

# Priestly Commandments for Offerings

Four Offerings Considered: Burnt, Grain, Sin, Guilt

Leviticus 6:8 **The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,**

<sup>9</sup> **"Command Aaron and his sons,** saying, This is the law of **the burnt offering**. The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the **fire** of the altar shall be kept burning on it.

<sup>10</sup> And the priest shall put on his linen garment and put his linen undergarment on his body, and he shall take up the ashes to which the **fire** has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar.

<sup>11</sup> Then he shall take off his garments and put on other garments and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place.

<sup>12</sup> The **fire** on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings.

<sup>13</sup> **Fire** shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.

<sup>14</sup> "And this is the law of **the grain offering**. The sons of Aaron shall offer it before the LORD in front of the altar.

<sup>15</sup> And one shall take from it a handful of the fine flour of the grain offering and its oil and all the frankincense that is on the grain offering and burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

<sup>16</sup> And the rest of it Aaron and his sons shall eat. It shall be eaten unleavened in a holy place. In the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it.

<sup>17</sup> It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my food offerings. It is a thing most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering.

<sup>18</sup> Every male among the children of Aaron may eat of it, as decreed forever throughout your generations, from the LORD's food offerings. **Whatever touches them shall become holy.**"

<sup>19</sup> **The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,**

<sup>20</sup> "This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the LORD on the day when he is anointed: a tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening.

<sup>21</sup> It shall be made with oil on a griddle. You shall bring it well mixed, in baked pieces like a grain offering, and offer it for a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

<sup>22</sup> The priest from among Aaron's sons, who is anointed to succeed him, shall offer it to the LORD as decreed forever. The whole of it shall be burned.

<sup>23</sup> Every grain offering of a priest shall be wholly burned. It shall not be eaten."

<sup>24</sup> **The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,**

<sup>25</sup> "**Speak to Aaron and his sons,** saying, This is the law of **the sin offering**. In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD; it is most holy.

<sup>26</sup> The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting.

<sup>27</sup> **Whatever touches its flesh shall be holy**, and when any of its blood is splashed on a garment, you shall wash that on which it was splashed in a holy place.

<sup>28</sup> And the earthenware vessel in which it is boiled shall be broken. But if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water.

<sup>29</sup> Every male among the priests may eat of it; it is most holy.

<sup>30</sup> But no sin offering shall be eaten from which any blood is brought into the tent of meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place; it shall be burned up with **fire**.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Leviticus 7:1** This is the law of **the guilt offering**. It is most holy.

<sup>2</sup> In the place where they kill the burnt offering they shall kill the guilt offering, and its blood shall be thrown against the sides of the altar.

<sup>3</sup> And all its fat shall be offered, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails,

<sup>4</sup> the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys.

<sup>5</sup> The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering to the LORD; it is a guilt offering.

<sup>6</sup> Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place. It is most holy.

<sup>7</sup> The guilt offering is just like the sin offering; there is one law for them. The priest who makes atonement with it shall have it.

<sup>8</sup> And the priest who offers any man's burnt offering shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered.

<sup>9</sup> And every grain offering baked in the oven and all that is prepared on a pan or a griddle shall belong to the priest who offers it.

<sup>10</sup> And every grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, shall be shared equally among all the sons of Aaron.

(Lev 6:8-7:10)

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## Wielder of the Sacred Fire

“Over the bridge!” cried Gandalf, recalling his strength. “Fly! This is a foe beyond any of you. I must hold the narrow way. Fly!” Aragorn and Boromir did not heed the command, but still held their ground, side by side, behind Gandalf at the far end of the bridge. The others halted just within the doorway at the hall’s end, and turned, unable to leave their leader to face the enemy alone.

The Balrog reached the bridge. Gandalf stood in the middle of the span, leaning on the staff in his left hand, but in his other hand Glamdring gleamed, cold and white. His enemy halted again, facing him, and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings. It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm.

“You cannot pass,” he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell. “I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass.”

This scene from the first book of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was made unforgettable by Peter Jackson in the *Fellowship of the Ring* movie. Based upon our text, I got curious as to what this “[Secret Fire](#),” this “flame of Anor” is. So, I went looking.

Turns out, anything that can be said about it is speculation, because Tolkien didn’t explain it. This is its only reference in the *Lord of the Rings*. A later book called *The Silmarillion* has what seems to be the same thing. The beginning of that book describes the creation of the Ainur, beings that seem equivalent in his fantasy world to the Bible’s sons of

God (**Job 38:7**). Gandalf is one of them. They are created by Ilúvatar, “The first beginning ... the Lord for Always who dwells beyond the world; who made it and is not of it nor in it, but loves it” (*The Book of Lost Tales Part One*, “The Music of the Ainur”). The *Tolkien Gateway* describes him as “existing eternally in the Timeless Halls and possessing the Flame Imperishable in his spirit which kindles existence from nothingness” [emphasis added].

The explanation I like best for this is that Anor means “sun,” and so Gandalf is literally wielding the power of the sun. However, the sun and this Secret Fire, this flame of Anor are types or metaphors of the Flame Imperishable which created the world. In this way, Gandalf is telling the evil Balrog that he is a loyal servant of the Creator of all things, and in using this flame, he is acting as a priest on behalf of Ilúvatar.<sup>1</sup>

A priest guarding or supervising or keeping watch over an eternal flame, a fire that never dies out, is at the center of

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<sup>1</sup> “Priest” is my own language. For more on the identification of this flame see Michael Martinez, “Is the Secret Fire the Same as the Flame of Anor?” *Middle-Earth Blog* (Aug 28, 2012), <https://middle-earth.xenite.org/is-the-secret-fire-the-same-as-the-flame-of-anor/>; “Flame of Anor,” *Tolkien Gateway*, [http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Flame\\_of\\_Anor](http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Flame_of_Anor); “What Does Gandalf Mean by ‘Secret Fire’, ‘Flame of Anor’ and ‘Flame of Udûn’?” *Stack Exchange: Science Fiction & Fantasy* (2013), <https://scifi.stackexchange.com/questions/27801/what-does-gandalf-mean-by-secret-fire-flame-of-anor-and-flame-of-ud%C3%BBn>.

Israelite worship, and to our text. Someone writes, “At its core, the religion of God’s people was not a social club, political bloc, or system of dogma. It was an ongoing encounter with the divine. For this experience to continue, the ‘pilot light’ had to remain lit. Sparks of any other kindling were ruled out.”<sup>2</sup> He is referring here to “pilot light” of the perpetually burning bronze altar of the tabernacle courtyard. Exodus describes the altar this way,

You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and fire pans. You shall make all its utensils of bronze. You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze.

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<sup>2</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 150.

And the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. You shall make it hollow, with boards. As it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.

(Exod 27:1-8)

This bronze altar was made out of a less expensive metal than the gold of the tabernacle, because it was in the courtyard, the place that symbolized earth (as opposed to the tabernacle itself, which represented heaven), and it was the place that any Israelite could enter under the right circumstances.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as we shall see, it was an extraordinarily holy object in its own right, and its fire, once lit, **must**, like the Olympic Flame of modern times, **never**, under any circumstances, **be allowed to go out**.

## Offerings and the Priests

We see this in the first part of our long text. The whole logical unit is essentially **Leviticus 6-7** (taking the Jewish numbering of the verses that is). It is broken down into two

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<sup>3</sup> On this see **Vern Poythress**, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterians and Reformed, 1991), 9-40.

main parts. The first (**Lev 6:8-7:21**) is directed to “**Aaron and his sons**” (**6:9, 25**), that is, the **priests**. The second is “**to the people**” (**7:23, 29**). The majority of the passage gives **supplemental instructions** for the same five sacrifices that we have seen in **Leviticus 1:1-6:8**. These are given in the same order as before, save for the peace offering:

	Previously:
1. The burnt offering (6:8-13)	1.
2. The grain offering (14-23)	2.
3. The sin/purification offering (24-30)	4.
4. The guilt/reparations offering (7:1-10)	5.
5. The peace offering (11-36)	3.

Because much of the **peace offering** is directed at the people rather than the priests, we will look only at the first four of these this time. I want to focus on the priests. The priestly focus, by way of side-note, is the explanation for why this material is here, even though much of it duplicates things we have already seen. **Leviticus 1:2** and **4:2** show that what we saw previously was written to “**the Israelites.**” However, what we have now are especially instructions for

the priests.<sup>4</sup> It is important, as we will see later, for us to know the responsibilities of the priests as we live in the light of these shadows of Moses, under the royal priesthood of the new covenant.

### *The Perpetual Burnt Offering (6:8-13)*

We will begin with a recap of the burnt offering. The burnt offering, as you may recall, was primarily a kind of house-warming gift to the LORD. As we have seen many times now in this, the most red-lettered of all OT books, it begins, “The LORD spoke to Moses, saying...” (Lev 6:8). Some of the Targums here have “The Memra (Word) of the LORD spoke with Moses,” meaning that the one speaking to Moses is Christ. And that, of course, always makes the words so much more interesting, considering that this very same person ends up fulfilling the very types he gives to Moses much later on in history. It always makes me wonder what he must have been thinking as he gave the instructions to this great prophet of God.

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<sup>4</sup> See Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 117.

As I've said, the object of the discourse is “Aaron and his sons” (9). Yahweh is commanding them regarding “the law of the burnt offering.” This is the first time that “law” (*torah*) is used in Leviticus, and the first of seven times it appears in Leviticus 6-7 (6:9; 14; 25; 7:1; 7; 11; 37), which is all interesting. Why might this be its first appearance? Heiser explains that the word comes from root *yarah*, which means “to cast” or “to shoot” (an arrow, for instance) or “to show” or “to indicate.” In the case of *torah*, a noun meaning “instruction,” God is showing his instructions to his priests concerning the portions and offerings, and the priests are aiming at hitting them. Thus, *torah* is intimately related to the priests, which is why it is first found here.<sup>5</sup>

What we learn next is new. “The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it” (9). The hearth of the altar is its top, the place where the fire goes.

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<sup>5</sup> See Michael S. Heiser, *Notes on Leviticus: From the Naked Bible Podcast*, on Lev 6:8-9, the Torah.



The idea here is one of **perpetual burning**—all night until morning. This is reinforced in **vv. 12-13**. “The fire on the altar shall be **kept burning** on it; it shall **not go out**. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be **kept burning** on the altar **continually; it shall not go out**.” This is what reminded me of the Flame Imperishable in Tolkien’s masterpiece.

The idea set forth here is that the burnt offering, being the first in both lists, becomes the **foundational offering** of Israel’s entire system, so much so that the altar can actually be called “**the altar of burnt offering**” (**Lev 4:7, 10, 18**, etc.). Being first, it is literally **the offering upon which all others**

are burnt (3:5; 6:12). Recall that in this offering, the entire thing was burnt as a pleasing aroma to the LORD. This offering soothes, as it were, the divine nature. It signifies that God will be disposed to mercy and kindness against unclean people. Its perpetual offering every morning and evening keeps those warm embers of grace burning towards his covenant people. This was, in fact, a law established on Mt. Sinai (Num 28:1-8).<sup>6</sup>

The one who would offer it is, of course, the priest. He has certain regulations here that correspond to the ordination ceremony of Exodus 29. He is to put on his linen garment (see Ex 28:2-4; 29:5) and his undergarments (Ex 28:42), which were his “work clothes.” The latter covered his nakedness; the former made him fit for heavenly service. He then was to take up the ashes left after the burnt offering was consumed and put them beside the altar (Lev 6:10). Then, he was to take off his garments and put on others to carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place (11). The

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<sup>6</sup> Note: One of the explanations for why this material is repeated here has to do with the close connection the whole passage has with Exodus 29, which takes place at Mt. Sinai. These commands are a reiteration of the Sinai exposition of these laws, whereas it was made very clear in Lev 1:1 that the previous six chapters were instructions given to Moses at the tabernacle. See Wenham, 117.

holy attires could not be allowed to leave the sanctuary precinct.

Reasons for taking the ashes away seem to be that while they are no longer useful for the service of the tabernacle, **they remain holy** and thus must be discarded in a holy place, yet outside of the tabernacle grounds, lest it get completely filled up with ashes! The Jews said that this was the first service **the priest would perform every day** and it had to be accomplished by break of day, so that the wind would not take the ashes away and scatter them to the four corners of the earth.<sup>7</sup> In other words, this was serious business of primary importance. For it meant the keeping clean of the temple and **treating of holy things with care and respect.**

## The Grain/Cereal Offering (6:14-23)

The **grain offering** is next. Recall that this was another gift-offering given in times of happiness. This section is divided into **two halves**. The first (**vv. 14-18**) explains **how the priests are to eat** their part of the offering when an Israelite

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<sup>7</sup> See **Andrew Willet**, *A Six-Fold Commentary Upon the Third Booke of Moses, Called Leviticus* (London: Aug. Mathewes, 1631), 94.

brings it. They are to bring it in front of the altar (14), take a handful of the fine flour and its oil and frankincense and burn that as a memorial portion on the altar, which is a pleasing aroma to the LORD (15). The rest is to be eaten by the priest. It is to be eaten, unleavened, in a holy place—the courtyard (16). It is not to be baked with leaven, but is their portion of the LORD’s food offerings, which he is sharing. It is a most holy thing, like the sin and guilt offerings, and hence the contagion of leaven must not be part of it (17). Every male of Aaron’s children can eat it as a decree forever throughout their generations (18).

Then it adds, “Whatever touches them shall become holy.” This is a phrase that has garnered opposite interpretations. On one hand, some have called it the *sanctum contagion* and say it describes the set of things that sanctify all that touch them.<sup>8</sup> Those who go with the ESV’s translation will call something like Ezekiel to their side. “And he said to me, ‘This is the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offering and the sin offering, and where they shall bake the grain

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 62.

offering, in order not to bring them out into the outer court and so transmit holiness to the people” (Ezek 46:20).

On the other hand, you have those who want to translate it very differently. “Anyone who is to touch these must be in a holy state.”<sup>9</sup> This translation is possible because of the form the verb (imperfect, which can be translated as a “shall be” or a “must be”). The idea is that there is no such thing as contagious holiness, although those who take this view do believe in contagious defilement from unclean things. Something like Haggai is usually brought in as evidence. “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: ‘If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?’ The priests answered and said, ‘No.’ Then Haggai said, ‘If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?’ The priests answered and said, ‘It does become unclean’” (Hag 2:11-13).

How can Haggai and Ezekiel be reconciled? Haggai is talking about something holy that is *outside* of the tabernacle

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<sup>9</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 37. Heiser adopts this view.

precinct. On the other hand, Ezekiel is talking about something from the holy place of the temple transmitting holiness to the people. “Holiness exists at the very center of the camp, in the tabernacle, and we are told of no activity or rite which can deprive a person or object of it” when they come into contact with it.<sup>10</sup> So there is no contradiction. It is the proximity of the holy thing to the LORD’s house that causes holiness to become contagious, because its contagion comes from its proximity to the Holy One of Israel. This is why holy space is such an important thing to understand.

The second part of this section begins a new speech by Yahweh (or the Memra of Yahweh; vs. 19). It deals with directions for how the priest is to bring his own grain offering (19-23). This is a new cooked grain offering not included in Leviticus 2, because unlike that offering, this one is mandatory.

It again parallels Exodus 29 and the ordination of the priest. “This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the LORD on the day when he is anointed” (Lev

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<sup>10</sup> Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 176ff, also Haran, “The Priestly Image of the Tabernacle,” *HUCA* 36 (1965): 216f.<sup>10</sup>

6:20). He is to bring a tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering. Half of it comes in the morning and half in the evening (20). In this way, it seems to be parallel to the burnt offering and probably goes on top of that one. It is made with oil on a griddle. It is well mixed and in baked pieces like the grain offering and it is offered as a pleasing aroma to the LORD (21).

This is what each new priest ordained beginning with Aaron must do, and it is a decree forever (22). The entire thing is to be burned. Every single one of them is to be wholly burned and not eaten (23). Why? Because they are holy to the LORD.

## The Sin/Purification Offering (6:24-30)

The law (*torah*, third time it is used) of purification offering is next. This is the sacrifice that purifies sacred space and also the offerer of uncleanness and sometimes even of sin. Again, the LORD (or the Memra) spoke to Moses (24). The reason for what follows is because there was meat left over on the “outer altar” in the explanation of this in Leviticus 4. Now we learn what becomes of that.

On the very same place where the burnt offering is killed, this purification offering is to be killed before the LORD; it is most holy (25). The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it, in a holy place, **in the court** of the tent of meeting (26). (Can you start to see how a priest like Eli might have been so fat? **1Sa 4:18**) Again, we see this idea of **contagious holiness**. “**Whatever touches its flesh shall be holy,**” and when any of its blood is splashed on a garment, you shall wash that on which it was splashed in a holy place (27).

The **earthenware vessel** in which it is boiled shall be broken, but if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water (28). Why? Again, we see the idea of **contagious holiness**. The **clay pot** is porous and thus absorbs particles of the flesh and blood of the offering. You can't run the risk of any part of this going somewhere other than the holy place, and so it had to be destroyed. Bronze doesn't do that, and so it simply had to be washed, albeit in the holy place.

Finally, it explains that **every male among the priests** may eat of it; it is most holy (29). But no purification offering is to be eaten from which any blood is brought into the

tent of meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place; that shall be burned up with fire (30).

## The Guilt/Reparation Offering (7:1-10)

Finally, we have the law (*torah*) of the **reparation offering**. This was offered when the person discovered they had done something that needed to be paid back to God or their neighbor. This offering is called “**most holy**” (**Lev 7:1**). Again, in the same place as the burnt offering, they are to kill the guilt/reparation offering. Its blood is to be **thrown against the sides of the altar**, rather than dabbed on its horns (2). This is because the power of the horns is not needed here; the offering is not for purification so much as it is for reparation.

Thus, all its fat shall be offered, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails (3), the two kidneys with their fat, the long lobe of the liver (4), and the priest shall burn them on the altar as a **food offering to the LORD**; it is a reparation offering (5). “**Food offering**” is an offering by fire, or a “**gift**” (*ishsheh*), and this gift corresponds to the fact that this is part of the quantifiable requirement for making reparations to

the LORD for the wrong committed, as opposed to a total debt payment due to sin which has no price-tag.<sup>11</sup>

At this point, we learn again that **every male among the priests** can eat of it, in a holy place, because it is most holy (6). This reparation offering is just like the purification offering in terms of how the law is to be carried out (7). It belongs to the priest who makes atonement for the person.

Further instructions are given to the priest who offers any man's burnt offering (**he shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering; 8**); every grain offering baked in the oven or prepared on a pan or griddle (they shall belong to the priest who offers it; 9); but every grain offering, mixed with oil or dry is to be **shared equally among all the sons of Aaron (10)**. While the law continues with the middle offering, the peace offering, that it has skipped over, we will stop our study here as said earlier.

## How It Applies in the New Covenant

### *The Consuming Fire*

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<sup>11</sup> A. Médebielle, "Le symbolism du sacrifice expiatoire en Israël," *Bib* 2 (1921): 300–301, cited in **Roy Gane**, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 132.

As we begin to think about what this all means in light of the new covenant, I want to return to that subject we noticed in the first offering—the burnt offering. I’m talking here about the [perpetual burning of the offering](#). Let’s ask a question. Why couldn’t the fire go out? The answer will not be known for two more chapters. But there it gives you the answer. “[And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces](#)” ([Lev 9:24](#)). The holy fire of the tabernacle was sent by God himself. [He started it.](#)

It is therefore [a miraculous fire](#). Yet, this fire would not continue to be a fire of miracle, but of ordinary means. An old commentary says,

[He who miraculously sent down this fire at first will not renew the miracle every day by a like supply: It began immediately from God, it must be nourished by means. Fuel must maintain that fire that came from heaven, God will not work miracles every day. If he has kindled his Spirit in us, we may not expect he shall every day begin again; we have the fuel](#)

of the word and sacraments, prayers and meditations, which must keep it in forever. It is from God that these helps can nourish his graces in us ... but we may not expect new [miraculous] infusions: rather know that God expects of us an improvement of those habitual graces we have received.<sup>12</sup>

In this way, you can see that one application of this perpetual fire is that *it takes work to keep it going*. This work is a priestly duty. Nevertheless, that work is not the work of your hands, but of ordinary means ordained by God himself. If we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and if we are a holy royal priesthood (1Pe 2:5, 9), then he has set a fire in us and it is only kept burning by attending ourselves to his holy service through those things that grow and strengthen our faith.

If those means are in fact the means of grace as the church has always held, that is the word preached and taught, baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, and singing with God's people the holy Scripture, and fellowship, then what does this say about how to keep the kindling of the

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<sup>12</sup> Abraham Wright, *A Practical Commentary or Exposition upon the Pentateuch viz. These Five Books of Moses: Genesis, exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (London: G. Dawson, 1662), 123.

Spirit's fire roaring in your heart? This is the vital importance of associating ourselves with the church, for it is the church itself, and not merely us as individuals, that are the NT temple of God.

This miraculous fiery beginning is amazing enough, until you realize that fire is what God is said to be. “**The LORD your God is a consuming fire**” (**Deut 4:24**). Here, then, is that direct connection to Tolkien's Flame Imperishable. This idea is **imaged for us many times** in the Scripture. The LORD came in the **pillar of fire** by day (**Ex 13:21-22**). He appeared to Moses in a **fiery bush** (**Ex 3:2**). He came down in the **fire on top of Mt. Sinai** (**Ex 19:16-18**). Like Gandalf, fire came out from **his staff** and consumed the offering of Gideon (**Jdg 6:21**). And when Manoah offered an offering, **the LORD went up in the flame** of the altar (**Jdg 13:20**). In all of these instances, it is the Angel of the LORD (Christ) somehow being surrounded by fire, although if this Angel did assume the nature of something like a seraphim, he would himself be a “burning” thing of light, even as Ezekiel describes him (**Ezek 1:27**). (*Saraph* means “to burn”).

Fire can be understood as an image of **God's Holy Spirit**. Hence, **tongues of fire** come down upon the Christians

when God sends the Spirit at Pentecost ([Acts 2:3](#)). And this is why, even as the Spirit descended upon Christ at his baptism to fill him, it is usually the case that the Angel in the OT is surrounded by, or enshrouded by, fire. In this way, the fiery Spirit of God can be considered our spiritual priestly clothing, which make us fit for holy service to the Lord.

### *Priestly Responsibilities and Blessings in the New Covenant*

Here's what I mean. In the [ordination ritual of the priest](#), to which our very passage is so intimately linked, he was first [washed with water](#) and then [clothed with his priestly garments](#). This ends up happening in [Leviticus 8:6-9](#) and it will become very important for the next few chapters. Part of those garments, namely, the 12 gems and the mysterious Urim and Thummim ([Lev 8:8](#)) are linked directly to the idea of fire (*urim* means “light” or “fire” and the twelve stones are fiery looking things that have a counterpart in the “fiery stones” of [Ezekiel 28:14](#)). Following this ordination Paul says, “[All of you who were baptized into Christ have](#)

clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27 NAS), that is, with the Spirit of Christ. This is regeneration.

These garments show up in our passage, as they become indispensable to the carrying out of the sacrifices of the priest, including the taking of the ashes to a clean place. The Puritan Andrew Willet gives some interesting “mystical” interpretations of the ashes as it regards *Christ’s* high priesthood. “Hereby historically was signified the sepulchral of Christ outside the city. And mystically we are admonished to the last resurrection, when our bodies turned to ashes, shall be raised to life. Some have understood the ashes to be the consummation and perfection of good works, and as here the priest carries the ashes out of the camp, so after this life our good works by Christ, our High Priest, are presented to God.”<sup>13</sup>

Whatever is intended in the typology of this by God, it is clear that this kind of interpretation has a long history in the church. But probably more to the point, it seems to me that the most practical thing about this is that without his priestly clothing, the son of Aaron could not carry out any of his duty. Why? The Venerable Bede explains it, “He is

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<sup>13</sup> Willet, 94.

clothed in linen garments when he does these things because ... he sets before us the examples of his own incarnation, passion and death, which can be signified by linen, as we have frequently said” (Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2.11).<sup>14</sup>

This speaks to the vital link between faith and Christ and the good works of carrying out our NT sacrifices of our lives and prayers and duties to turn to him to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. For without faith, it is impossible to please God, and without Christ and his Spirit, there is no fire being offered to the Father for your forgiveness.

But there is more here that God graciously does to help his priests. God in Christ has provided **good food** for his priests in the OT to be sustained from day to day. Almost all of our passage in one way or another speaks to this. Some parts go out of the way to make sure you understand that this is to be **a decree forever**, that all the sons of the priests might share in the holy food for their sustenance. These are glorious gifts, especially considering that the priest had no share in the tribes of Israel with the land. He had to attend

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph T. Lienhard and Ronnie J. Rombs, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 3. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 170.

to the holy things all his adult life, but **God promised to sustain him through the sacrifices.**

Again, the new covenant parallel is the priesthood of the believer. We are all sons of God, and brothers with Christ, the high priest. The Good God has given us through his Spirit this fire that kindles our hearts and **warms the food** so that it provides all that we need we feast upon the Word and partake of Supper (signified especially in the last offering we have not dealt with this time). These keep us going as the very food of heaven so that we might persevere through all the storms and wildernesses of life. Anyone who is in Christ is now his priest and may eat of these things.

Therefore, **you must turn to Christ** and his once-for-all sacrifice outside the city this day to begin your priestly service in his NT temple. Anything else, anything short of conversion and turning to him, and the results are deadly. What do I mean?

### *Contagious Holiness and the Consuming Fire*

I mean that they are considered “**most holy.**” Holy things touched by holy blood and holy fire become

contagious. But this contagion, when not carefully walled off, carefully stored away, carefully separated from that which is not made fit to be there, becomes a deadly roaring wildfire that quickly burns and scorches all in its path. This is the nature of fire; this is the nature of the holiness, the otherness, of God.

When fire destroys homes and forests, it is easy to think of fire in this way. But few think of holiness this way. Yet, they are one and the same. “Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isa 33:14), asks Isaiah? He would know. He understood the power of contagious holiness when the tongs from the altar touched and scoured his lips (Isaiah 6:7). As we have seen, “Whatever touches them shall become holy” (Lev 6:18, 27).

That alternate translation, “Anyone who is to touch these must be in a holy state,” is true. But it does not go far enough. It is true because if you are not in a holy state, woe to you. Woe to you (Isa 6:5)! And this is the reason why I think it is dangerous to not understand or even to deny the *Sanctum Contagion*. It’s like pretending that flying into the sun would not be dangerous even when you were millions

of miles away. Of course, it is not merely disease and uncleanness that is contagious; so also are light and heat.

God as a fire **never changes**. Don't think that because you do not have to go to a specific place in this world and kill one of your herd that this has changed. The same thing is said in the NT. **Our God is a Consuming Fire (Heb 12:29)**. What does that mean? It means, this perpetual fire represents him. If God is a jealous God (**Deut 4:24**), as the context of him being a Consuming Fire in Deuteronomy explains, that means the fire represents *jealousy for his holiness*. And thus he tells Israel, **“Know therefore today that he who goes over before you as a consuming fire is the LORD your God. He will destroy them and subdue them before you. So you shall drive them out and make them perish quickly, as the LORD has promised you” (Deut 9:3)**.

Closer to the sanctuary, someone has referred to the **“high voltage of the supersanctums.”**<sup>15</sup> The tabernacle complex is like **a power generator of billions of volts of electricity**. Anything not prescribed to prepare the worshiper or the intercessor, the priest is lethally contagious. **“Holiness is**

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<sup>15</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 64.

lethal to all but the priests.”<sup>16</sup> Do you wonder why Uzzah simply touching the ark resulted in his death (2Sa 6:6-7)? Do you wonder why God struck 70 Bethshemeshites simply for looking at the ark (1Sa 6:19). Even Steven Spielberg understood this! And do you wonder why the sons of Aaron in just a couple of chapters from now will be scorched inside the holy place for offering strange fire? Even the priests are not immune, if they are not holy.

Thomas Watson has said, “Whatever is not divinely appointed, is offering up strange fire. There is in many a strange itch after superstition: they love a gaudy religion and are more for the pomp of worship than the purity; which cannot be pleasing to God. As if God were not wise enough to appoint the manner how he will be served, man will be so bold as to prescribe for him. To thrust human inventions into sacred things, is doing our will, not God’s; and he will say, *quis quaesivit haec?* ‘Who has required this at your hand?’”<sup>17</sup>

Everything had to be just right. His nakedness could not be exposed, so he wore undergarments. He could not enter

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Lord’s Prayer* (Books for the Ages; Version 1.0 on CD-ROM; Albany, Ore.: Ages Software, 1997), 164, cited in Gane, 151.

without the proper clothing, so he carefully put on what had been commanded and made in the prescribed way. He had to touch everything exactly right, do everything exactly as commanded. God provided them a remedy, but sometimes holiness broke out anyway.

Truly, [who can dwell with the Consuming Fire?](#) Answer. Only those who have the Fire of God burning brightly inside of them, who have been clothed with Christ and washed by him. Whatever he touches becomes holy, for he is the Holy One of Israel, and his sacrifice is Most Holy. And if you are the temple of God, contagious holiness dwells in you, because God's Spirit is in you. It can be a fire for salvation or of death, so wield it well and keep it kindled in obedience to the commandments. Because of the cleansing offering, God's holiness is contained perfectly in judgment of the Son of God, so that you might be made fit vessels for service in the new covenant, thereby partaking of the good food, and carrying out the good service he has made you fit to do towards him and your neighbor.

I found the words of Paterius (sixth-seventh century), who carefully transmitted the words of his mentor Gregory the Great a fitting way to end this study.

That fire is perpetual that is never extinguished on the altar. The altar of God is our heart. Fire must always burn in it, for the flame of charity must always burn on it for God. Day by day, the priest puts wood on the fire, lest it go out. Everyone who has faith in Christ has been made a member of the high priest. The apostle Peter says to all the faithful, “You are an elect people, a royal priesthood” (1Pe 2:9). The apostle John says, “You have made us a kingdom and a priesthood for our God” (Rev 1:6). The priest who feeds the fire on the altar and puts wood on it each day is each one of the faithful. To keep the flame of charity from going out in himself, he does not cease to gather both the examples of the elders and the testimonies of Holy Scripture. To call to mind the examples of the fathers or the precepts of the Lord in the practice of charity is to put fuel on the fire. Since this inner newness of ours grows old in the daily living of life, wood must be used to feed that fire. While the fire grows dim as we age, it grows bright again through the testimonies and examples of the fathers [I would add again, and the means of grace]. And the command is good, to gather wood each day in the morning. This cannot be done except when the night of darkness is banished. Since morning is the first part of the day and comes when we have put off thoughts of this present life, each of the faithful should think of this task first so that the practice

of charity can inflame whatever is just about to die out in him, by the efforts he can make. For that fire on the altar of God—that is, in our hearts—is soon extinguished unless it is carefully maintained by the examples of the fathers and the testimonies of the Lord [and the means of grace].

(Paterius, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*,  
Leviticus 5)

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