

Leviticus 6:8-30

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2021

Chapter 6 continues the retelling of the instructions concerning the offerings, sacrifices and the attendance of the eternal fire on the altar that sits before the Tabernacle. Moses is commanded by the Lord to instruct Aaron and his descendants in the rituals. Why the Lord chooses not to communicate with Aaron directly concerning these things is unknown. It's interesting to note that Moses is the younger brother to Aaron, fitting the biblical pattern in which God chooses to minister through the younger brother and not the elder. Moses describes the appropriate handling of the 'holy things' including the preparation of the animal or grain for sacrifice, the eating and disposal of leftovers and the proper attire that is to be worn while doing it.

From this reading we raised a few questions for discussion. Do we understand the nature of holiness and ceremony? What truly is holy for us (if anything), and how do we relate to it? How do we approach a time of worship and in what manner? What sort of clothing should we wear, and does God actually still care about that sort of thing? During our thoughts on appropriate clothing, we noted that when we go on a date, when we attend important work meetings or visit the queen of England we would wear appropriate clothing. So why not when attending Church? In Jewish tradition, you cannot attend synagogue in shorts, which are seen as disrespectful when going to a place of worship. God takes clothing seriously and has done since the Garden of Eden. Clothing reflects somewhat our internal emotional status and so perhaps we should take heed of what we choose to wear when coming before the Lord.

Moses then instructs Aaron concerning the eternal flame on the altar. Interestingly the Hittites also had instructions for their priests regarding the fire of the altar. Their instructions were the opposite: to put the fire out at night so that it doesn't burn the temple down. God requires a perpetual slow-burning offering that is never extinguished. The initial fire on the altar is a heavenly flame, which appears in Leviticus 9:24. Something from heaven is therefore by definition very important. What spiritual lessons can we learn from priests attending fire from heaven? First, the fire is not permanent. It needs to be kept burning. There is a partnership in which heaven starts a project, in this case the holy fire, but humans maintain the work in progress. God starts something but we continue something. The Holy Spirit is poured out, faith is a gift but our responsibility is in working out our salvation and putting the gifts of the Spirit into practice. We are to be living sacrifices, and that is something that is perpetual and ongoing. Also we note that the fire was a slow burn. We are here to worship and serve the Lord in lifelong service which might also appear slow at times.

Concerning the grain offering, Moses once again announces that holiness is transferable. Priests that touch and eat a holy thing become holy, and they cannot eat in an unholy state. Subsequently, anyone touching the priest also becomes holy. In 2 Kings 13, we read that even the tomb of Elisha the prophet remained so holy that dead people buried in the tomb came alive. The prophet Malachi reflects that the coming Redeemer, the Son of Righteousness, will bear 'healing in His wings' and perhaps influenced the woman with the issue of blood to simply want to touch the 'holy man'. What does this say about our individualism so espoused by our society and some of our churches? If holiness is transferable then we should always endeavour to remain in community to promote, give and receive holiness. Paul admonishes us to not forsake meeting together as some have done already, and the *Didache* (teaching of the early church) required that everyone should seek the company of the saints every day.

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The last point of interest in our discussion concerned the consumption of the sin offering. The sin offering was for unintentional sins, but the question remains; why would you want to eat a sin offering that someone has imparted his or her 'sins' on? Interestingly it appears that the 'sin' is not ingested. As Jesus says, it is not what goes into your mouth that's important but it is what comes out of it. The sin offering of the priest was not to be eaten, and if we recall from chapter 5; the sin offering of the anointed priest (*Cohen HaMashiach*) covered the sins of the whole community and not just his own. Touching the sin offering would also make you holy. Noting that Romans 8:3 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 can be read to say that Jesus is our sin offering (which takes away the sin of the world), we understand the importance of remaining and abiding close with Him and His holiness.