of the constant tendency of people to stray. The evening offering was mentioned first, because the Hebrew day began with night-fall, rather than daybreak, though in Exodus 29:38-43, the morning offering was mentioned first. During the night when the nation was asleep, the continual rededication-offering was to be kept roasting on the altar to represent the fact that Jehovah’s work to cleanse and renew Israel never ended, even while Israel slept.

The animal to be used in continual rededication-offerings is not mentioned in this MESSAGE, but Exodus 29:38 had already specified that it was to be a year-old lamb. The animal used in regular rededication-offerings could be varied by the people according to the ability of the worshiper (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading of the herd and on Lev. 1:10-13 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And if his offering is of the flock, [that is] or sheep or of goats). However, continual rededication-offerings were always to be a year-old lamb..

The word translated “roastings” is used only this once in the whole Old Testament. It is based on a verb that means “to fire continually.” It is an entirely different verb from the word translated “roast” in Leviticus 1:9 (see comments on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading and the priest shall roast all on the altar) and also from the word translated “incinerate” in Leviticus 4:12 (see comments on Lev. 4:12 in MESSAGE 2 under the

heading And he shall incinerate it). The emphasis of this word is not on the intensity of the fire but on its persistence. A verb that is based on the same root is used in the next clause in this verse and in verses 12 and 13 of this chapter. In those verses, the emphasis is clearly on continuing the fire throughout the night. The noun that is used in this verse must describe an item that “burns continually,” or rather “roasts continually,” which is the point of the “continual offerings.” Since the rededication-offering was to roast all night, obviously it was not to burn rapidly in a blazing fire. It was to roast slowly all night long.

In most English translations the noun that is translated “roasting” is translated as “hearth,” but that meaning is most unlikely. A hearth is the metal or brick base or frame of a fire pit, and it does not burn. A much more likely meaning of the word is that it refers to the meat that was offered on the altar. It has been noted previously that the offerings were not burned up rapidly but gradually roasted until they turned to ashes. So in the evening, many offerings that had been offered during the day would still be roasting on the altar. The continual rededication-offering was to be placed on those other offerings, and it was to roast all night long with them. For that reason, the translation “roastings” is used above.¹

And the fire of the altar must be kept burning in it. The verb translated “kept burning” is the verb based on the same root as the word translated “roastings” above. It referred to a continuing fire. The fire was to be regulated so that it would continue to glow all night. The fire was to be coals that would continue to roast the offerings and yet not burn up completely before morning. “In it” means in the altar.

Verse 10. **And the priest shall put on his linen robe, and he must put his linen breeches on his body; and he shall take up the ashes which the fire has consumed [along with] the**

¹ KJV translates this word “burnings.” HCSB, ASV, RSV, NIV, NASB, NWT, SGV, and NEB translate it “hearth.” BBE and CJB use “fire-wood, and JB uses “brazier.”

rededication-offering from the altar; and he shall place [them] beside the altar.

The special clothing that the priests were to wear when officiating in The Tabernacle had been given to Moses on the mountain. They are described in Exodus 28:40-42. For the ordinary priests, they included a long white linen robe and white linen breeches underneath. The white linen symbolized the pure lives priests were expected to live. Exodus 28:42 says the linen breeches were “to cover [his] naked body. They must be from abdomen to thighs.” Modesty was a requirement of the priests, and their clothing symbolized sexual purity. However, the priests’ clothes were more than a symbol. They were an actual covering for the body and were a strong deterrent to the licentious practices that were associated with Canaanite worship. The way of life of the Israelites and of their priests was to be different from the people around them, because their God Jehovah is a pure, holy, and moral God. These holy garments were to be worn even when the priest emptied the ashes from the bottom of the altar because the ashes symbolized the lives that had been totally yielded up and burned out for God. Even as the priest emptied the ashes from the altar, he symbolized Jehovah’s receiving those surrendered lives.

The removal of the ashes of the continual rededication-offering from the bottom of the altar was the first task of the morning. They were to be scraped out of the altar on the east side away from The Tabernacle, as had already been stated in Leviticus 1:16 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 1 under the heading and he shall fling it on the east side of the altar, in the place of the ashes).

Verse 11. **And he shall put off his clothes and put on other clothes and carry the ashes forth outside the camp to a clean place.**

The second task of the morning was to carry outside the camp those ashes plus any other ashes that had been scraped out of the altar and placed in the pile on the east side of the altar during the previous day (Lev. 1:16). For this task, the priest was to take off his special officiating clothes and

put on regular clothes. This change of clothes did not mean that this part of the work of the priest was unimportant and devoid of symbolism. It was done simply because the special clothes of the priests were to be worn only within The Tabernacle complex (Ex. 28:43). The ashes were to be carried to a place that was “clean,” meaning ceremonially clean (see comments on Lev. 4:11-12 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading he shall take out to the outside of the camp to a clean place). Thus, even carrying the ashes outside the camp represented Jehovah’s receiving the surrendered lives of His people.

Verse 12. **And the fire on the altar must be continually burning on it, and it must not be extinguished. But the priest shall burn up the wood [that is] on it. So every morning he shall lay the rededication-offering on it, and he shall roast on it the fat of the peace-offerings.**

And the fire on the altar must be continually burning on it, and it must not be extinguished. The verb translated “must be continually burning” is the verb used in verse 9, which means “to fire continually.” Care was to be taken not to let the fire go out, so that the symbol of Jehovah’s receiving the lives of His people would never be absent.

But the priest shall completely burn up the wood [that is] on it. The word translated “shall burn up” is still a different word for “burn” from the three mentioned in verse 9. This word means “to burn up completely” or “to consume.” The wood did not need to be preserved. It was simply a means of providing heat to roast the offerings. It was to be used until it was completely burned up.

So every morning he shall lay the rededication-offering on it. The third task of the morning was to offer the continual rededication-offering. After the ashes had been removed from the reservoir beneath the altar and after fresh wood had been placed on the altar, the morning rededication-offering was to be killed and the whole of it other than the hide offered on the altar.

And he shall roast on it the fat of the peace-offerings. No provision was made for offering continual peace-offerings. So, this statement

means, when an Israelite came later in the day to present peace-offerings, the fat of those offerings was to be placed on top of the continual rededication-offering. The point was that one offering did not have to be completely turned to ashes before another could be added on top of it. This arrangement was necessary because time would not allow for every offering to be roasted separately.

Verse 13. Fire must be kept burning continually on the altar. It must not be extinguished.

Fire must be kept burning. Jehovah emphasized again that the fire was never to be extinguished. The verb translated “must be kept burning” is the word used in verses 12, which means “to fire continually.”

continually. The Hebrew word is a noun that means “continuity” or “a continuum.” It is added to make the emphasis on continual burning even stronger. It lays stress on the importance of keeping the fire burning without a break.

It must not be extinguished. Verse 9 said the continual rededication-offering was to be kept roasting continually, and verse 12 said the fire or coals were to be kept burning continually. This verse stresses again the importance of not interrupting either the fire or the offerings. This emphasis was to signify that Jehovah was always ready to receive the offerings of His people. As the fire was always burning and a continual offering was always roasting, God was always ready to receive the surrender of His people and to meet their needs.

(2) Continual homage-offerings
(6:14-18)

Verse 14. And this is the law of the homage-offering. The sons of Aaron [are] to bring it to the face of Jehovah toward the face of the altar.

And this is the law of the homage-offering. This verse begins a description of continual

homage-offerings, which were to be offered along with continual rededication-offerings every evening and morning. Though the offering is not called “continual” here, three considerations show that the passage describes continual homage-offerings: (1) It immediately follows the description of continual rededication-offering. Since continual homage-offerings were offered along with continual rededication-offerings (Ex. 29:38-42), a discussion of continual homage-offerings was the natural expectation here. (2) This verse states that the priests were to present this offering to Jehovah. If the passage described homage-offerings of private individuals, the individuals would have presented the offerings, not the priests. In this, case, the priests did it as representatives of the whole nation. (3) Special instructions for the priests in connection with private homage-offerings were given later and are recorded in Leviticus 7:9-10 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 7). Yet, all the instructions given here (with the exception of the presentation of the offering) applied to private homage-offerings also. For that reason, all the details given in this passage are not repeated in full in Leviticus 7:9-10. As continual rededication-offerings showed the need for repeated rededication of life to Jehovah, continual homage-offerings showed the need for Jehovah’s people to repeatedly surrender their possessions to Jehovah.

The content of continual homage-offerings and the amount of materials to use is not discussed in this MESSAGE. They are explained in MESSAGE 6 (see comments on Lev. 6:20 in MESSAGE 6 under the heading the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a homage-offering). Considerable variety was allowed for individuals when they offered homage-offerings (see comments on Lev. 2:1-10), but continual homage-offerings were to consist of raw flour and specific amounts of oil and frankincense.

The sons of Aaron are to bring it. The word used in this clause means “to bring near.” The priest who presented the offering was to bring the it as a worshiper on behalf of the nation. In so doing, he was not officiating at the ceremony but presenting the offering to symbolize the commitment of the whole nation to Jehovah. This

regular duty each evening and morning was to be performed by Aaron's sons, that is, by the regular priests.

to the face of Jehovah toward the face of the altar. These words describe how the offering was to be presented, and they are highly instructive. The offering was to be offered "to the face of Jehovah toward the face of the altar." In other words, the offering was presented at the altar but to Jehovah. The important element in the offering was not the altar ritual but the experience with Jehovah. The altar and the offering were symbols. The reality took place between the worshiper and Jehovah in the worshiper's heart.

Verse 15. **And one shall take from it in his fist [some] of the fine flour of the homage-offering and its oil and all of the frankincense that [is] on the homage-offering, and he shall roast it on the altar, a soothing fragrance, its representative portion for Jehovah.**

And one shall take. The word "one" indicates that a different priest was to perform this duty from the priest who brought the offering. A second priest was to be involved at this point. The first priest brought the offering in behalf of the nation. The second priest officiated over the ceremony to represent God's receiving the offering.

from it in his fist [some] of the fine flour of the homage-offering and its oil and all of the frankincense that [is] on the homage-offering, and he shall roast it on the altar, a soothing fragrance, its representative portion for Jehovah. Jehovah had explained in MESSAGE 1 that a representative portion of the homage-offering was to be roasted on the altar. When the offering consisted of raw flour, it was to consist of a handful of the flour plus oil and frankincense (see comments on Lev. 2:2 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading and he shall grasp from it one of his fist's full of its fine flour, and some of its oil, along with all of its frankincense and on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a soothing fragrance to Jehovah).

Verse 16. **And Aaron and his sons shall eat the rest of it unleavened. It must be eaten in**

The Holy Place. They must eat it in the court of the Tent of Meeting.

And Aaron and his sons shall eat the rest of it. Instructions recorded in Leviticus 2:3 had already stated that the remainder of an homage-offering was to be given to the priests (see comments on Lev. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And the remainder of the homage-offering [shall be] for Aaron and for his sons). This verse describes what the priests were to do with it: (1) The priests were to eat it. They were not free to sell or otherwise vary its use. When the major portion of the offering was eaten by the priests, it symbolized that the offering was received by Jehovah for His service. It was also more than a symbol. It actually was useful to Jehovah's service by providing support for Jehovah's ministers. (2) It was to be eaten by the priests only, not by their families, because in the fire-offering ceremonies the priests symbolized Jehovah. Eating the offering by the priests showed that Jehovah received not just the offering but also all of the worshiper's possessions for use in His service. (3) It was to be eaten unleavened. The significance of omitting leaven from the homage-offering was discussed in comments on Leviticus 2:4,11, with the conclusion that leaven tended to encourage decay and it was improper for anything that encouraged decay to represent God's work in people's lives (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 1). This verse clarifies that leaven was to be omitted from homage-offerings, not only from the representative portion that was offered on the altar but also from the portion that was eaten by the priests. The reason was that eating the remainder of the offering by the priests was a part of the ceremony. The symbolism of the offering needed to be preserved to its full completion. However, Jehovah had already clarified that this prohibition did not apply to first-fruits, which were also eaten by the priests (see comments on Lev. 2:12 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading but they must not rise up as a soothing fragrance). The difference was that an homage-offering was a symbolic ceremony conducted in God's house, whereas first-fruits were gifts given to support Jehovah's work and ministers. (4) It was to be eaten in the courtyard of The Tabernacle. Eating the offering in The Tabernacle showed that eating

the offering was an integral part of the ceremony. The eating was to take place in the same area where the offering was presented at the altar.

It must be eaten in The Holy Place. They must eat it in the court of the Tent of Meeting. The name translated “The Holy Place” is used in this verse for the first time in Leviticus. It occurred once previously in instructions given at Sinai (Ex. 29:31). It is a name formed by combining the noun for “place” with the adjective for “holy.” It is to be distinguished from the name translated “The Holy [Place]” in Leviticus 4:6. That name is literally “the holiness,” though the best way to translate it in English is “The Holy [Place]” (see comment on Lev. 4:6 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading of the Holy [Place]). Enclosing “Place” in brackets distinguishes it from the term used in this verse and shows that the word “Place” is not actually used in that term. That practice will be followed throughout this writing to distinguish the two different terms.²

This verse makes it specifically clear that the place designated by this term was the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. A study of other references where this term occurs (Ex. 29:31; Lev. 6:16,26,27; 7:6; 10:13; 16:24; 24:9) shows that the term was always used as a designation for the courtyard. In Hebrew, the definite article was never used with the expression. However, since it was a title for a certain part of The Tabernacle, it should be rendered in English with the definite article and spelled with capitals. Another example of this language peculiarity is found in this same verse in the title “The Tent of Meeting” (see comments on Lev. 1:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading out of The Tent of Meeting).

For background on the root meaning “holy,” see comments on Lev. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading [It is] a holiness of holinesses. The adjective built on that root is used here for the first time in Leviticus. As a part of the title for the courtyard of The Tabernacle complex, it described

the court as a place that was separated out for Jehovah’s service and that reflected His character.²

Verse 17. **It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it [as] their portion of my fire-offering. It is a holiness of holinesses, like the sin-offering and like the offense-offering.**

This verse repeats aspects of the homage-offering that had already been discussed (see comments on Lev. 2:4,10 in MESSAGE 1). One new thought is found in this verse, which is that the parts of the sin-offering which were to be given to the priests belonged to the “most holy” category. “Most holy” portions of the offerings were to be eaten by the priests only (see comments on Lev. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading [It is] a holiness of holinesses). They were portions of the homage-offering, the sin-offering, and the offense-offering. The purpose for this verse was to list the three “most holy” offerings. The “most holy” portions of the sin-offering were later discussed in detail in Leviticus 6:26-30, while “most holy” portions of the offense-offering are discussed in Leviticus 7:6-7 (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 7).

Verse 18. **Every male among the sons of Aaron may eat it. [It is] a statute [for] an age through your generations from Jehovah’s fire-offerings. Whoever touches it must be holy.**

Every male among the sons of Aaron may eat it. The portion of the homage-offering that was given to the priests could be eaten by all males of the priestly family. This requirement was explained in comments on verse 16. That verse makes it clear that any male of the priestly family could eat of the homage-offering, even though some of them might be prohibited from officiating at the altar because of such problems as physical deformities (see comments on Lev. 21:16-24 in MESSAGE 26 and

² Among the English translations, only KJV and DRV recognize this term as a title and accompany it with the definite article. They translate it as “the holy place,” except that DRV uses “a holy place” in two references. ASV, RSV, NASV, NWV HCSB always and JB, NEV usually use “a holy place.” SGV always and ABV, NABV usually use “a sacred place.” MV uses “a sacred place” and “a sacred spot.”

on Lev. 22:1-9 in MESSAGE 27). None of the males of the priestly family had received allotments of land, because they were to receive their support from portions of the fire offerings and other gifts. They deserved their share of that support, even if they could not perform some of the duties of the priests.

[It is] a statute [for] an age through your generations. The word translated “statute” in this verse is the masculine form of the word translated “statute” in Leviticus. 3:17. Both forms had the same meaning. The word translated “age” is also the same word that is used in Leviticus. 3:17, and it means “a long extension of time” but not necessarily “forever.” In Leviticus 3:17, the full expression is literally “a statute of an age,” while in this verse the expression is “an age-statute.” In both verses, the meaning is the same (see comments on Lev. 3:17 in MESSAGE 1 for a full explanation of the meaning of “a statute [for] an age through your generations”).

from Jehovah’s fire-offerings. The “most holy” portions that were for males of the priestly family came from fire-offerings. “Fire-offerings” was a term that applied to all of the offerings offered on the altar (see comments on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a fire-offering).

Whoever touches it must be holy. The word translated “must be holy” is one word in the Hebrew. It is the first occurrence in Leviticus of the verb related to the idea of “holiness” (see comments on Lev. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading [It is] a holy of holies.). This verb in its simple form (Qal) means “to be holy.” In other forms (Piel, Pual, Hiphil), it means “to make holy,” “to consecrate,” or “to sanctify.” Here it occurs in its simple form; which means “to *be* holy” not “to *become* holy.” Therefore, this statement does not mean that a person who touched the offerings would be “made holy” or would “become holy,” as most English translations translate it. It means that a person had to “be holy” to be qualified to touch them. The meaning is that only the priests could touch it. The priest were holy men because they were men dedicated to Jehovah’s service.

Correctly translating this clause clearly shows that the effort made by some to connect the idea of “holiness” with the pagan concept of “taboo” is a mistake. They have contended that the Israelites believed “holy” people or objects possessed a mysterious “spirit” or “infection” that could be transferred by touch to another person or object. Once transferred, this “infection” would render that other person or object unsuitable for “common” (secular) use until the “infection” was removed. This is a serious misinterpretation and abuse of the revelations of God. Holiness was not and is not transferred by touch (compare Hag. 2:12-13). It is brought about by the sincere dedication of a person or object to Jehovah God.³

³ English translations of the Bible have done a disservice to Bible readers by their inadequate translations of this clause. NASB, NIV, HCSB, JCB, GNB, and NWT all use the inaccurate translation “become holy.” KJV, ASV, and LITV make the mistake of failing to be discriminating in the use of the helping verb “shall” to translate the perfect state and “will” to translate the imperfect state in the third person. They use the rendering “shall be holy,” which indicates determination. “Shall be holy” indicates that a priest is obligated to be holy after he touches the offering. The state of this verb is imperfect and should be translated with the helping verb “will” when indicating simple future or “must” when indicating the subjunctive mood. A correct understanding of the statement is that the verb is subjunctive and the person who touches the offering “must be” holy in order to touch it, which means he must be a priest. BBE comes closest to an accurate translation by using “will be holy” but still misses the true significance of the statement by interpreting the imperfect state of the verb to be a simple future instead of a jussive subjunctive. The translation “will be holy” means that any person will be holy after touching the offering, but that understanding does not agree with the teaching of the verse that only “males of the sons of Aaron” are allowed to handle and eat the offerings. This statement is not a prediction of what people will be after they touch the offering. It is a requirement of what they must be in order to touch it. SGV even further distorts the meaning of this phrase by substituting its incorrect understanding of the meaning and translating it as “becomes taboo.” MV makes the same mistake by using “shall be taboo.” GNB throws out any attempt to translate the clause and substitutes instead “will be harmed by the power of its holiness,” while NEB invents the virtually meaningless phrase “is to be forfeit as sacred.” JB completely reverses the meaning of the text by using “none of it is to be eaten.” The renderings of SGV, MV, GNB, and JB are prime examples of the danger that comes from using the free method of translation or even the sentence-by-sentence or phrase-by-phrase method. Only adhering as closely as possible to a literal word-by-word translation will protect the translator

from these kinds of errors. Even when the translator does not understand the meaning of the text, he should translate the text as it is written. A reader might understand the true meaning better than he if he translates what God revealed instead of substituting what he hopes it might mean.

Application

Christians need to constantly renew the dedication of our lives and possessions to God. The continual rededication-offering teaches that the lives of God's people need to be surrendered to Him anew every day. The continual homage-offering teaches that the possessions of God's people also need to be surrendered to Him anew every day. Christians need to make that surrender at least twice a day, night and morning. When we do, the Lord is constantly ready to receive us, forgive us for any misdeeds that have come into our lives during the night or day, and renew our fellowship with Him. A Christian's relationship with God is a living, growing, daily experience. Our relationship to God lives and grows on the constant recommitment of our lives and our possessions to Him. We need to renew our commit to God corporately as a Christian group and also one by one as individuals.

This recommitment of our lives and our possessions does not mean we are saved all over again. It means we receive renewed strength to grow in our Christian living and service. Those who trust Jesus as Savior are permanently pardoned from the penalty for our sins, but we are not yet perfect. Our souls have been made new, but our bodies have not yet been changed. As we struggle with our fleshly weaknesses, we need God's renewed strength every day. Therefore, we need to yield to God anew regularly for cleansing and for strengthening in His service.