

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Instructions for Priests

Leviticus 6:8-30

Intro: Most of the instructions we're going to see in the rest of ch6 and all of ch7 may seem like information we have all ready encountered in our study of the first 5 chapters of **Leviticus**. **Lev 1-5** talks about the 5 main offerings God had provided to Israel as part of the old covenant: burnt, grain, fellowship, purification (sin) and restitution (trespass). Now, in ch6-7 we read of the same offerings again with further details provided. As the great baseball philosopher Yogi Berra used to say, "It's déjà vu all over again." Why are the same offerings addressed again? The only thing worse than reading about the minute, gory details about sacrifices that are no longer offered is reading those minute, gory details twice! Nevertheless, this is still God's Word and **II Tim 3:16** is still the guiding principle of our approach to God's Word so we respect that God had a reason to repeat this information and we receive it as His Word to us.

In this section (**6:8–7:38**), all 61 verses, God provides some new information about these offerings and addresses them from a different perspective. This information isn't necessarily repetitious but is really supplementary to ch1-5. Our text is primarily concerned with the practices and procedures of the priests in handling the sacrificial offerings rather than with the responsibilities of the ordinary Israelite in presenting their sacrifices. The text does refer to prior instructions (**Ex 29:38-46**) but it expands on and goes beyond those instructions considerably. It also deals with the divinely appointed provisions and perks allotted to the priests: the portions of the sacrifices that go to the priests as partial compensation for their priestly services, and to members of their families. However, the passage concludes by giving stern warnings against carelessness and laxity in following these instructions, including the possibility of being cut off from Israel and from God.

These warnings are included in this section dealing with priests because they're of particular importance for priests. Just as a human master expects their servants to dutifully carry out the instructions given to them, how much more would God expect His priests to meticulously follow all the prescribed regulations? Consequently, if human servants failed to carry out their duties

responsibly, they could expect punishment from their human masters and oftentimes that punishment would extend to their families. The same could be expected by God's priests and we see evidence of this in the life and service of **Eli** the High Priest and his scoundrel priest sons: Hophni and Phinehas (**1 Sam 2-4**).

While this might not seem fair to our modern understanding, the idea is that even as the priest's household benefits from the compensation the priest receives, the priest's family will also suffer the punishment that will be brought upon the priest if he fails to carry out his duties responsibly and diligently. The principle of blessing + responsibility extends to everyone that enjoys the blessing. The various transgressions the priests are being warned about would include taking more than what is allowed from the sacrifices, failure to present the sacrifices properly, failure to carry out the rituals at the appointed time and failure to protect the holiness and sanctity of the temple.

Now, even though most commentaries understand this passage to be dealing with instructions for priests rather than the common Israelite; this generalization is still qualified by 2 important factors: 1) while this text is mainly addressed to priests, there are also some instructions for the common worshipper as well, particularly in **ch 7**; 2) even for the passages primarily dealing with priests, it's important for us to note that these instructions are not hidden away in some secret manual for the priests' eyes only. Rather, all Israelites were to be aware of them just as Moses would instruct later in **Deut 33:4**, that the law was a heritage of the congregation of Jacob.

You see, if the priests didn't carry out the instructions precisely as God had directed, the repercussions of this would not be felt by the priests alone but by their families, their households and even the entire congregation of Israel. The common Israelite had a vested interest in seeing that the priests were diligent in the performance of their duties. It wasn't just the priests who would be punished for not following correct procedures; the people could experience the results as well, even to the point of being cut off from God. So, even the common worshipper had a role to play here.

At the heart of this text lies the divine desire for an obedient and worshipping community to come into being in Israel. But that desire is

tempered by realism. Change will not simply happen by itself because the Israelites were used to doing things their own way (17:1-5). Because of this, God speaks with authority to warn against potential violations of sacred boundaries that will endanger the people and separate them from their covenant King. Deliberate care must be exercised now that a holy God lives close by. Only through precisely following the divine instructions will the God, the priests and the people of Israel receive their respective dues and thus begin to realize the ideal of rich fellowship marked by provision and blessing for all.

The failure of Christian leaders today is as damaging as it is common. Whether it's a high-profile case that dominates the news cycle or it's a less noticed situation in a local church, the results of that failure can be devastating for the individuals directly involved as well as for the wider church community. Similarly, for Israel's priesthood to go bad would have been catastrophic. Without a proper priestly ministry, the tabernacle would cease to function, sin and impurity would go unremedied and the people would inevitably face the divine wrath. Much was at stake concerning the priest's proper fulfillment of their sacred duties; primarily their relationship with God. So, maintaining a functioning and well-provisioned priesthood is part of these instructions. A generous allotment of material provisions allowed Israel's priests to focus on properly executing their God-given roles.

8-13 – Here, for the first time in the book, the Lord tells Moses to address the priests directly. Moses then gives them commands focused on the proper handling, distribution and disposal of offerings. As we've noted, these commands were vital to the priests, who, as the very attendants of the holy, covenant King, needed to treat His holy property with due reverence and respect.

This law was for the burnt offering; not the one described in 1:1-17, which was for the individual worshipper, but the sacrifice described in Ex 29:38-42, which was prescribed specifically for the priests. This offering consisted of 2 one year old lambs along with both grain and drink offerings. This law addresses 2 practical requirements of such an offering. 1st, since the offering would be smoldering on the altar all night; the attending priest would need to clear the ashes in the morning. To do this, he had to wear his holy priestly garments so that he could have contact with the holy altar. After placing the ashes beside the altar, the priest would change into his street

clothes since he was about to leave the tabernacle area. He would then carry the ashes outside the camp to a place that was ceremonially pure (clean), which was the only appropriate place for ashes from the holy altar to be placed.

The 2nd practical requirement was the need for the fire to be kept burning on the altar continually. The priests were to build up the fire every morning and lay the burnt offering on it. He would also add the fat of the fellowship offering throughout the day, thus feeding the fire and helping it to completely consume the burnt offering.

The text references the need for a continual fire 3 times, emphasizing that this offering was to be burning continually. And since the offering's purpose was to seek the Lord's favor, this law taught the priests that they and the Israelites were to have a posture of continual dependence and worship before the Lord; a posture that the modern Christian is also supposed to have ([Mt 22:37](#); [II Cor 12:9](#)).

At the same time, in order for the fire to burn continually, the priests would need to perform their duties diligently. If they failed to do this, the worship of God would suffer. Thus, this text is a strong exhortation for priestly faithfulness, much like we find in Paul's exhortation to Timothy in [II Tim 4:12-16](#). Like the Levitical priests, NT ministers are to be faithful in the execution of the duties of their ministry for the benefit and blessing of the people God has given them to lead. The duty of the OT priest was to intercede on Israel's behalf for the Lord's favor and help. They did this by means of an animal sacrifice, but Jesus Christ, our High Priest, does this by means of the perfect sacrifice of Himself, by which He has eternally secured the Lord's favor for those who come to God through Him.

14-18 – This law begins with a brief review of things covered in [ch2](#): that the priest was to present the offering before the Lord and burn a handful as a memorial portion. It then elaborates on a matter briefly mentioned in [ch2](#): namely, that the rest of the grain offering was to go to Aaron and his sons. This was because it was most holy; as a result, it was to be eaten by holy people (Aaron & sons), without yeast (prohibited on the altar), in a holy place (tabernacle area). [V18](#) affirms the offering's holiness by a 3-fold repetition that it's only for the priests. 1st) only male descendents of Aaron could eat it since only they had been anointed as priests into the ritual state

of holiness. 2nd) it was to be their perpetual share or special allotment granted by the Lord to the priests. 3rd) whoever touched it must be holy (or an anointed priest).

Clearly, this is a strong exhortation to treat this most holy offering with due reverence. Since this law is addressed to priests in particular, it implies that they were to be especially careful to treat this offering properly. This is certainly a call to priestly faithfulness but it is even more than that; it's an opportunity for the Lord's priests to model for all Israel that the Lord's holiness must always be respected. Those that lead the Lord's people are always to be the first to hallow His name.

19-23 – Like the people's grain offering, the priest's continual (or regular) grain offering was to be a sweet aroma to the Lord. But, the priest's offering differed from the people's in 3 important ways: 1) this offering was to be made by the anointed priest, meaning the High Priest, who would offer it as the representative head of the entire priesthood. 2) This offering was to start on the day the priesthood was inaugurated (day they were anointed) and was to be a continual offering: offered daily, half in the morning; half in the evening. Each day would begin and end with the High Priest making supplication for the Lord's favor on behalf of the priesthood. 3) No part of it was to be eaten. The text doesn't elaborate as to why but merely states that every grain offering for the priest shall be wholly burned (**23**).

Each day, morning and evening, the High Priest offered the priestly grain offering to seek the Lord's favor on behalf of the priesthood. This act constantly served to remind the priests that, although they were different from the rest of the Israelites in terms of function, they were exactly the same in terms of their desperate need for the Lord and His favor. The priests who realized and remembered this need would be protected from one of the strongest temptations faced by those who lead God's people: spiritual pride.

24-30 – Traditionally known as the sin offering, the purification offering served to purify away sin and ritual impurity. This section instructs Aaron and his sons on specific matters connected to this offering, most of which focus on its most holy status. 1st) as a most holy sacrifice, this offering had to be slaughtered in a holy place; particularly where the burnt offering was slaughtered: on the north side of the altar (**1:11**). 2nd) Its most holy status

meant that its meat and blood had to be treated very carefully: after the fat had been removed and burned, the remaining meat had to be eaten in a holy place (tabernacle courtyard), by holy people (anointed priests). In fact, anyone who touched the meat had to be holy (27a).

The holiness of the meat and blood serves to explain the regulations concerning garments and pots. Any garment that was spattered by sacrificial blood had to be washed in a holy place (27b) in the sanctuary area; this ensured that the blood of a most holy sacrifice did not enter the profane (common) realm. It's also possible that the blood actually consecrated the garment, so it needed to be washed to deconsecrate it before it left the Holy Place. These same explanations can be applied to a bronze pot in which a sacrifice was boiled, which was subsequently to be washed with water. A clay pot was treated differently: it was to be broken (28a), probably because it was porous and could have absorbed some of the blood of this most holy sacrifice. Breaking the pot would have prevented it (and any of the sacrifice it retained) from re-entering the non-holy sphere of everyday, common use.

Finally, the passage ends with a sober reminder: if the blood rites of the purification offering took place within the tent of meeting, which they were when it was offered for the High Priest (4:3-12) or for the entire congregation (4:13-21), then none of the meat was to be eaten – it was to be wholly burned in the fire. Each of these instructions served to emphasize the great holiness of the purification offering and the respect with which it must be treated by those who offer it as well as by those who administer and possibly benefit from the sacrifice.

There are several modern applications we can make from this seemingly obscure list of instructions but time will only allow us to look at 1. In the opening section of our text (9-13), God says 3 times that the fire on the altar was to be kept burning continually. For the 40 yrs that Israel wandered in the wilderness, every night was a campfire night. But, eventually, each family would extinguish their fire and retire to their tents. If an Israelite were to leave their tent in the night, they would be met with a deep darkness, especially on moonless nights. But, if they looked to the center of the camp, they'd see smoke rising from the tabernacle and maybe even the light of the flames causing that smoke. The sight of that smoke and fire in the darkness would have evoked thoughts of the presence and power of God.

Smoke rising from the altar of burnt offering meant that their God, their Creator, their King, was present in the camp. God was with them; He dwelt among them. His tent was set up just as their tents were. The King was in residence. But, although God was present in His tent, He wasn't sleeping there; rather, He was keeping vigil over His people, just as He had done earlier on the night of the first Passover. And this God would protect them from their enemies and go before them and lead them into battle.

To equate the fire and smoke to God's presence isn't just fanciful allegorizing or some typological trickery. From the very beginning of Israel's wilderness wandering, the Lord went before them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When they arrived at Mt. Sinai, God's awe-inspiring presence was manifested at the top by smoke and fire. Moses was probably not surprised that the Lord would reveal Himself by fire, since his first encounter with the Lord was by means of a burning bush that wasn't consumed by the fire. Despite all of this, the most logical reason the Israelites would associate the fire of the altar with God's presence is because God was the one who initially started the fire (9:24). Aaron didn't have a holy box of matches or a sanctified Zippo lighter. He wasn't over there rubbing sticks together or making sparks with flint. No, God started the fire; it was His fire the priests were tasked to maintain. So, when Israel saw the smoke from the altar, it reminded them of God presence and all that it meant.

What's the significance of God's presence? The fire reminded Israel that they had access to God's presence. We should also remember that as God's children, we always have access to His presence. Just as the fire on the altar was to never go out, so the fire of God's presence will never go out in the believer's life. When we go through trials, God is with us (Isa 43:2). He doesn't say He'll meet us on the other side of our suffering; He says He'll walk with us through our suffering. When we feel weak and incapable, God is with us. In fact, there'll never be a time when we don't have access to God's presence. Jesus said, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Mt 28:20b).

The fire of the altar also reminded Israel that atonement for sin was available. God's purpose for the altar was to provide a place where people offered sacrifices to atone for sin. Since the sacrificial animal had to be

burned to accomplish atonement, fire must be on the altar. The fire was always burning, so atonement was always obtainable. God let His people know that His atonement and forgiveness of sin were always available.

God's still in the business of forgiving sin. Just as the fire was always burning, Jesus our Savior is always with us and [Heb 7:25](#) says that He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. No matter what we've done, at any time we can confess our sin and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleans us from all unrighteousness ([1 Jn 1:9](#)). Praise God, His forgiveness is always available to those who earnestly seek it.

Finally, the fire reminded Israel that their God was active among them. When Israel saw the fire, they remembered the miracle God performed in lighting it. This miracle demonstrated that God's activity among His people is powerful. The miraculous lighting also demonstrated God's grace. Where did God send the fire? To the altar so His people could offer sacrifices that would atone for their sins and restore their fellowship to their covenant King. God was providing a means for forgiveness with that fire so the fire represented both God's supernatural power and His amazing grace.

We still need God's power and grace. We need His grace because we're reconciled to Him by grace ([Eph 2:8-9](#)). We also need God's power. After He reconciles us to Himself, we need His power to live as He calls us to live. Of course, God's power is available to us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit resides in all of followers of Jesus Christ. He empowers us to be witnesses for Christ. He produces spiritual fruit in us and gives us spiritual gifts to enable us to serve our Lord properly and effectively. That's the only way to do God's work – by God's power. The sacrificial system was God's idea. He initiated it by His grace and power. It was His work done His way. Should we expect to do any less? 😊