

MESSAGE 27
UNCLEANNES DISQUALIFYING A PRIEST AND
RELATIONSHIPS DISQUALIFYING A PERSON
ATTACHED TO A PRIEST’S HOUSEHOLD
FROM EATING HOLY FOODS
 Leviticus 22:1-16

Introduction

This MESSAGE concerned factors that disqualified priests and their families from eating of the holy foods. The distinction between “a holiness” and “a holiness of holinesses” out of the offerings and explanations concerning who was authorized to eat of each have been explained in Leviticus 6:14-18; 7:28-36; 10:12-15 (see also comment on Lev. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading [It is] a holiness of holinesses, on Lev. 6:14-18 in MESSAGE 5, on Lev. 7:28-36 in MESSAGE 9, and on Lev. 10:12-15 in MESSAGE 13). Further information concerning other items that were holinesses or holinesses of holinesses is found in Leviticus 27:1-33. Rules given in this MESSAGE also applied to those items (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 38). In this MESSAGE, certain limitations were placed on the right of priests and their families to eat or touch those holy items. Priests were disqualified from eating holy foods (certainly including most holy foods) when they were unclean. Persons in a priest’s household were disqualified from eating holy foods if they were only temporarily attached to the household.

This MESSAGE may be outlined as follows:

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Interpretation

CHAPTER 22

Introductory note (22:1)

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

A new MESSAGE delivered to Moses is introduced with this verse.

a. Uncleanness disqualifying a priest from eating holy foods (22:2-9)

Verses 2-3. **2 Tell Aaron and his sons to keep away from the holinesses of the sons of Israel, so that they will not make common My holy name that they are making holy. I am Jehovah.**

3 Say to them through your generations, Any man of all your seed who comes near the holinesses that the people of Israel make holy to Jehovah while he is unclean, that person shall be cut off from My face.

This MESSAGE was to be relayed to Aaron and his sons. The first part of the MESSAGE (vs.

2-9) was especially pertinent to the priests, because it dealt directly with them. The second part (vs. 10-16) was also of concern to them, because they were responsible for supervising their households to prevent infractions of the rules by members of their families.

The commandment in verse 2 sounds strange, because Aaron and his sons were commanded to keep away from the holy foods they already had been given the right to eat (see comments on Lev. 6:16-17 in MESSAGE 5; on Lev. 7:28-36 in MESSAGE 9; on Lev. 10:12-15 in MESSAGE 13, and on Lev. 21:22 in MESSAGE 26). The puzzle is explained in verse 3 by the statement that priests were not to come near to holinesses when they were unclean. Verses 4, 6, 7 show that “come near the holinesses” means to eat of them. Eating of the portions of the offerings that were assigned to the priests was a part of the offering itself. Eating those portions had important symbolic significance as a part of the offering. Therefore, those who ate of those portions of the offerings needed to be in a ceremonially clean condition when they ate.

The occasions by which it was possible for a priest to become ceremonially unclean were numerous enough that, no matter how careful a priest might be, he could not always avoid uncleanness (see comments on Lev. 11-15 in MESSAGES 14-19; and on Lev. 21:1 in MESSAGE 26; see also Num. 12:11-22). When a priest was in an unclean condition, he was not to eat of the portions of the offerings that were assigned for his and the other priests’ support.

Since uncleanness symbolized sin, the command that when a priest in an unclean condition he was not to eat meat or bread from off the altar, even though it was set aside for his support, surely was intended to teach the Israelites that even the best of men at times would fall short of God’s commandments and ideals. No follower of Jehovah, not even the priests, could be completely free of sin. However, the susceptibility of every person to sin did not mean that they could take sin lightly. Sin always brought evil consequences and shut them off from some of God’s blessings. The commandment that the priests were not to eat of the holy foods

when they were unclean taught them that sin in their lives would prevent them from fully carrying out the work to which God had assigned them.

A priest who did eat of holy foods when he was unclean showed that he desired the privileges of his office without the responsibilities that accompanied them. Such an action was rebellion against Jehovah and His commandments. He was to be “cut off from My face.” Some have interpreted this expression to mean he was to be removed from being a priest. Verse 9 shows it really means he was to be executed. The expression has the same meaning as “cut off from among his people” in Leviticus 7:20 and as “cut off” in Leviticus 20:5 (see comments on Lev. 7:20 in MESSAGE 7, in Introduction to MESSAGE 24, and on Lev. 20:5 in MESSAGE 24)..The priest who ate without proper preparation revealed a rebellious heart, and the penalty for rebellion was death.

There is no statement here or in verses. 10-16 that being unclean disqualified a member of a priest’s household from eating of the holy foods; however, it must have been taken for granted that that was the case. Since being unclean disqualified a priest from eating most holy portions of the offerings, it must have disqualified a member of his household from eating holy portions. This conclusion is supported by Leviticus 7:20-21, which prescribed the death penalty for any person eating of the meat of a slaughter-offering while unclean (see comments on those verses in MESSAGE 7).

Verses 4-8. **4 Any man of the seed of Aaron who is a leper or has a discharge must not eat of the holinesses until he is clean, and whoever touches any unclean person or a man whose discharge of seed goes out from him.**

5 And a man who touches any swarmer by which he may become unclean or a man by whom he may become unclean by any [kind of] uncleanness.

6 A person who touches it shall be unclean until the evening, and he must not eat of the holinesses until he has bathed his body in water.

7 When the sun has gone down, then he shall be clean, and afterward he may eat of the holinesses, because this [is] his food.

8 He must not eat a carcass or a prey to become unclean by it. I am Jehovah.

These verses review certain conditions that made a person unclean. The first condition was having the disease of tsaraath (see comments on Lev. 13:1-46 in MESSAGE 16). The second condition was an abnormal discharge from the body (see comments on Lev. 15:1-12 in MESSAGE 19). Those conditions made a person unclean until he was healed and cleansed (see comments on Lev. 14:1-32 in MESSAGE 18 and on Lev. 15:13-15 in MESSAGE 19). The other conditions mentioned made the person unclean until nightfall. They were: touching the carcass of an unclean animal (see comments on Lev. 11:1-23 in MESSAGE 14), touching a man in a day when he had discharged seed or semen (see comments on Lev. 15:16-18 in MESSAGE 19), touching an unclean swarmer (see comments on Lev. 11:29-38,41-43 in MESSAGE 14), touching an animal that had died of a natural cause (see comments on Lev. 11:39-40 in MESSAGE 14), and touching an animal that was killed by being prey for another animal (see comments on Lev. 7:24 in MESSAGE 8 and on Lev. 17:15 in MESSAGE 21).

Then verse 5 includes other unclean conditions that are not specifically named by referring to touching “**a man by whom he may become unclean by any [kind of] uncleanness.**” Those conditions would include touching a woman after she had given birth to a child (see comments on Lev. 12:1-8 in MESSAGE 15), touching a person with tsaraath (see comments on Lev. 13:45-56 in MESSAGE 16), touching a woman during menstruation (see comments on Lev. 15:19-30 in MESSAGE 19), and touching a corpse (see comments on Lev. 21:1 in MESSAGE 15; see also Num. 12:11-22). Two other conditions could make a person unclean that do not specifically fall under the classification of “touching a man.” They are touching cloth that was infected with tsaraath (see comments on Lev. 13:47-59 in MESSAGE 16) and touching a house that was infected with tsaraath (see comments on Lev. 14:33-53 in MESSAGE 18). No doubt, those conditions were to be understood.

When a priest became unclean, he had to observe the appropriate cleansing ceremony before

he could eat of holy foods. That ceremony usually consisted of washing his body and his clothes in water and waiting until the evening (see comments on Lev. 11:25,40 in MESSAGE 14, on Lev. 14:46-47 in MESSAGE 18, on Lev. 15:4-12,18,19-23,27 in MESSAGE 19, and on Lev. 17:15 in MESSAGE 21). This passage says a priest who became unclean was to carry out those cleansing ceremonies, though it does not specifically mention washing the priest’s clothes. After the washing, at evening he would be clean. “Evening” is defined in this passage for the first time as “When the sun has gone down.” After his ceremonial cleansing, the priest could eat of the portions of the offerings that belonged to him. Eating portions of the offerings and gifts Jehovah had designated for the priests was a priest’s only means of support. God did not intend for him to be denied of them long enough to harm him, but the provisions of these verses preserved the unclean symbols, which were constant reminders to the Israelites to avoid all forms of sin.

Verse 9. **And they shall watch My watch, and they will not bear sin for it, and they shall not die by it [as they would] if they made it common. I am Jehovah who is making them holy.**

This verse means that, if the priests kept watch over their actions and obeyed God’s commands, the weight of sin would not bear down on them and they would not die. The expression translated “watch My watch” is the same as the command God gave to Aaron and his sons to spend seven days in The Tabernacle after their anointing to study and prayer over their responsibilities (see comments on Lev. 8:35 in MESSAGE 10). The same expression was used in Leviticus 18:4,5,26,30; 19:3,19,30; 20:8,22 to refer to watching out to keep Jehovah’s commandments (see comments on Lev. 18:30 in MESSAGE 22). The priests were to be as diligent in keeping Jehovah’s commandments as they had been in observing study and prayer as a part of their hallowing ceremonies. In verse 3, Jehovah had already made it clear that the penalty for eating holy foods while unclean was death. By comparison with Lev. 20:2-5, it would seem that this commandment meant an offending priest was to be executed by the Israelites after he was judged guilty by the judges and that, if the Israelites failed

to carry out the sentence, Jehovah Himself would punish him with death. Such a stern penalty was required because eating holy foods while unclean was direct disobedience to a known command of God. It showed disrespect for the symbols of Jehovah and for the spiritual truths they represented. It amounted to rebellion against the authority and commands of Jehovah (see Introduction to Lev. 20 and comments on Lev. 20:2-5 in MESSAGE 24). The penalty for rebellion against Jehovah was death.

- b. Relationships disqualifying persons attached to a priest's household (22:10-16)

Verse 10. **And any outsider must not eat of a holiness. A visitor with a priest or a hired servant must not eat of a holiness.**

This verse means that any person who was not a regular or permanent member of a priest's household was not authorized to eat of the holy food that Jehovah had designated to provide support for their priests and their families. The word translated "outsider" is the same word used for "strange" fire in Leviticus 10:1 (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 11 under the heading and offered strange fire before Jehovah, which He had not commanded them). It can be translated correctly as "stranger," though "outsider" communicates the idea more clearly to English readers. Persons from outside the family were not to be allowed to eat the food God had set apart for the priests' and their families, though they could be welcome guests of the family. This provision prevented persons in secular occupations, who had other means of support, from imposing on the priests, whose only support was through their portions of the people's offerings and gifts to Jehovah.

The word translated "visitor" means a person who may have been staying within a priest's house for a period of time but who was not a regular part of his family. It signified a person who was more closely related to the family than an "outsider," but who still was not a permanent part of the family. This word has often been translated as "sojourner," but it is not the same word that is often translated in that manner in Leviticus 16:29; 17:8,

10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26; 19:10, 33, 34; 20:2. That word means a person of foreign birth who had accepted Jehovah as his God and who had been accepted as a member of the family and as a citizen of the nation. Such persons were accepted into the family's tribe and were given all the privileges of native-born Israelites (see comments on Lev. 16:29b-31 in MESSAGE 20, on Lev. 17:8-9 in MESSAGE 21, on Lev. 19:10,33-34 in MESSAGE 23, and on Lev. 20:2 in MESSAGE 24). Many examples of sojourners who played an important part in the life of Israel can be cited. Two who are readily and universally recognized are Rahab (Josh. 6:25; Matt. 1:5; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25) and Ruth (Ruth 4:13-17; Mat. 1:5).. By contrast, this word means "visitor." When it was applied to the nation, it meant a foreigner, an alien. When it was applied to a family, it meant a person who was not a regular part of the family. The person could have been a renter or a long term guest. The length of his stay did not make him a member of the family. Those visitors were not to be invited to share in the holy food that Jehovah had appointed for the priests' support. If translators were more careful to distinguish between these two words, the meaning would be much clearer to English readers.

A third type of person who might be attached to a priest's family but who was not authorized to eat of the holy food that was set aside for the priests' support was a hired servant, that is, an employee. He might have worked for the priest for a long time and perhaps could have lived with the priest, but he was not a regular part of the household. He had his own means of support through the wages he earned, and he did not need to eat the priest's food. He was to be treated fairly and his wages were to be paid to him regularly (see comments on Lev. 19:13 in MESSAGE 23), but he was not authorized to eat food set aside for the priest's family.

Verse 11. **But if a priest buys a slave, a purchase by money, he may eat of it; and ones born in his house, they may eat of his food.**

A slave owned by a priest was another matter. He was a regular part of the priest's household, because he belonged completely to the priest. A child of a priest's slave was also a part of

the priest's family. Both the slave and his or her child could eat the priest's food. They had no other means of support, because they were completely dependent on their priest owner. They could eat the priest's food just like the priest's family members. (For a discussion of the moral questions involved in provisions for slavery in Israel, see comments on Lev. 19:20-22 in MESSAGE 23).

Verse 12. **And a priest's daughter, if she is for an outside man may not eat of the offering of the holinesses.**

13 But a priest's daughter, if she is a widow or one divorced and has no seed and has returned to her father's house as [in] her youth, she may eat from her father's food; but an outsider may not eat of it.

A third kind of person who was considered to be a part of a priest's family and who was entitled to eat of the priest's food was a daughter who had been married but who had returned to her father's house to live. A priest's daughter who was married to a man who was not a priest and who lived with her husband was not entitled to eat her father's food. The word translated "outsider" in verse 12 is the same word translated in that manner in verse 10. Here it refers to a man who was not of the priestly family, that is, not descended from Aaron. When a priest's daughter married, she no longer belonged to her father's household and, therefore, she lost her right to eat of the holy food, unless her husband was also a priest. However, if her husband died or if she was divorced and returned to live with her father, she was again authorized to eat of her father's food.

Verse 14. **And if a man eats a holiness by mistake, he shall add a fifth of it to it, and he shall give the holiness to the priest.**

If an unauthorized person ate of holy food, that is, food designated for the priests without realizing it was holy food, it was not rebellion but a sin of "mistake" (see comments on Lev. 4:2 in MESSAGE 2). He was to return to the priest food of equal value plus one-fifth more. This provision had been commanded already in instructions concerning the offense-offering. In those instructions, it also had been made clear that the

restitution was to be accompanied by an offense-offering (see comments on Lev. 5:15-16 in MESSAGE 3).

Verse 15. **And they must not make common the holinesses of the people of Israel that they contribute to Jehovah.**

Because this offense could be forgiven did not mean that either the offender or the priest should take it lightly. If the offender made light of his offense, he made a holy object common, which was a serious offense against Jehovah. The word translate "contribute" is a verb related to the word translated "contribution" in Leviticus 7:14. In that verse, the word "contribution" referred to the bread a worshiper was to offer to Jehovah along with a slaughter-offering. Jehovah designated it for the priests (see comments on Lev. 7:14 in MESSAGE 7 under the heading And he shall offer from it one from each [kind of] offering [as] a contribution to Jehovah). In Leviticus 7:32, the word was used to refer to the right front quarter of a slaughter offering, which was a portion of the offering that belonged to Jehovah and which He assigned to the officiating priest (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 9). In Numbers 15:19-21, it was used to refer to a first-fruits offering (concerning first-fruits, see comments on Lev. 2:12 in MESSAGE 1). In Numbers 18:8-29, which lists all the items that were set aside for the priests' support, it is applied to the whole list. In Numbers 31:29,41 it was applied to the priests' portion of spoils from a war with Midian. Therefore, this verse means that any items Jehovah had set aside for the priests' support was to be recognized as holy and treated with the greatest of respect.

Verse 16. **And they shall cause them to bear iniquity of offense by eating their holinesses, for I am Jehovah who hallows them.**

All translators have struggled with these words and have interpreted them in a number of complicated ways. The literal translation given here is best. "Cause them to bear" means the weight of iniquity would bear down on those who made light of holy objects set aside for the priests. They were subject to punishment (see comments on Lev. 5:1 in MESSAGE 2). "Iniquity of offense" means treating lightly holy objects was an iniquity that required

restitution (see comments on Lev. 5:6 in MESSAGE 2). The restitution already had been

specified as equal to the amount eaten plus a fifth more.

Application

Christian ministers should be extremely careful to keep their lives free from sin. They have no right to enjoy the blessings and privileges that belong to the Lord's ministers, unless they are willing to carry worthily the moral responsibilities that go along with them. If a minister deliberately sins and persists in sin while trying to pose as a servant of Christ, he is guilty of rebellion. He will become an outcast from the Lord and from the privileges that the Lord's ministers enjoy.

Persons outside of a minister's family who try to enjoy the privileges that belong to those chosen families also sin. To seek those privileges without the right to them is not rebellion, but it is a serious offense and should be repented of. The person also should restore the privileges wrongfully taken, and more besides.