Leviticus - Commentaries by John Nelson Darby

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We have in this section supplemental regulations chiefly for the priests, but of great value for all because of much added truth. Communion with the offering where enjoyable is prominent, and the limitations laid down distinctly.

First comes the law of the burnt offering (vi. 9-13). That which went up wholly as a savor of rest to God has here as before the foremost place. The fire was to be ever burning, “all night unto the morning.” If divine judgment knows in itself no mitigation, nor cessation, the accepted offering is there to be altogether consumed. God thus established both the witness of unslumbering judgment according to His holy nature, and the offering that glorified Him even when sin made it imperative for fallen man. There was no offering or sacrifice to God in Eden. Some moderns understand place or fuel of burning, instead of burning — “upon the place, or fuel, of burning on the altar all night until the morning.” But the substantial sense abides the same. When men sleep, far away from God, He has ever His savor of rest. How true this is now of Israel during their long night, not yet alas! of penitent weeping. Yet the morning will come assuredly for them in the mercy that endures forever, the morning without clouds. God is faithful to them, if they have been faithless to Him. “The fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out.” “The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out.”

Next is the law of the meal offering (vers. 14-18), with a special ordinance appended when it was an offering of Aaron and his sons on the day of his anointing (vers. 19-23), in which last case it was wholly burnt like the burnt offering, though in the more general form the priests had their portion of the flour or meal. In every case the frankincense was for God exclusively; but the saint who has accepted Christ is free to enjoy the perfection of Him as man. Our communion is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ, though there be that which we own God only can appreciate, which is therefore for Him alone.

Then follows a new ordinance from chap. 5:24-30, the law of the sin offering; as also that of the trespass offering in chap. 7:1-10. Then following this we have the law of peace offerings (vers. 11-24). Nor is this all. A related ordinance is appended in vers. 22-27, denouncing the eating of fat or of blood; and then comes another and final one which begins with the sacrifice of peace offerings, and ends with a summary of all these laws (vers. 28-38). It will be noticed that the peace (or communion) offering here stands last, though preceding those for sin and trespass in the previous order of the offerings. There are privileges we enjoy simply as belonging to God; there are others into which we can only enter as in His presence, drawing in conscious nearness to Him (i.e., as priests, and not Israelites only). “All things are ours “; but we do not all or always enjoy equally. Hence we see that only the priests partook, as of the meal offering, so of the sin and trespass offerings. All the males among the priests eat it in the holy place, though here it would seem that the court of the tabernacle is so designated. The incarnation of Christ, and His propitiation are “most holy.” Man as such cannot meddle with either. They can be enjoyed only in God's presence. There they are food, but holy food. So it is the spiritual that the apostle exhorts to restore a man overtaken in any fault or trespass. It supposes holy activity of grace, identifying themselves with Christ and His work in the sin before them, He of course alone efficaciously, they in divine love as one with Him, and near Him practically.

There is solemn instruction in the law of the sacrifices of peace offerings. Thanksgiving has not the same force as a vow or a voluntary offering. In the former case the peace offering must be eaten on the same day; in the latter it might be on the next after as well. Worship cannot be severed from the sacrifice of Christ with impunity; and purity is obligatory on the worshipper. How terrible is the failure of Christendom in both respects! It is in both forms the figure of communion which should be expressed in worship, though all that are of God may not enjoy it. All the life that is given up, all the energy of Christ, is for God; but Christ and the saints (Aaron and his sons) have special fellowship.

Letters 3, Christ in the Offerings

This is an important ordinance.1 First, there is tender compassion for the poor in the things of God. Next, as to the sacrifice itself, weighty principles are contained in it. No sin could be forgiven without a sacrifice or offering for sin. This particularly characterizes this part of the instructions as to sacrifice. If one failed to discover what he knew, when adjured, to hide sin; or touched, without even knowing it, what was unclean; when he was aware of it, he was guilty. No poverty could bring compassion into play without an offering. Let one be ever so dull in the apprehension of sin, or, consequently, of atonement, still guilt was there if evil was touched. On the other hand, if truth of purpose was there in owningit, and owning it in such sort that the need of atonement before God was felt, which alone consequently is recognized as owning sin, the poverty of apprehension does not hinder the perfect forgiveness. That rests on the value of the sacrifice; only Christ must be seen as a sacrifice for sin as one rejected, a sin-bearer for us. The fact of its being fine flour without blood hardly affects the principle of blood-shedding. It comes where bloodshedding is universally required for sin, and is only an exception in view of poverty to shew that, in no case, without a sinoffering, is there forgiveness, and carries as an exceptional case the character of blood along with it as the principle. It is not that one kind of sin requires blood and another not; but incapacity by poverty puts this in place of a bloody offering, and it is so accounted. Only if a real sense of needed atonement be there, the want of apprehension of the full import of sin and death, that is of Christ's death and blood-shedding, will not prevent the getting the benefit of that death and blood-shedding.

The female sacrifice was accounted of less value. In Lev. 5 it begins with a female. It was not in the first instance a bad conscience in doing it.

[1862.]

The firstfruits were to be offered but not burnt, because1 leaven was in them; and they could not be in themselves a sweet savor: hence a sin-offering was offered with them. (Lev. 23:17-19.) They represent the church, being (as may be seen in Lev. 23) the offering of the day of Pentecost: not the church in the unity of the body, but as formed among Jews on earth on that day. The first of the firstfruits, the corn out of full ears, is Christ risen, offered on the morrow of the sabbath after the Passover; it represents Christ Himself, and hence (Lev. 23:12, 13) there was no sin-offering. If we look at it in Lev. 2:14, it is still Christ. Oil and frankincense are put on it. It is an offering made by fire without leaven. It is Christ looked at as man, tried by divine trial of judgment, but perfect to be offered to God. The expressions are somewhat remarkable-geres carmel, "corn mature out of full ears;" it may be, "produce of the fruitful field," the latter being the known sense of carmel; the meaning of geres was certain. But the general meaning of the offering is pretty plain: Christ in His manhood, sinless and full proved, presented to God with oil and frankincense of acceptable odor, the firstfruits—fruits of man to God.

[1868.]

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