

Deuteronomy 33:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.

Analysis

They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Moses defines the Levites' dual priestly function: yarah (יְרָא, "teach") and sacrificial mediation. The Hebrew torah (תּוֹרָה, "law/instruction") appears here, linking Levitical teaching ministry to the broader covenant instruction system.

The teaching function appears first, indicating priority: priests were fundamentally instructors in divine mishpat (מִשְׁפָט, "judgments/ordinances") before being sacrificers. Malachi 2:7 confirms this: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts." The collapse of teaching function contributed to Israel's apostasy (Hosea 4:6).

The sacrificial duties—qetoreth (קְטוּרָה, "incense") and kalil (קָלִיל, "whole burnt offering")—represent mediation and atonement. Incense symbolized prayers ascending to God (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8), while whole burnt offerings expressed complete consecration, the entire animal consumed on the altar. Together, teaching and sacrifice formed comprehensive priestly ministry: instructing people in God's ways and mediating their approach to Him. Christ fulfills both roles perfectly as Prophet-Teacher and High Priest-Sacrifice (Hebrews 4:14-5:10).

Historical Context

This verse establishes the Levitical priestly charter that governed Israel's worship from the wilderness period through the Second Temple. The teaching function was exercised through regular instruction at the Tabernacle/Temple, circuits to Levitical cities (2 Chronicles 17:7-9), and legal rulings in disputed cases (Deuteronomy 17:8-13).

The incense offering occurred twice daily in the Holy Place (Exodus 30:7-8), performed exclusively by priests. Zechariah was offering incense when Gabriel announced John the Baptist's birth (Luke 1:8-11). The whole burnt offering (olah) was the most common sacrifice, offered morning and evening as the tamid (continual offering), plus additional offerings for festivals and individual worshipers.

The Levitical system's teaching function suffered periodic collapse, contributing to cycles of apostasy. King Jehoshaphat's revival included sending Levites to teach throughout Judah (2 Chronicles 17:7-9). Ezra's reforms after exile reestablished this teaching ministry (Nehemiah 8:7-9). The New Testament critiques first-century Judaism not for maintaining Levitical functions but for distorting teaching through tradition (Mark 7:13) and losing the sacrificial system's typological meaning, which pointed to Christ's perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-18).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the priority of teaching before sacrifice challenge modern worship practices that emphasize experience over instruction?
2. What parallels exist between Levitical teaching ministry and the pastoral/teaching office in the New Testament church?

3. In what ways has the church sometimes separated teaching from worship, contrary to the integrated Levitical model?
4. How does Christ fulfill both the teaching and sacrificial aspects of priesthood in His person and work?
5. What happens to Christian communities when sound teaching is neglected in favor of ritual or emotional experience?

Interlinear Text

וְיֹרֶר	בְּמִשְׁפָט	לְמִשְׁפָט	לְיִשְׁרָאֵל	וְיִתְּבַרְתָּךְ	יְשַׁׁעַת
They shall teach	thy judgments	Jacob	thy law	and Israel	they shall put
H3384	H4941	H3290	H8451	H3478	H7760
מִזְבֵּחַ	עַל	וְכָל־יְלִל	בְּאֹפֶן	קָרְבָּנָה	מִזְבֵּחַ
incense	before	thee and whole burnt sacrifice	H5921	upon thine altar	
H6988	H639	H3632		H4196	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 51:19 (Sacrifice): Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

Leviticus 10:11 (References Israel): And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

Ezekiel 43:27 (Sacrifice): And when these days are expired, it shall be, that upon the eighth day, and so forward, the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord GOD.

1 Samuel 2:28 (Sacrifice): And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?