

THIRTY-FIFTH MESSAGE:  
THE OIL AND BREAD FOR THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING  
Leviticus 24:1-9

Introduction

Three articles that were used in The Tabernacle of Meeting had to be renewed or replaced regularly. They were the incense for the altar of incense, the oil for the lamps, and the bread for the table of faces. Incense smoldering on the altar of incense represented the prayers of God's people rising up to Him and the pleasantness of being able to communicate with God. Oil burning in the lamps represented the vision, truth, and the insight God grants to those who walk with Him. Bread spread on the table represented the sustenance He provides to people who feast on His presence and His Word. The three together represented the resources God provides to His people as we live with Him and for Him each day. Thus, the outer room of The Tabernacle pictured the blessings God gives in this life of people who are in covenant relationship with Him, while the inner room represented the ultimate relationship with God that will come when believers in Jehovah have come to perfection.

While Moses was in the mountain, Jehovah had described to him the structure of the table of faces (Ex. 25:23-29) and simply had told him that bread of faces should be kept displayed on it at all times (Ex. 25:31). He also had given him instructions concerning the structure of the lampstand (Ex. 25:31-40) and the makeup of the oil to be burned in the lamps (Ex. 27:20-21). In addition, He had given him instructions concerning the structure of the altar of incense (Ex. 30:1-5), the recipe for the incense, and instructions on how it was to be used (Ex. 30:34-38). Moses had communicated those instructions to the people, and each of those items of furniture had been constructed according to Jehovah's instructions (Ex. 37:10-28). Twenty-seven days before this MESSAGE was delivered, Moses had set up The Tabernacle, including the table and the bread, the lampstand and lamps, and the altar and its incense just as God had commanded (Ex. 40:22-27). Eleven days before this MESSAGE, Aaron and his sons had begun serving as priests (Lev. 8:1-9:24) (see comments in INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS under the heading **Theme**; also see Introduction to MESSAGES 11, 12, 13, comments on Lev. 10:12 in MESSAGE 13, and SUMMARY OF LEVITICUS EVENTS AND MESSAGES at the close of this Commentary). It must be assumed that during those eleven days they followed carefully Jehovah's instructions concerning the incense, the oil, and the bread. In spite of the careful instructions that had been given and carried out, nothing had been recorded previously concerning how the oil was to be obtained or how it was to be maintained. Also no instructions had been given concerning how the bread was to be prepared or how it was to be displayed on the table and used after it was removed from the table. Moses must have received those instructions when he was in the mountain, or he and the priests would not have been able to carry them out. However, he had not recorded them in the Record of God's revelations, which he called The Testimony (see comments on Lev. 16:13 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading that is over The Testimony). To be sure that none of Jehovah's instructions were omitted and to enable future generations to have the benefit of those instructions, Jehovah repeated them in this MESSAGE, and Moses faithfully recorded them.

This MESSAGE may be outlined as follows:

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Critical Note.

Since the instructions in this MESSAGE concerning the oil and the bread are recorded after Moses carried them out on the day The Tabernacle was set up and after the priests had begun to use those instructions in their daily service at The Tabernacle, many interpreters have argued that this arrangement of the materials is evidence that the materials in the Book of Leviticus were compiled from different documents that were combined by a clumsy editor. However, the theory creates a greater problem than it solves, because the various passages that describe the oil and the bread are so minutely consistent with each other. How could they be consistent to the last detail if they originated in different places, from different writers, over a period of a thousand years? The addition of this MESSAGE even after some of its instructions were already in practice is better evidence that Jehovah took utmost care to be sure that every detail was recorded for future generations just as He gave them, even if He had to repeat them twice.

Interpretation

## CHAPTER XXIV

## Introductory Note (24:1)

Verse 1. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

This verse is another note introducing a new MESSAGE from Jehovah. It shared information Moses and the priests already had been using, but that information had not been recorded in either Exodus or Leviticus. Jehovah spoke that information again so it would be written in the Record and so that neither Aaron, his sons, nor future generations would misunderstand His requirements. Apparently it was spoken to Moses on the same day as the five MESSAGES about holy assemblies. It could be spoken quickly because Moses already was familiar with most of its contents.

A. The oil for the lamps (24:2-4)

Verses 2-4. **2 Command the people of Israel that they must bring you pure beaten olive oil for the lamp to keep light burning continually**

**3 Outside the veil of The Testimony in the Tent of Meeting. Aaron must arrange it both evening and morning before Jehovah continually. [It is] a statute for an age through your generations.**

**4 He must arrange the lamps on the pure lampstand continually.**

Command the people of Israel that they must bring you pure beaten olive oil for the lamp to keep light burning continually.

The lampstand and its lamps are mentioned in these verses for the first time in the Book of Leviticus; however, they had been referred to often in the Book of Exodus. References in Exodus to the lampstand, the lamps, and the oil are as follows: the structure of the lampstand and its accessories (Ex. 25:31-40), the location of the lampstand (Ex. 26:35), the donation of the materials needed for the lampstand, its accessories, and the oil (Ex. 25:1-3,6; 27:20; 35:4-5,8,21-22,27-28,36:5-7), construction of the lampstand and its accessories and preparation of the oil (Ex. 31:1-6,8; 35:10,14; 36:1-4; 37:17-24; 39:37), the responsibility for keeping the lamps burning (Ex. 27:21; 30:8), and the installation and hallowing of the lampstand, its accessories, and the oil (Ex. 30:26-27; 40:4,24-25).

The purpose of the instructions in this MESSAGE concerning the light was to record how the oil was to be obtained and the procedure for maintaining it. This MESSAGE was to be delivered to all the Israelites, because they were responsible to donate the oil for the lamps. This command to bring oil was needed at this point because evidently the oil previously gathered had begun to run out. While Moses was in the mountain, Jehovah had commanded him to ask the Israelites to

contribute willingly all the materials that were needed for construction of The Tabernacle, including the oil for the lamps (Ex. 25:1-6). He had asked them not only to contribute the oil for the hallowing of The Tabernacle but also to continue bringing oil to keep the light burning day and night continually (Ex. 27:20-21). Unfortunately before Moses could share those instructions with the people, they committed the serious sin of worshiping by means of a Golden Calf. That sin began a long struggle on the part of Moses and the people to understand how Israel could be restored to God after they had broken the covenant. The result was that they learned restoration could come only from God's grace. They trusted God's grace, repented, and were restored (Ex. 32:1-34:35). Only then was Moses able to share with the people Jehovah's instructions concerning The Tabernacle. When he did tell them about God's plan for The Tabernacle, he asked them to bring a freewill offering to provide the materials for The Tabernacle and its contents. They responded so generously that he had to ask them to stop bringing any more donations (Ex. 35:4-5,8,27-28). Using the materials the people had brought, the workers had constructed The Tabernacle. Twenty-seven days before this MESSAGE was delivered Moses had supervised the erection of The Tabernacle. Eighteen days before this MESSAGE, hallowing ceremonies had begun for the priests, which lasted for seven days. Then the priests began to serve, and during the next eleven days, they must have kept the lamps burning before Jehovah (Ex. 35:30-40:38; see SUMMARY OF LEVITICUS EVENTS AND MESSAGES at the end of this Commentary). If the lamps had been burning continually since Moses first lighted them at the construction of The Tabernacle, why would Jehovah tell Moses at this point to ask the people to bring oil? The reason is the people had stopped bringing materials for the Tabernacle, because Moses had told them they had brought more than enough. Evidently the oil they had brought had been enough to last to this point. Now it must have been nearly exhausted, and they needed to be asked to begin again bringing the materials that needed to be used in The Tabernacle continually.

The oil was to be pure olive oil, that is, undiluted and unmixed with any other oil or ingredient. To keep it completely pure, it was to be squeezed out of the olives by beating it in a container, rather than by stomping it with the feet in a vat (compare Ex. 27:20)..

Outside the veil of The Testimony in the Tent of Meeting. Jehovah repeated the information about the location of the lamps. They were to be kept on the specially constructed lampstand outside the veil. The veil was the heavy, ornate curtain that separated the inner room from the outer room of The Tabernacle. Burning the oil outside the veil, meant it was to be burned in the outer room of The Tabernacle or The Holy Place (compare Ex. 27:20-21).

Jehovah called the veil "the veil of The Testimony." The Testimony was the Record Moses was keeping of Jehovah's revelations. It was to be kept in the ark of the covenant in the inner room of The Tabernacle (see comments on Lev. 16:13 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading that is over The Testimony). Jehovah called the veil "the veil of The Testimony," not the veil of the ark, because the revealed Word of God that was kept in the ark was more important than the solid gold ark that contained it.

Aaron must arrange it both evening and morning before Jehovah continually. Jehovah explained that, though the people were to bring the oil, the priests' were responsible to keep the lamp replenished with oil so the light would never go out. All English translations known to this writer translate the word "both evening and morning" as "from evening until morning" or their equivalent. However, the Hebrew lexicons recognize that the combined prepositions are often used to mean "both/and." That translation is much preferable because it would not be logical to tell the priests to arrange the oil from evening to morning when it was to be kept supplied all the time, night and day. The verse means that twice a day the priests were to replenish the oil to be sure the light in the lamps was kept burning continually. This verse specifically says that Aaron, the chief priest, was to keep the oil replenished, but in Exodus 27:21 both Aaron and his sons were given that responsibility.

The mention of only Aaron in this verse stresses that the high priest was responsible to see that the lamps did not run out of oil, but he was to use the ordinary priests to assist him in that task.

[It is] a statute for an age through your generations. Commandments concerning the light, both the people's responsibility to bring the oil and the priests' responsibility to replenish the oil in the lamps, were given as a statute from God. They were to be obeyed on and on into the future from generation to generation. "For an age" is not equivalent to "forever." It left open the possibility that God could cancel these commands at some time in the future if He wished, which He did in Jesus (see comments on Lev. 3:17 in MESSAGE 1 and on Lev. 6:18 in MESSAGE 5 under the heading [It is] a statute [for] an age through your generations). This statement occurs a total of seventeen times in the Book of Leviticus.

He must keep the lamps in order on the pure lampstand continually.

Aaron also was responsible for seeing that the lamps that held the oil were kept properly arranged on the lampstand. The lampstand is called "pure" because it was made of pure gold without any alloys (compare Ex. 37:17).

#### B. The bread for the table (24:5-9)

**Verse 5. And you shall take fine flour and bake from it twelve loaves. Each loaf shall be two-tenths [of an ephah].**

And you shall take. At this verse, the MESSAGE shifts from discussing the light for the outer room of The Tabernacle to the bread of faces that was to be kept on a pure gold table in the same room. The personal pronoun that indicates those to whom these instructions were directed also changes in this verse from third person plural (v. 2) to second person singular. Verse 6 clarifies those to whom this portion of the MESSAGE was to be delivered. It was intended primarily for the priests, because it directs them to place loaves of bread on the table of faces in The Holy Place. Only the priests could enter The Holy Place to arrange the loaves on the table of faces. Therefore, it was

appropriate to address this portion of the MESSAGE to them.

This verse is the first mention of the table and the bread in the Book of Leviticus; however, much had been said about them in the Book of Exodus. Information that had been given in Exodus concerning the table and the bread is as follows: structure of the table and its accessories (Ex. 25:23-29), location of the table (Ex. 26:35), donation of the materials needed for the table and its accessories (Ex. 25:1-3; 35:4-5,21-22,24; 36:5-7), construction of the table and its accessories and preparation of the bread (Ex. 31:1-6,8; 35:10,13; 36:1-4; 37:10-16; 39:36), installation and hallowing of the table, its accessories, and the bread (Ex. 30:26-27; 40:4,22-23), responsibility for placing bread on the table (Ex. 25:30).

In Exodus, the bread had been called "bread of faces" (Ex. 25:30, 35:13; 29:36). The faces were the faces of Jehovah and Israel looking toward each other as they enjoyed each other's presence. Thus, the bread represented the spiritual food and sustenance that the presence of Jehovah gave to the hearts and lives of His people.

Nothing is said in this section of the MESSAGE about asking the people to bring fine flour to be used in preparing the bread. Also no instructions had been given previously, even while Moses was in the mountain, about the people's bringing fine flour for the bread of faces, as had been done about the oil for the lamps. Since Jehovah had given instructions on this same day about bringing first-fruits offerings for the nation from the wheat harvest during the Feast of Weeks and provided a convenient opportunity for individuals to bring their own first-fruits offering, perhaps enough fine flour was expected to be given during that Feast to make it unnecessary for people to bring special offerings of fine flour for the bread of faces (see comments on Lev. 23:16b-18 in MESSAGE 31).

fine flour and bake from it. Instructions for preparing the bread had not been recorded earlier; however, Moses must have received information concerning its preparation prior to this MESSAGE, because the bread had been prepared and laid in its

place at the time The Tabernacle was assembled (Ex. 39:36; 40: 22-23). After the priests were hallowed for ministry at the altar (Lev. 8-9), they must have kept the bread in place as God had instructed (Ex. 25:30). Since instructions for preparing the bread had not been entered into the Record previously, Jehovah repeated them in this MESSAGE, and Moses recorded them so they would be available to the priests and the people into the future.

The bread was to be prepared with fine flour, which meant wheat flour (see comments on Lev. 2:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading his offering may be [of] fine flour). The additional information that is given is that the bread was to be prepared for the table by baking it.

twelve loaves. The word translated “loaves” has traditionally been translated “cakes,” which to most English readers seems to indicate a sweet desert. The description of the bread that follows says nothing about its containing a sweetener. The word means bread shaped into one piece, so some modern versions give a better impression of what the bread was by using the translation “loaves.”<sup>1</sup>

The bread was to consist of twelve loaves, one cake for each of the twelve regular tribes. Displaying twelve loaves in The Holy Place indicated that each tribe enjoyed the presence of God and received spiritual sustenance from Him. Using twelve loaves also means the tribe of Levi was omitted from the display. Doing so was appropriate, because representatives of the tribe of Levi entered The Holy Place every day and enjoyed Jehovah’s presence directly each time they entered. Their relationship to God was better shown by their actual presence than any symbol could have done.

Each loaf shall be two-tenths [of an ephah]. The amount of flour to be used in each loaf was two-tenths of an ephah (see comments on Lev. 5:11 in MESSAGE 2). Depending on which measurement of an ephah is accepted, each loaf was to consist of either about three-fourths of a quart or three-fourths of a pint of fine flour. The

MESSAGE does not state how much oil was to be used. Also no statement is made to indicate whether or not the bread was to contain leavening. Three facts seem to show conclusively that it was not to be leavened. First, the bread was to sit on the table for a week and then was to be eaten by the priests (v. 9). Leavened bread would surely have been too stale to eat by that time, but unleavened bread would still be edible. Second, since leavening in bread represented decay and was not fit for use on the altar of rededication-offering (see comments on 2:11), the same principle must have applied for bread in The Tabernacle of Meeting. Third, it was the unvarying practice of later Israelites to use unleavened bread on the table of faces.

Verse 6.

**And you shall place them in two stacks, six in a stack on the pure table before Jehovah.**

The word translated “stacks” is used in Scripture only to describe the arrangement of the bread on the table of faces, but a similar word was used to describe the arrangement of soldiers in a battle line. The word used in this verse simply means “to put” or “to place.” It is uncertain, therefore, whether the bread was to be arranged in two rows with six in each row or in two stacks with six in each stack. The size of the bread would seem to have made it impossible for them to have been arranged in rows side by side on so small a table (three feet by one and a half feet; Ex. 25:23; 37:10), plus the other accessories that belonged on the table (Ex. 25:29; 37:16). Most likely the loaves were to be arranged in two stacks, with six in each stack.

Verse 7.

**And you shall put pure frankincense with the stack, and it shall be to the bread as a memorial fire-offering to Jehovah.**

Pure frankincense (see comments on Lev. 2:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading and put frankincense on it) was to be placed with “the stack.” Undoubtedly, the purpose of one of the accessories on the table was to hold the incense. “With the stack” may mean that a container of frankincense was to be placed with each stack or

<sup>1</sup> KJV, NASB, RV, RSV, ASV, BBE, and LITV use the translation “cakes.” HCSB, NRSV, CEV, CJB, GNB, and MSG use “loaves.”

that one container of incense was to be placed between the two stacks.

When the bread was replaced with fresh loaves each sabbath, the frankincense was to serve as memorial or representative for the bread and be used on the altar of rededication-offering as a fire-offering (see comments on Lev. 2:2 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading Then the priest shall roast its representative portion on the altar). When burned on the altar to represent the bread, it symbolized that the bread was given to Jehovah but then assigned to the priests for their support. It portrayed the sweetness and pleasantness of being sustained by the presence of Jehovah. The frankincense was Jehovah's portion of the meal that followed the replacing of the bread, while the bread itself was the priests' portion of the meal.

Meyrick thought the frankincense was to be used on the altar of incense. Three considerations show that it was to be used on the altar of rededication-offering. (1) The incense burned on the altar of incense was not pure frankincense, but a mixture of spices (Ex. 30:34-36). (2) Pure frankincense was offered on the altar or rededication-offering to add fragrance and pleasantness to other offerings (Lev. 2:1,15,16; 16:15). (3) "Fire-offering" was a term regularly used to describe offerings roasted on the altar of rededication-offering (see comments on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a fire-offering)

Verses 8

**On every sabbath day you must arrange it before Jehovah continually on behalf of the people of Israel [as] a covenant for an age.**

The bread was to be arranged on the table every sabbath day by the priests. The bread of the previous week was to be removed and replaced with fresh bread. Though the priests arranged the bread on the table, they were to do it in behalf of the people of Israel. It represented the covenant relationship the people of Israel had with Jehovah and the sustenance Jehovah provided for them continually. It was to be arranged on the table "continually," that is, bread was to be on the table at all times. In addition, it was to be displayed on the

table on and on into the future until Jehovah himself should change the instructions (see comments on Lev. 3:17 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading for an age).

Verse 9.

**And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in The Holy Place, which [shall be] to him a holiness of holinesses from the fire-offerings of Jehovah. [It is], a statute for an age.**

And it shall be for Aaron and his sons. After removal from the table, the bread was to belong to the priests as another means of providing for their support.

and they shall eat it in The Holy Place. Because the bread had been displayed inside The Tabernacle, it was not to be taken out of The Tabernacle area. It was to be eaten in "The Holy Place" or in the courtyard of The Tabernacle. Eating the priests' portion of those offerings was a part of the symbolism of the offering and, therefore, needed to be observed inside The Tabernacle area. This instruction is the same requirement that applied to eating the priests' portion of homage-offerings (see comments on Lev. 6:16 in MESSAGE 5 under the heading It must be eaten in The Holy Place. They must eat it in the court of the Tent of Meeting) and on Lev. 10:13 in MESSAGE 13 under the heading And you shall eat it in The Holy Place because it is your prescribed part and your sons' prescribed part from the fire-offerings of Jehovah). The same requirement was made for eating the priests' portion of sin-offerings (see comments on Lev. 6:26 in MESSAGE 7 under the heading will eat it in The Holy Place. It must be eaten in the court of The Tent of Meeting) and the priests' portion of offense-offerings (see comments on Lev. 7:6 in MESSAGE 7). This requirement did not apply to eating the priests' portions of slaughter-offerings, because they symbolized fellowship among all of Jehovah's people and could be eaten by the priest's whole family including wives and daughters in any clean place (see comments on Lev. 10:14 in MESSAGE 13 under the heading in a clean place).

which [shall be] to him a holiness of holinesses. Any portion of offerings that were to be eaten by the priests only in courtyard of The Tabernacle was called a “holiness of holinesses” because they were considered to have a special holiness (see comments on Lev 2:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading [It is] a holiness of holinesses; also see comments on Lev. 6:24,29, Lev. 7:6, and Lev. 10:17 in the MESSAGES cited above).

from the fire-offerings of Jehovah. The bread of faces was called a “fire-offering” because the “memorial” frankincense that represented it was burned on the altar of rededication-offering.

[It is], a statute for an age. Jehovah’s instructions concerning the bread were decreed by a statute that was to continue on and on into the future as long as Jehovah retained it (see comments on Lev. 6:18 in MESSAGE 5 under the heading [It is] a statute [for] an age through your generations. For the age for which it was revealed it was more than a request. It was a command, because it belonged to people who had committed a covenant relationship with Jehovah God.

### Application

Christians today are living the life that was symbolized by The Holy Place of The Tabernacle. We enjoy the blessings of a close relationship with God. Like the frankincense on the altar of incense, we enjoy the sweetness and pleasantness of God’s fellowship. Like the light on the lampstand, we receive light and understanding from God that reveals what He is like and how He wants us to live. Like the bread of faces on the table of faces, we receive sustenance and strength from His nearness.

Christians enjoy the presence of Jesus every moment of every day. His presence supplies pleasure to give hope and comfort in the midst of the dangers of life. It supplies light for understanding temptations, making decisions, and walking righteously. It supplies food and sustenance for the soul. Christians do not ever need to dwell in spiritual sadness, darkness, or weakness. If we do, it is because we get away from close fellowship with Jesus, who is the Fragrance of our existence, the Light of the world, and the Bread of life.